



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 7, 2020

Contact: Beth Moore
Communications Director
803-734-0153
bfmoore@scfirststeps.org

TOWN OF KERSHAW RECEIVES GRANT FOR NEW CHILD CARE CENTER

First Steps program aims to expand 4K service in underserved SC communities

KERSHAW, S.C. – South Carolina First Steps today held a press conference announcing a \$600,000 grant to the town of Kershaw, South Carolina. The funding will transform a historic downtown building into a state-of-the-art child care and early education center serving families across Lancaster, Kershaw, and Chesterfield counties.

“An early childhood center in the heart of Kershaw has long been a vision for members of this community,” said Georgia Mjartan, Executive Director of South Carolina First Steps. “We are proud to make this vision a reality, building a place that supports working families and helps young children thrive.”

State and local leaders joining First Steps officials for the announcement included SC Senator Vincent Sheheen, SC Representative Mandy Powers Norrell, Kershaw Mayor Mark Dorman, and Lancaster County First Steps Board Chair Dr. Paul N. McKenzie.

“This exciting investment will help transform the lives of the littlest ones amongst us and bring renewed vitality to our town center,” said Sheheen. “This partnership will open opportunities for our four year old kids and families all over Southern Lancaster County and Northern Kershaw County.”

The 2,250 residents of Kershaw live in a “child care desert”, having no licensed providers in either the town limits or surrounding areas. The grant is aimed at addressing this need as part of a downtown revitalization effort. Funds will be used to renovate the town-owned former Bank of Kershaw, a two-story, 10,000 square foot structure built in 1910. The building has sat vacant for nearly 40 years.

“Downtown revitalization is economic development,” said Kershaw Mayor Mark Dorman. “Bringing life back into the old Bank Building for the First Steps 4K Program will give our young people a great start for achieving a quality education.”

The renovation will add classroom space for 30 First Steps 4K children, to be recruited from a tri-county area that includes the towns of Kershaw (Lancaster County), Jefferson (Chesterfield County), Westville and Mt. Pisgah (Kershaw County). The First Steps 4K program provides free full-day 4-year-old kindergarten to eligible children in private, nonprofit and faith-based child care centers across the state.

“As First Steps 4K works to expand our services to communities across South Carolina, we are deeply encouraged by the commitment and partnership of state and local leaders,” said Martha Strickland, Director of the First Steps 4K program. “Our unique partnership with the town of Kershaw has the

potential to serve as a national model for revitalizing communities while addressing the needs of children and families.”

Lancaster County First Steps will operate the 4K center and plans to expand its Early Head Start program for infants and toddlers to the site in future years. Additional funding from public and private partners will provide an outdoor playground.

“Families will receive services in one of the highest quality facilities in the state,” said Lora Bryson, Executive Director of Lancaster County First Steps. “We are ecstatic to be collaborating with the town of Kershaw to offer these services.”

Officials say that architectural plans have been completed and renovations will begin immediately with plans to open this fall. In future phases, the town plans to add classrooms for children 0-3 and renovate the 2nd floor, which in partnership with a new library branch planned for next door, will turn the town center into a resource hub for families.

“I call this the education block in Kershaw,” said Mayor Dorman. “This is a win-win for the town of Kershaw and surrounding community.”

#

ABOUT SOUTH CAROLINA FIRST STEPS

South Carolina First Steps is both a nonprofit and state agency and is the only statewide, dedicated comprehensive early childhood agency in South Carolina focused on getting children ages birth through five ready for school and life success. Last year, First Steps directly served 28,427 children across all 46 counties.

Established in 1999 by the South Carolina General Assembly to close the gap on students’ preparedness for success in school, South Carolina First Steps takes a holistic approach to accomplishing its mission of preparing all children for success in school, work and life, offering services that improve children’s health, strengthen families, expand access to quality child care, increase participation in four-year-old kindergarten programs and help transition rising kindergartners into school.

Learn more at **[SCFIRSTSTEPS.ORG](https://www.scfirststeps.org)**