



# 2023-2024

## ANNUAL REPORT



# FIRST STEPS IS HERE

Last year, because of Pickens County First Steps:



**5,274 children**

were directly served in Pickens County



**4,207 parents & caregivers**

received services and support to be their child's first and most important teacher



**131 educators**

participated in First Steps training and professional development, benefitting 500+ children

---

## PROVEN RESULTS

A 2019 study found that children who received First Steps local partnership services were:



**74% more likely**

to score at the highest level on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment



**34% less likely**

to be chronically absent in kindergarten

---

## THE NEED PERSISTS IN PICKENS COUNTY

First Steps works but we need to expand our reach to ensure that all children are ready.

**7,014**

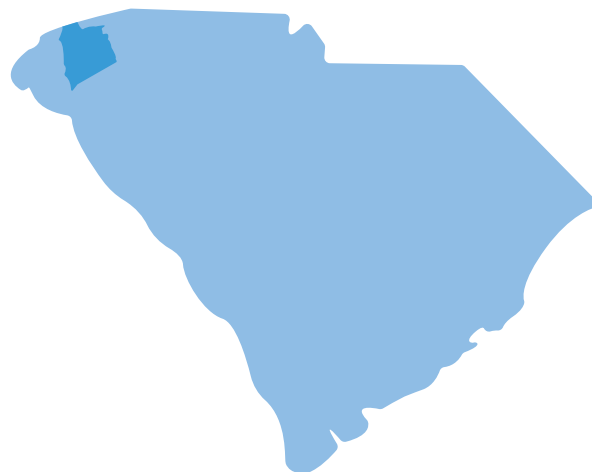
children under 6

**39%**

of young children live in poverty or low-income households

**62%**

of kindergarteners are considered "not ready" for school



# OUR MISSION

We serve as a convener of early childhood champions to coordinate services to measurably improve the early childhood development of all children in Pickens County.



## Amity Buckner

### Executive Director

Our desire is to equip families and early childhood champions with the tools they need to give every child a great start in life! The strong relationships we have built over time with community partners have allowed us to collaborate in the crucial work of strengthening families, promoting early literacy and creating a culture of school readiness, meeting families where they are with the use of technology, and caring for the whole child.

One of the highlights of this past year was the launch of Family Connects in our county. Born out of our county's most recent needs assessment, Family Connects brings an evidence-based, voluntary nurse home visit for every Pickens County family delivering a baby at two Prisma hospitals in Greenville, where over 60% of our county's children are born. Nurse home visitors provide comprehensive physical exams for mom and baby about 3 weeks postpartum, as well as maternal depression screenings and referrals to community resources. Wrap around support, such as enrollment in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library and Bright by Text, are part of the initial home visit.

We worked with multiple community organizations and funders to maintain funding for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library for all Pickens County zip codes. By the end of the fiscal year, around 57% of eligible children were registered to receive quality, multi-genre, age-appropriate books to help promote early literacy and positive interactions with their primary caregivers.

Thanks to our strong partnership with United Way, we were able to expand our reach of Reach Out and Read into more pediatric practices in our county. Additionally, we were able to continue to provide parents with age-specific text messaging as well as links to community events via Bright By Text.

We are grateful for our board's forward-thinking commitment to the young children in Pickens County and their support of meeting parents where they are. Most importantly, we are grateful for the families that allow us to step into their lives and offer support.

---

## Creating a community where children are ready for school and ready for life

"This program is AMAZING! I feel like it's such a blessing that I got to participate in it! The free resources we got were amazing! I can't get over it!"

Countdown to Kindergarten parent

# PROGRAMS

## PARENTING

### Parents as Teachers

Offers research-based curricula that help families raise children to be healthy, safe, learning, and ready for school.

33

children served

35

group meetings and events

587

home visits

### Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

Free, high-quality books mailed to the home of children from birth until age five.

1,183

children served

10,965

books distributed

### Connected Families

Prevents the unnecessary removal of young children from their homes by providing parents and caregivers with voluntary, coordinated services.

20

children served

360

home visits

## HEALTH

### Reach Out and Read

Free, high-quality books provided by a child's pediatric provider during doctor's visits.

2,464

children served

4,928

book distributed

### Family Connects

Strengthening bonds within families of newborns and linking them directly to supportive community resources.

40

families served

2

clinics served

### Nurse-Family Partnership

Home visitation for first time mothers, from pregnancy until the child turns two.

26

children served

26

families served

291

home visits

## SCHOOL TRANSITION

### Countdown to Kindergarten

Supports transitions into kindergarten by connecting incoming students, their families, and their teachers in a series of one-on-one sessions during the summer.

56

children served

5

schools served

336

home visits

### Countdown to 4K

Supports transitions into pre-kindergarten by connecting incoming students, their families, and their teachers in a series of one-on-one sessions during the summer.

26

children served

2

schools served

156

home visits

# FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

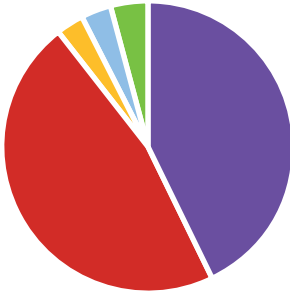


**\$1 = \$3.39**

Pickens County First Steps leveraged \$677,965.46 from sources outside of state government, providing a match of \$2.39 for every state dollar invested.

## EXPENDITURES

Total: \$967,758.78



- Parenting - \$414,712.46
- Health - \$451,192.58
- School Transition - \$30,223.16
- Administrative - \$33,623.21
- Core Functions - \$38,007.37

## FUNDING SOURCES

Total: \$961,601.46



- State Funding - \$283,636
- Federal Funding - \$116,114.06
- Private Funding - \$118,136.69
- In-kind Contributions - \$443,714.71

## FUNDING SUPPORT BY SOUTH CAROLINA FIRST STEPS

State Education Improvement Act (EIA) Funding  
 State READY Funding\*  
 Federal ESSER Funding\*\*  
 The Duke Endowment & Doris Duke Foundation  
 Enterprise Holdings Foundation ROAD Forward Grant  
 State Income Tax Check-off and Private Donations to SC First Steps

\*Resources for Early Acceleration and Development in Youth (READY) Proviso 1.105

\*\*American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund, awarded to the South Carolina Department of Education

Note: Revenue amounts may show a difference between allocations and revenue based on penalties imposed by the SC First Steps Board of Trustees for non-compliance with organizational policies. The figures provided are based on unaudited financial statements and, as such, are subject to change.

# Lyle Jacks

## Board Chair



Serving as a board member and chair of Pickens County First Steps over the years has been such a meaningful part of my life and work in our community. Pouring into the youngest citizens of our county is the most responsible action and most beneficial use of resources to create a brighter future for Pickens County and beyond. Providing programs to support the literacy, well-being, and mental health of all Pickens County children yields measurable outcomes and immeasurable benefits for children and their caregivers. Our collaborations with local organizations are more important than ever before as we strive toward school readiness for every child.

Thank you to our local partners, board, and staff whose work is dedicated to preparing our children for success in school and in life. Thank you to the families that invite us into their lives during the most crucial years of their children's development. And thank you to the children, our source of hope.

## Our Local Supporters

Community Foundation of Greater  
Clemson

Dabo's All In Foundation

Rotary Club of Clemson

United Way of Pickens County

---

## Board of Directors

Meredith Dickens

George Hicks

Faye Nichols

Liz Rampy

Melissa Sanders

John Schafer

Jeff Martin

Kasey Swords

Nicole Matheny

Lauren Willis

Lyle Jacks

Victoria Tate

Traci Boyles

## CONTACT US

Post Office Box 1113, Central SC 29630 | 864-654-3000 | [PickensCountyFirstSteps.org](http://PickensCountyFirstSteps.org)