

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

2021 – 2023





Mission

Collaborating with other entities, First Steps helps South Carolina families and caregivers prepare their children for school success by maximizing public and private community resources to deliver, enhance and expand high-quality early childhood services.

Vision

Every South Carolina child will be prepared for success in school.

Values

The years of early childhood are a critical window of development during which much of human potential is shaped.

Families are the single most important influence on the development of their young children.

The work of supporting families and caregivers is a collaborative effort between state and local stakeholders within the public, private and faith sectors.

School readiness is the result of a child's development in many areas, with each contributing to the child's success.

Services must be individualized and adaptable to meet the unique needs of children and families.

We value, and demonstrate in our collaborative work and advocacy, diverse perspectives in the development of public policy and programs.

To achieve desired results, services must be high-quality and grounded in strong evidence. First Steps operates within a culture of accountability.

Message from the Executive Director



Dorothy M. Priester
Executive Director
Cherokee County First Steps

Cherokee County First Steps board and staff began the comprehensive planning process during Summer 2020. We continued the process by gathering additional information from local community partners, parents, and child care directors to determine challenges and areas of interests. After compiling a Needs and Resources Assessment, further discussions with partners, and an additional focus group; we were able to determine key strategies to implement for the next several years.

The Board's vision for the organization in three years is to increase the number of families served through Talk to Me Cherokee, Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, and Countdown to Kindergarten. They also wish to raise awareness of the importance of early literacy and education to the public as well as promote quality training for workers at child care facilities.

We take this opportunity to express our gratitude to all partners, board members, clients, and volunteers for their assistance and participation.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dorothy M. Priester". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a thin horizontal line.

Overarching Measure of Success

INCREASE THE REACH OF FIRST STEPS SERVICES

By FY23, the percentage of children in need who are directly served by Cherokee County First Steps will increase from 110% to 113%. We will increase public awareness of the importance of early language and literacy. We will expand outreach and participation in programs by strategically targeting at-risk and low-income families through education and health fairs as well as partners' events. We will work with child care facilities and schools to promote the significance of a child's early development and of the options available to parents. We will provide quality training for child care facilities staff to allow them to maintain the licensing required for SC Department of Social Services. We will conduct board development training to empower our members to more effectively support the needs of preschool children. We will also coordinate with the State Office and other partners on grant applications for Cherokee County programs.

Overarching Measure of Success

INCREASE THE REACH OF FIRST STEPS SERVICES

By FY23, the percentage of children in need who are directly served by Cherokee County First Steps will increase from 110% to 113%.

In order to achieve success Cherokee County First Steps is committed to:

- increasing public awareness of the importance of early language and literacy
- expanding outreach and participation in programs by strategically targeting at-risk and low-income families through education and health fairs as well as partners' events. We will work with child care facilities and schools to promote the significance of a child's early development and of the options available to parents
- providing quality training for child care facilities staff to allow them to maintain the licensing required for SC Department of Social Services
- conducting board development training to empower our members to more effectively support the needs of preschool children
- coordinating with the State Office and other partners on grant applications for Cherokee County programs

Objectives

1. FAMILIES ARE SUPPORTED AS THEIR CHILD'S FIRST AND MOST IMPORTANT TEACHERS.

Research indicates it is vitally important for parents to talk to and interact with their children to facilitate success in school and life. Talk to Me Cherokee encourages and measures the amount of interaction between parent and child. It also provides home visits, training, and feedback to parents; which enables them to help prepare their children to succeed in school. Dolly Parton's Imagination Library aims to provide every child with his/her own library and increase the amount of time parents spend reading with their children. If this is done, children are better prepared to learn when they enter school.

2. FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN WILL BE AWARE OF AND ABLE TO ACCESS PROGRAMS, SERVICES, AND RESOURCES FOR WHICH THEY ARE ELIGIBLE.

Increasing the awareness about the importance of early education and literacy, local programs, and area resources can alter the family's comprehension of how they can help their child be better prepared. Strategic targeting through outreach including community events, education/health fairs, and presentations to local agencies can help connect families with needed services.

3. CHILDREN AND FAMILIES WILL EXPERIENCE A SMOOTH TRANSITION FROM EARLY CHILDHOOD INTO KINDERGARTEN.

Increasing awareness about choices available to parents for their child's early development and the significance of childhood transitions can promote parents' interests in their child's education process and foster continued involvement. Countdown to Kindergarten focuses on school readiness issues and enables parents to understand the expectations for the coming school year. Child Care Training & Professional Development ensures that child care facility staff have quality training and allows them to maintain the licensing required for the SC Department of Social Services.

1. Families are supported as their child's first and most important teachers.

STRATEGY 1.1

Talk to Me Cherokee Initiative (LENA)

SMART GOAL(S)

- Cherokee County First Steps will increase enrollment in the program by 5% by the end of FY22 and an additional 5% in FY23 for a total of 10% by the end of FY23.
- Each year, reports will show that 50% of parents will increase words spoken to their child per hour, 50% will increase conversational turns with their child per day, and 75% will increase the amount of time spent talking with their child.
- Each year, Cherokee County First Steps will apply for grants that will contribute funds or materials to the program totaling \$2,000.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)

- We will work together with Talk to Me Cherokee Initiative local partners including Piedmont Community Action Head Start/Early Head Start, Cherokee County School District, United Way of the Piedmont, Spartanburg Community College, Limestone University, Cherokee County Public Library, Gaffney Visitors' Center, and SC Department of Health & Environmental Control to recruit and focus on low-income/at-risk families.

1. Families are supported as their child's first and most important teachers *continued.*

STRATEGY 1.2

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

SMART GOAL(S)

- Cherokee County First Steps will increase enrollment in the program by 1% by the end of FY21, 1% by the end of FY22, and 1% in FY23 for a total of 3% by the end of FY23.
- Each year, 60% of parents will report reading to their child 5 or more days each week, 80% of parents will note reading to their child more often than before enrolling in the program, and 75% will state that the number of books in the home have doubled.
- Each year, Cherokee County First Steps will apply for grants that will contribute funds to the program totaling \$10,000.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)

- The Dollywood Foundation is our primary partner for this program covering their administrative costs, selecting the books, and passing on a reduced rate for the books and shipping. Other partners assist with distribution of enrollment forms including: child care centers, pediatricians, schools, Head Start, BabyNet, DSS, churches, and other community agencies including Talk to Me Cherokee partners. Further, Talk to Me Cherokee partners collaborated with CCFS by ensuring children were enrolled and promoting the importance of literacy in early childhood. United Way of the Piedmont also assisted by providing funding through the Community Investment process.

2. Families with young children will be aware of and able to access programs services, and resources for which they are eligible.

STRATEGY 2.1

Outreach & Community Education

SMART GOAL(S)

- In FY 21, Cherokee County First Steps will facilitate 1 community learning group, conduct 2 quarterly educational/outreach presentations to local or statewide audiences, and participate quarterly in 1 education/health fair. By the end of FY23, we will increase these numbers to facilitate 2 community learning groups, conduct 3 quarterly educational/outreach presentations to local or statewide audiences, and participate quarterly in 2 education/health fairs.
- By the end of FY23, we will increase by 10% the number of families and individuals provided with information regarding CCFS programs and the importance of early language and literacy.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATORS

- We will partner with the local agencies including: Piedmont Community Action Head Start/Head Start, Cherokee County Chamber of Commerce, Cherokee County Public Library, Gaffney Visitors' Center, Spartanburg Community College, Limestone University, and other state and local agencies in planning and participating in presentations, community events and education/health fairs.

2. Families with young children will be aware of and able to access programs, services, and resources for which they are eligible *continued*.

STRATEGY 2.2

Local Portal and Mobilizing Communities

SMART GOAL(S)

- Attend 10 meetings each year in the community as early childhood representatives including Cherokee Community Partners.
- Each year, facilitate 4 meetings and coordinate activities/events for Talk to Me including 3 weekly Facebook posts.
- Each year, facilitate a minimum of 3 meetings and host training for Cherokee County Child Care Directors' Association.
- Update training for volunteers annually.
- Conduct Board development training annually and update committee roles and responsibilities.
- Work with partners each month to refer and enroll children in Talk to Me, Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, Countdown to Kindergarten, and partner services.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)

- We will collaborate with partners including BabyNet, 4K regional representative, Piedmont Community Head Start/Early Head Start, Cherokee County School District, child care directors, pediatricians, Department of Social Services, Department of Health & Environmental Control, and other local agencies/ organizations to connect children to needed services.

3. Children and families will experience a smooth transition from early childhood into Kindergarten.

STRATEGY 3.1

Countdown to Kindergarten

SMART GOAL(S)

- Each year, reports will show that 85% of children will have received at least 5 of the home visits scheduled.
- Each year, reports will show that 95% of children were placed into the Kindergarten classroom of their CTK teacher.
- Each year, 90% of parents will report a better knowledge of the expectations for kindergarten and a commitment to working with the Kindergarten teacher to promote their child's learning.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)

- Cherokee County School District is our primary partner but multiple elementary school principals within the district will be the actual representatives with which CCFS works. The schools will recommend teachers to participate and suggest at-risk children for enrollment for the program.

3. Children and families will experience a smooth transition from early childhood into Kindergarten *continued.*

STRATEGY 3.2

Child Care Training & Professional Development

SMART GOAL(S)

- Cherokee County First Steps will provide training for child care facility staff and directors totaling a minimum of 20 hours each year for FY21, FY22, and FY23 for a total of a minimum of 60 hours by the end of FY23.
- Cherokee County First Steps will host a minimum of 3 Cherokee County Child Care Directors' Association meetings each year for FY21, FY22, and FY23 for a minimum total of 9 meetings by the end of FY23.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)

- We will collaborate with Piedmont Community Action Head Start/Early Head Start, SC Child Care Resource & Referral, and local child care providers to determine core areas for instruction. This collaboration will ensure that adequate training is provided and enable child care facility staff to maintain the licensing required by the Department of Social Services.