



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SC FIRST STEPS INVESTS OVER \$1 MILLION TO SUPPORT FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

Funds will deploy 19 AmeriCorps national service members; address growing need among SC parents and caregivers for resources and support

COLUMBIA, S.C. – South Carolina First Steps has awarded over \$850,000 in grants and invested an additional \$190,000 in support for an AmeriCorps service program to meet the needs of young children and families in South Carolina. Awarded competitively to local First Steps partnerships in 15 counties, the funds will be used to expand evidence-based parenting programs, family support services, and community outreach efforts.

“This major investment comes at a critical time for young children and families in our state,” said SC First Steps Executive Director Georgia Mjartan. “We know that access to child care is limited, social networks are strained, and parents are overwhelmed.”

The agency recently asked SC families with young children to complete a [survey](#) assessing the impact of COVID-19 on child care needs. Among the 2,431 responses, 59% of parents and caregivers say they are more stressed and anxious than usual. The same percentage worry that their young children are missing out on important developmental opportunities, such as socialization and learning.

“First Steps is uniquely positioned to address this issue,” Mjartan said. “Our local partnerships have the training and experience to support parents where they are, equipping them with the knowledge and skills to succeed in being their child’s first and best teacher. We are pleased to award these grants, knowing that they will have a direct and lasting impact on young children and their families.”

Eight grantees plan to use the funds to expand the reach of home visiting programs including Parents as Teachers, Triple P – Positive Parenting Program, and Early Steps to School Success. Three additional grantees will launch new programs in their communities: Nurturing Parenting in Dorchester and Berkeley Counties, and Nurse-Family Partnership in Pickens County. All programs are evidence-based and utilize voluntary home visiting as a strategy for providing intensive, one-on-one support to parents.

In addition to expanding the reach of services currently offered by First Steps, the grants will introduce to the state a new internationally-recognized parenting model proven to be effective in improving school readiness. 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 offerings, the grant awards provide grantees with the funding and support to deploy part-time AmeriCorps members as parent educators, family support specialists, and community outreach specialists. First Steps is now recruiting applicants across the state

for a 10-month term of AmeriCorps service beginning October 1. An online application is available at scfirststeps.org.

“Recruiting a diverse cadre of AmeriCorps members will allow us to expand access to services for young children and families, and 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.

The First Steps AmeriCorps program is funded by a three-year grant from the United Way Association of South Carolina. Additional funding for the grant program comes from the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5), a federal grant awarded to the South Carolina Department of Social Services by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Administration for Children and Families, and from private contributions. South Carolina First Steps is a primary partner for the PDG B-5 grant and provided 100% of the required state matching funds.

Below is a list of the grantees, their funded programs and AmeriCorps positions, and the total value of their awards:

Grantee	Grant	Award Value
Bamberg County First Steps	Parents as Teachers expansion	\$71,500
Barnwell County First Steps	Parents as Teachers funding; 1 1200-hour AmeriCorps position; 2 900-hour AmeriCorps positions; and HIPPY program support	\$48,865
Berkeley County First Steps	Nurturing Parenting (new); 2 900-hour AmeriCorps positions; HIPPY program support	\$98,967
Tri-County First Steps (Charleston, Berkeley, Dorchester)	1 1200-hour AmeriCorps position	\$9,450
Colleton County First Steps	1 900-hour AmeriCorps positions; and HIPPY program support	\$13,750
Dillon County First Steps	Nurturing Parenting expansion	\$51,915
Dorchester County First Steps	Nurturing Parenting (new)	\$50,071
Greenville County First Steps	Triple P Level 4 expansion	\$78,000
Marion County First Steps	2 900-hour AmeriCorps positions; and HIPPY program support	\$27,500
Newberry County First Steps	Parents as Teachers expansion; 2 900-hour AmeriCorps positions; HIPPY program support	\$87,575
Orangeburg County First Steps	Early Steps to School Success expansion; 1 900-hour AmeriCorps position; HIPPY program support	\$91,750
Pickens County First Steps	Nurse-Family Partnership (new); 1 900-hour AmeriCorps position	\$85,250
Richland County First Steps	5 900-hour AmeriCorps positions; HIPPY program support	\$61,750
Williamsburg County First Steps	1 675-hour AmeriCorps position	\$5,143
York County First Steps	Parents as Teachers expansion	\$78,500
Total Grant Awards		\$859,986
Support for 19 AmeriCorps members		\$82,671
Support for HIPPY program		\$106,880
Total Investment by SC First Steps		\$1.05M

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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](https://www.scfirststeps.org)**

ABOUT AMERICORPS

AmeriCorps is a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), the federal agency for volunteering, service, and civic engagement. CNCS engages millions of Americans in citizen service through its AmeriCorps and Senior Corps programs and leads the nation's volunteer and service efforts.

For more information, visit **[NATIONALSERVICE.ORG](https://www.nationalservice.org)**