



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FIRST STEPS PLEDGES \$1 MILLION TO EXPAND SERVICES FOR SC FAMILIES

Grants to include funding for parenting programs and AmeriCorps service opportunities

COLUMBIA, S.C.— South Carolina First Steps has announced plans to invest more than \$1 million in services for South Carolina families through a new competitive grant opportunity.

The Family Services Expansion Grant program makes available more than \$800,000 in federal funds and an AmeriCorps program valued at more than \$250,000 to local First Steps partnerships to increase the reach of evidence-based parenting education strategies, including home visitation and group parenting programs.

“This investment is guided by our understanding that a parent is a child’s first and most important teacher,” said Georgia Mjartan, Executive Director of South Carolina First Steps. “At a time when so many families are home with their children, First Steps’ role in equipping parents and caregivers with the skills and resources they need to ensure their children’s success is more important than ever.”

In addition to expanding the reach of services currently offered by First Steps, the grant will introduce a new internationally-recognized parenting model to the state; HIPPY (Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters) is an evidence-based home visiting program that emphasizes a peer-to-peer, parent-to-parent approach.

To support First Steps partnerships in expanding their services, the Family Services Expansion Grant also offers partnerships the opportunity to recruit up to three AmeriCorps Members from within their communities. A total of 37 AmeriCorps Members will be trained to serve as peer parent educators, family support specialists, or community education and outreach specialists.

“Recruiting a diverse cadre of AmeriCorps Members will allow us not only to expand access to services for young children and families, but to do so in a way that reflects the diversity of our state and builds on the skills, knowledge, and experiences that exist within the communities we serve,” said Mjartan.

First Steps will begin statewide recruitment for its AmeriCorps program next month. Most of the positions are for a one-year term of service.

Approximately 75,000 Americans participate annually in AmeriCorps, which is a national program supported by the Corporation on National and Community Service. The benefits of service include a monthly living allowance, professional development, student loan deferment, an education award upon service completion, and for full-time members, medical benefits and child care assistance.

The First Steps AmeriCorps program is funded by a three-year grant from the United Way Association of South Carolina. Additional funding for the Family Services Expansion Grant comes from Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5), a federal grant awarded to South Carolina by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families.

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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**