

Annual Report

2019-2020

CHEROKEE COUNTY



Getting children ready for school.

THE NEED

IN CHEROKEE COUNTY:

3,278

children under age 5

60.6%

of young children live in poverty
or low-income households

70%

of kindergartners are considered "not
ready" for school



THREE MOST COMMON RISK FACTORS:

1. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or free school lunches eligibility
2. Single parent household and has need of other services
3. Low Maternal Education (less than high school graduation)

OUR 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.

OUR APPROACH



High quality programs and services
for children and families



Intensive training, resources and
support for childcare providers



Strategic partnerships and
community education

OUR IMPACT

6,189

number of children and adults served by
Cherokee County First Steps in 2019-2020

JOIN US

We rely on a community of partners, donors, and volunteers – **people like you** – who believe in a brighter future for children and families in our community.

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR



Dr. Joette C. Johnson

Chair
Cherokee County First Steps Board

Cherokee County First Steps endeavors to meet the educational needs of local children. During FY20, the organization was able to impact families and children throughout the county in the following areas.

- 2,627 children served through Dolly Parton's Imagination Library
- 166 child care teachers in attendance at training sessions
- 304 home visits with children in the Talk to Me Cherokee Initiative
- 10 outreach events including education fairs and presentations
- 502 total families and individuals informed of the importance of early literacy at events

I would like to convey heartfelt appreciation for my fellow board members and our partners that support us with donations, outreach, collaboration, and contributions. The partners include: SC First Steps, United Way of the Piedmont, Wells Fargo Foundation, SC Center for Child Care Career Development, Founders Federal Credit Union, Cherokee County Community Foundation, Broad River Electric Charities, Piedmont Community Action, SC Child Care Resource & Referral Network, Kiser Development Company, Allegra Marketing Print Mail, The Gaffney Ledger, Cherokee County Department of Social Services, SC Department of Health and Environmental Control, Cherokee County School District, Spartanburg Community College - Cherokee Campus, Midway Baptist Church, Cherokee County Public Library, SC Education Oversight Committee, Institute for Child Success, Limestone College and community supporter KNOW(2).

GETTING CHILDREN READY FOR SCHOOL

All children are ready to benefit from a quality kindergarten experience when they are five years old by September 1 of that school year. But kindergarten readiness—the critical stage at which children are prepared for learning and success—is more than a matter of age. For a strong start in school, children need positive relationships and supportive learning environments beginning at birth. At First Steps, we partner with families, caregivers, and communities to ensure that all children are prepared for success.

South Carolina's Profile of the Ready Kindergartner

Developed by SC First Steps and the SC Department of Education, the state's description of school readiness includes 60 developmental milestones across 5 categories:



Approaches to learning & inquiry



Emotional & social development



Physical development, self-help & motor skills



Mathematical thinking



Language & literacy development



OUR GOALS

In support of the Profile of the Ready Kindergartner, our approach is focused on advancing Cherokee County toward the following strategic goals:

- Coordinate with State Office and other partners on grant applications for Talk to Me, Imagination Library, Child Care Training, and capacity building
- Increase public awareness about the importance of early language and literacy
- Increase targeted outreach for Imagination Library; include at-risk children and low income families which will be strategically targeted through community events and education fairs
- Provide training to child care providers to update them on rules and regulations

PIVOTING FOR COVID-19

When the coronavirus pandemic forced South Carolina to shut down in March 2020, Cherokee County First Steps quickly pivoted to provide much-needed support to young children, their families and child care providers. Cherokee County First Steps began enhancing its efforts to provide parents and caregivers with the services and resources they need to weather this storm. Virtual meetings were held to promote safe contact between the Home Visitor and families for Talk to Me Cherokee. Contactless delivery of the LENA devices and books were instituted to meet state guidelines. Training with staff and directors at child care facilities was postponed until Fall 2020 to allow planning for safety procedures and social distancing. Supplies and grants from private donors were provided to local child care facilities to assist with budget limitations.

IMPACT ON CHEROKEE COUNTY

HEALTH

Through June 30, Cherokee County had a total of **156** confirmed COVID-19 cases and **8** COVID-19 deaths.

JOB LOSS

254%

increase in unemployment, 2019-2020

CHILD CARE

53.1%

children under 5 in Cherokee County lived in a child care desert* before COVID-19

80.5%

children under 5 in Cherokee County lived in a child care desert as of May 28, 2020



Michele Wright, Program Assistant, preparing COVID-19 Safety Material bags for Child Care Facilities in Cherokee County. Cherokee County First Steps was able to procure these supplies primarily through donations and a grant from a private funding partner. These materials included gloves, masks, sanitizer, cleaning solution, and safety signs.



*The Center for American Progress defines a child care desert as a ZIP code with at least 30 children under the age of 5 and either no child care centers or so few centers that there are more than three times as many children under age 5 as there are spaces in centers.



IMAGINATION LIBRARY



an evidence-based program

As the local affiliate of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, we provide free, high-quality books to children from birth until age five, no matter their family's income.

Children enrolled in our Imagination Library program receive one book per month by mail. Each title is selected by a panel of early childhood literacy experts, who are responsible for choosing books that meet the age-specific developmental needs of young children.

IMAGINATION LIBRARY BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

2,627

children served

24,659

books distributed



- ✓ Children were read to approximately 136,682 hours by parents and caregivers
- ✓ 73% of children within the county are participating in the program
- ✓ 42% of parents reported reading to their child daily
- ✓ 84% of parents reported reading to their child more often than before enrolling
- ✓ 88% of parents have doubled the number of books in the home while in the program





COUNTDOWN TO KINDERGARTEN



an evidence-informed program

Developed by South Carolina First Steps – and identified as a promising state practice by the National Governor’s Association in 2005 – Countdown to Kindergarten (CTK) is a home visitation program pairing the families of rising kindergartners with their future teachers during the summer before school entry. Teachers complete six visits with each family, establishing strong connections during the summer that facilitate classroom learning throughout the year.

CTK BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

5

kindergarten teachers
trained as home visitors

31

children served

179

total home and school
visits



Countdown to Kindergarten
Coordinator Randi Heffner (left)
and Teacher Ashlee Gordon with
participating children at
Blacksburg Primary School.





CHILD CARE TRAINING



an evidence-based program

High-quality child care hinges on high-quality professional development that meets the needs of the local child care workforce. Our training programs are certified through SC Endeavors and include topics in the areas of nutrition, health and safety, curriculum, child guidance, professional development and program administration. Our 2019-2020 trainings included:

Directors 101

Orientation to the Regulations 101

Using Language & Literacy in Guiding Children's Behavior

Physical Activity: Infant & Toddler Musical Exercise

Keeping Our Children Safe on the Playground

Who's Leading Who? The Levels of Leadership for Effective Leaders

Reading & Books that Sing

TRAINING BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

166

total training attendance

64

child care teachers and directors served

7

number of training sessions offered



You have done so much for us. Thanks for everything you do to help so many people here in Cherokee County. You do a great job! We are thankful to have you.



**VICKIE PARKER, DIRECTOR
MIDWAY BAPTIST CHURCH WEEKDAY MINISTRY**

4K

FOUR-YEAR-OLD KINDERGARTEN



an evidence-based program

South Carolina First Steps provides eligible children with free enrollment in full-day four-year-old kindergarten. In coordination with First Steps local partnerships and more than 230 private, community and faith-based preschool providers, First Steps 4K expands access to quality early education across the state.



ELIGIBILITY

To qualify for enrollment, a child must be:

- ✓ 4 years old on or before September 1
- ✓ Eligible for Medicaid, SNAP or TANF, experiencing homelessness or transiency, or in foster care

FIRST STEPS 4K IN CHEROKEE COUNTY 2019-2020

25

children enrolled

2

First Steps 4K providers

PIVOTING FOR COVID-19

When schools closed due to COVID-19, First Steps 4K classroom converted to distance-learning, with teachers creatively supporting their young learners through video chat, take-home materials, and hands-on projects that caregivers could facilitate at home.





TALK TO ME CHEROKEE INITIATIVE



an evidence-based program

Talk to Me Cherokee Initiative's mission includes preparing Cherokee County children for success through language and literacy skill development. Talk to Me addresses the problem of children falling behind in vocabulary skills by increasing parent-talk and face-to-face interactions. One of the initiative's main goals is increasing interactive talk and conversational turns. As one component of the program, home visits are provided to targeted families utilizing quality early learning experiences through the LENA curriculum. The LENA (Language ENvironment Analysis) System (device) is used to measure language exchanges between the parent and child, track progress, and provide feedback. An additional component of the initiative is providing parents with the information needed to further their own education and assist them with enrolling in college. Talk to Me Cherokee Initiative is a collaboration between Cherokee County First Steps and other agencies including: United Way of the Piedmont, Cherokee County School District, Piedmont Community Action Head Start/Early Head Start Program, Spartanburg Community College - Cherokee Campus, Cherokee County Public Library, SC Education Oversight Committee, Institute for Child Success, Limestone College, and community supporter KNOW(2).

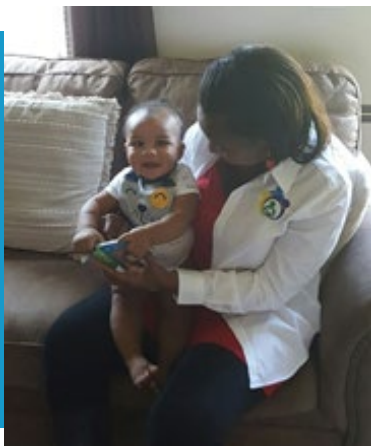
TALK TO ME CHEROKEE BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

26

children served

304

total home visits



- ✓ 65% of parents increased words spoken to their child per hour
- ✓ 42% of parents increased conversational turns with their child each day
- ✓ 84% of parents increased the amount of time spent talking with their child



PUBLIC AWARENESS



an evidence-informed program

Public awareness was increased regarding the importance of early education by conducting presentations at meetings and events in the community. Local learning events included Early Head Start Family Socialization Events, Fall Festivals, and the 5K Walk/Run. There were 10 outreach events, which included education/health fairs, back to school activities, company presentations and picnics. A total of 153 children and families were served by these events. An additional 292 adults were provided with information about programs.

PUBLIC AWARENESS BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

156

materials
distributed

10

events held

502

total event
attendance



Executive Director, Dorothy Priester (left), with a family participating at an event. A mother with her son smiling for the camera at an event for Talk to Me Cherokee.





COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Addressing the needs of young children is a shared endeavor. In addition to providing services to families and support for child care providers, Cherokee County First Steps mobilizes partners and the community to ensure all children in Cherokee County begin school ready to succeed. We serve as a:

LOCAL PORTAL

connecting preschool children and
their families to services

CONVENER

of community stakeholders to develop an effective
and comprehensive early childhood system

CHAMPION

of the importance of school
readiness to our children's future

OUR PARTNERSHIPS BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

5

Talk to Me Initiative Partner
Meetings

3

Cherokee County Child Care
Directors' Association Meetings

“Piedmont Community Action Head Start and Early Head Start have worked actively with Cherokee County First Steps over the last four years to promote increased literacy and school readiness. I believe the organization has truly made a difference in helping prepare the children for school success in Cherokee County.”

**DR. ARTHUR BREWTON, DIRECTOR
PIEDMONT COMMUNITY ACTION HEAD START/EARLY HEAD START**



OUR SUPPORTERS

Through partnerships and collaborations, as well as financial support from grants and contributions, Cherokee County First Steps leverages state dollars to enhance and expand services to children and families.

FUNDING SUPPORT

State of South Carolina \$191,650 (through South Carolina First Steps)	Limestone Presbyterian Church \$303
Broad River Electric Charities \$1,000	SC Endeavors \$2,000
ELCA of Gaffney, Inc. \$500	United Way of the Piedmont \$9,770
Encounter Church \$500	Wells Fargo Foundation \$10,000
Founders Federal Credit Union \$1,500	Dr. Ronald W. Cope 5K Walk/Run \$6,120
JKP Family Foundation \$500	Dr. Ronald W. Cope Memorarium \$2,350

IN-KIND SUPPORT

Dollywood Foundation
Kiser Development Company
Allegra Marketing Print Mail
Midway Baptist Church
Spartanburg Community College, Cherokee Campus
SC Child Care Resource & Referral Network

JOIN US

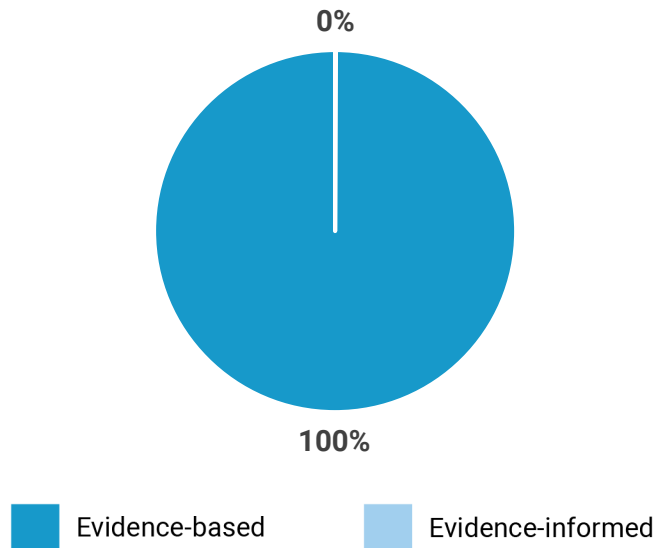
Support Cherokee County First Steps today through a tax -deductible donation or volunteer! For more information, please call our office at 864.487.9466 or email us at ccfs@cherokeeountyfirststeps.org.



FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

OUR INVESTMENT IN QUALITY

Expenditures of State Funds by Program Type



ESTIMATION OF COST SAVINGS

Since inception, Cherokee County First Steps has leveraged **\$2,991,362** from sources outside of state government.

That's **\$0.64** for every state dollar.

SUMMARY OF EXPENDITURES BY STRATEGY

	State Funding	Federal Funding	Private Funding	In-Kind Contributions	Total
Dolly Parton's Imagination Library	\$29,000	\$	\$20,311	\$290,193	\$339,504
LENA – Talk to Me Cherokee Initiative	\$64,205	\$	\$7,460	\$1,950	\$73,615
Countdown to Kindergarten	\$88	\$3,751	\$	\$	\$3,839
Child Care Training & Professional Dev.	\$62,506	\$	\$14,970	\$3,900	\$81,376
Core Functions	\$18,523	\$	\$828	\$975	\$20,326
Administrative Support	\$17,328	\$	\$945	\$975	\$19,248
Total Expenses	\$191,650	\$3,751	\$44,514	\$297,993	\$537,908



LEADERSHIP

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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STAFF

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Tammy Hutcherson, Program & Grants Coordinator

Michele Wright, Program Assistant

Mae Frances Sarratt, Outreach Professional; Consultant

Timena Sarratt, Talk to Me Coordinator; Consultant

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