

Annual Report

2019-2020



THE NEED IN DARLINGTON COUNTY:

3,953

children under age 5

62.1%

of young children live in poverty
or low-income households

76%

of kindergartners are considered “not
ready” for school



THREE MOST COMMON RISK FACTORS:

1. Single parent households in need of services
2. Teenage custodial parents
3. Low maternal education

OUR MISSION

To provide programs, services, and information to strengthen families and communities in Darlington County.

OUR VISION

Strong Families in Healthy Communities.

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

1,245

number of children and adults served by
Darlington 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 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Darnell Byrd McPherson

Executive Director
Darlington County First Steps

This report represents the efforts of the DCFS Board of Directors, team members and community partners and collaborators. In the words of noted anthropologist, Margaret Mead, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world, indeed it’s the only thing that ever has.” Our outcomes and impacts are accomplished through collaborative relationships and strong partnerships, not only in our county but within our state and nation. We express heartfelt gratitude to our donors, supporters, and the families who have joined us on this journey to actualize our vision to build “strong families in healthy communities”.

Darnell Byrd McPherson

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.



OUR GOALS

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

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

- To establish significant relationships and partnerships which engage our communities and supports building strong families and healthy communities.
- To support parents as the primary educators of their children.
- To offer comprehensive programs and services, in partnership with other key community stakeholders, which improve overall health and educational outcomes for young children and their families and the communities we serve.

PIVOTING FOR COVID-19

When the coronavirus pandemic forced South Carolina to shut down in March 2020, Darlington County First Steps quickly pivoted to provide much-needed support to young children, their families and childcare providers.

Our work has never been more critical. While children are at low risk for the serious health effects of the virus, the crisis is having a profound impact on their wellbeing and development. For children of color and low-income communities, these impacts are expected to be even more damaging. That is why Darlington County First Steps is enhancing our efforts to provide parents and caregivers with the services and resources they need to weather this storm.

IMPACT ON DARLINGTON COUNTY

HEALTH

Through June 30, Darlington County had a total of **456** confirmed COVID-19 cases and **22** COVID-19 deaths.

JOB LOSS

112.4%

increase in unemployment, 2019-2020

CHILD CARE

45.5%

children under 5 in Darlington County lived in a childcare desert* before COVID-19

86.9%

children under 5 in Darlington County lived in a childcare desert as of May 28, 2020



COVID-19 affected children and families all over the world. Many families we serve needed household items to help them remain as safe as possible during the pandemic as well as engaged in learning activities with their children. Darlington County First Steps responded to this need by providing Family Care Packages including face masks, hand sanitizer, anti-bacterial hand soap, baby food, books, and literacy activities.

*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.

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 DARLINGTON COUNTY 2019-2020

57

children enrolled

4

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.





PARENTS AS TEACHERS



an evidence-based program

Parents as Teachers (PAT) is a home visiting program designed to build strong communities, thriving families and children who are healthy, safe and ready to succeed. PAT services include:



Personal visits from a parent educator at least twice monthly



Monthly group connections with other PAT families



Screenings and assessments to identify developmental concerns



Connections to outside resources that families may need to succeed

PAT GOES VIRTUAL

Due to COVID-19, Parents as Teachers (PAT) National provided guidance for affiliates to deliver virtual services via interactive video conferencing and phone calls. South Carolina PAT affiliates rose to the occasion by engaging families in creative and meaningful ways while continuing to meet the Essential Requirements of implementing a quality PAT program during the pandemic.

PAT IN DARLINGTON COUNTY 2019-2020

15

families served

237

total home visits



I love everything about Parents as Teachers. I love being provided with the proper supplies and support to help me be a better person and parent. I have made so much progress because of this program and look forward to the future!

- PAT PARENT



Parents as Teachers.
Model Affiliate



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

7

kindergarten teachers
trained as home visitors

48

children served

288

total home and school
visits



“CTK has been nothing but a positive experience for me and my students since I first started with the program in CTK in 2003. I have built everlasting relationships with children, parents, and CTK teachers. Even with the trying times of COVID-19 this summer, we still made it work and learning continued in Darlington County. I am so proud to say I am still a part of this exceptional program!”

BRANDY WEAVER, CTK COORDINATOR

**COUNTDOWN to
KINDERGARTEN**

SOUTH CAROLINA





EARLY EDUCATION (CHILDCARE) PROGRAM



an evidence-based program

Darlington County First Steps worked in partnership with Darlington County School District's Adult Education Program to provide free part-day Early Education (childcare) for parents enrolled in programs offered by our organization and parents enrolled in the Adult Education Program. Access to affordable childcare is a barrier for many families who are working, seeking employment, and finishing their education. We provided Early Education (childcare) services at Hartsville and Darlington Adult Education sites to help families achieve their goals and support their child's early learning development.

EARLY EDUCATION (CHILDCARE) BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

5

classroom staff

33

number of children 0-5
enrolled in classroom



This picture captures our childcare team celebrating a birthday for one of their students enrolled in the program. Her parents brought cupcakes to share with staff and classmates and spent the day engaging with their child during learning activities in the classroom.



PARENTS ARE FIRST (PAF) PROGRAM

The PAF, Parents are First Program, in its seventh and final year of federal funding provided support services for expectant and parenting moms in Darlington County. The PAF Program was funded under the Community Support for Young Parents (CSYP) program through the Office of Population Affairs (OPA) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The 2019-2020 CSYP/PAF program had four primary goals:

1. Improve health outcomes of expectant and parenting teens and young adults.
2. Improve the well-being of children of teens and young adults.
3. Improve the economic self-sufficiency of expectant and parenting teens and young adults.
4. Increase coordination among community organizations serving expectant and parenting teens and young adults, and their children.

The PAF program was facilitated under the direction of a state leadership team including the Children's Trust of South Carolina (CTSC), Fact Forward, the SC Center for Fathers and Families (the Center), the Rural and Minority Health Research Center (RMHRC), and the Core for Applied Research and Evaluation (CARE). The state leadership team provided coordination, support, and oversight to local grantees. DCFS was one of six programs funded in South Carolina.

The PAF program facilitated both direct and indirect services to expectant and parenting moms through a combination of services including referrals, group meetings, one-on-one meetings and providing concrete supports such as diapers and wipes. The PAF program worked closely with a wide-range of Community Partners to ensure the needs of young moms in Darlington County were met.

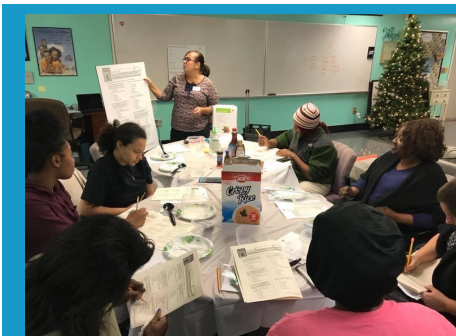
PARENTS ARE FIRST (PAF) BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

84

children served

36

Families served



Christy Beasley, Nutrition Educator with Clemson Extension Agency, was a guest speaker during this session with parents. Ms. Beasley worked with our parents throughout the year to help inform and demonstrate how to prepare healthy meals for and with their children.



MOTHEREAD PROGRAM



an evidence-based program

Motheread is an evidenced based family literacy program model. Parents are engaged in learning how to select age-appropriate books, to read to their children, to extend the story line of each book, to learn about child development, and to introduce parents to adult literature. An important goal of Motheread sessions is to develop a learning environment where parents (students) improve their skills as they also enjoy reading and discussing themes in children's books and other literature. Participants invest time and effort in their own skill development, with support from other adults, with an aim toward improving their relationship with their children. We conduct sessions specifically for males, also known as Fatheread, in the homes of children.

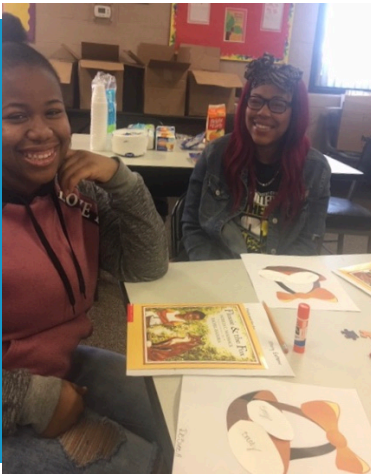
MOTHEREAD BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

36

families served

22

sessions held



"Motheread is an interactive reading program for parents, using children's books and activities to relate to real life situations. In my involvement with this program, I've seen parents improve in reading skills, asking more open-ended questions, using recall and making predictions. The parents love the books they receive after every session and always look forward to the next one! One of our goals as a facilitator is to get more parents to participate in this awesome program."

LINDA BRIGHT-EDWARDS, MOTHEREAD FACILITATOR





REACH OUT AND READ PROGRAM



an evidence-based program

The Reach Out and Read (ROAR) Model prepares young children to succeed in school by partnering with pediatricians to prescribe books and encourage families to read together. According to child development research, 80% of a child's brain is formed between birth and age three (3). ROAR begins at the 6-month checkup and continues through age five (5), with a special focus on children growing up in low-income communities. Families who participate in ROAR read together more often and their children enter kindergarten with larger vocabularies, stronger language skills, and are better prepared to achieve their potential. ROAR is the only national pediatric literacy model endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

REACH OUT AND READ BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

913

children served at
Eastern Carolina
Pediatrics Associates



Lobby of area of Eastern Carolina Pediatrics Associates Center where the Reach Out and Read Program is implemented under the leadership of Dr. Davis.



STRENGTHENING FAMILIES PROGRAM



an evidence-based program

The Strengthening Families Program is a two-generational approach where children, ages 6-11, and their parents work on parallel activities, designed to improve family relationships and break generational cycles of dysfunction. In addition, childcare services were provided to the four (4) siblings under the age of six (6). This program is a 14 week, evidenced-based program which is nationally recognized for its success in helping families improve their communication and problem-solving skills.

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES PROGRAM BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

14

families served

4

Children under the
age of 6 served

28

sessions held



This picture captures a happy family during our Graduation Ceremony receiving their graduation certificates. Parents were given gifts for the family to enjoy, shared a meal with their children and participated in an arts and craft project together.



REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES

Contraceptive Care & Education: Darlington County First Steps received funds from New Morning Foundation to provide contraceptive care services to men and women of reproductive age in Darlington County. The Family Planning Health Specialist on staff conducts group and individual counseling sessions to males and females to screen for pregnancy intention, review available birth control options, and help to schedule appointments with a health care provider to receive the contraceptive method of their choice. The overall goal of this initiative is to prevent unintended pregnancies.

Reproductive Health Education: Fact Forward and the Department of Social Services funded and supported our work to educate young people ages 15-24 years of age on how to prevent unplanned pregnancies, STDs/STIs and HIV/AIDS. Seventeen Days sessions were held with several groups in Darlington County. These sessions allowed participants to engage in an interactive video presentation which encourages healthy sexual behaviors and responsible decision making.

Condom Distribution Program: The Access Condoms in Darlington County (AC/DC) program has been implemented since 2016. We have sustained partnerships with local barbershops, beauty salons and trusted adults in the community to provide condoms to men and women in Darlington County free of judgment. Like our other reproductive health services, we work to reduce and prevent unplanned pregnancies, STDs/STIs, and HIV/AIDS by providing condoms through this program.

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

20,977

condoms distributed

42

providers served



We co-coordinated and hosted a Reproductive Health Symposium at Coker University for Coker students in partnership with Fact Forward and CareSouth Carolina. Pictured here are presenters and coordinators.



MEN'S HEALTH INITIATIVE

Traditionally, when professionals discuss families served women are primarily the focus; however mothers have relationships which involve men. This includes men in their lives and the lives of their children. We have joined with the SC Cancer Alliance to address health inequities in African American men by mobilizing and educating the community to normalize men getting regular health screenings, spreading awareness through marketing campaigns and providing access to available resources and information.

MEN'S HEALTH BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

14

families served

58

materials distributed



In November of 2019, Darlington County First Steps hosted a Men's Health Forum to discuss the state of men's health in Darlington County and plan next steps to ensuring more men schedule regular health checks. Our panelists were comprised of representatives from CareSouth Carolina, Genesis Healthcare, SC Cancer Alliance, and the owner of a wellness center. Vendors were also stationed to provide on-site health screenings and information on local resources.



PUBLIC AWARENESS & COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Community Symposiums: This year, Darlington County First Steps had great success collaborating with partners to spread awareness about program services to strengthen families and communities. We hosted **3** Community Work Group (CWG) meetings with representatives from Federally Qualified Health Centers, Carolina Pines Regional Medical Center, DCCAA Head Start, and other community serving organizations throughout the county. During CWG convenings, partners collaborate to address and remove barriers to families accessing services. Additionally, we coordinated and hosted, at the request of Coker University, **2** reproductive health events which collectively served over **450** students. In November, we hosted a Men's Health Symposium, attended by **15** men, in partnership with Genesis Healthcare, CareSouth Carolina, SC Cancer Alliance and Macedonia Family Life Skills Center which included a panel discussion about the state of men's health in Darlington County and what steps could be taken to improve health outcomes for men of color.

Social Media Sharing: Darlington County First Steps uses Facebook and Newsletters (E-blasts) to spread awareness and provide updates about the happenings within our organization and community to partnering organizations and community members.

Tabling Events: Participating in community events allows us to extend our reach to families in Darlington County. This year, we participated in Gospel in the Park, a Concert Series held monthly in the summer, which brings together faith-based communities and allows community serving organizations an opportunity to share information and provide services to participants at the event. We distributed early education materials and personal supplies to parents during the Hartsville High School Back to School Extravaganza, hosted by Senator Gerald Malloy. We participated in **2** tabling events hosted by the YMCA of Hartsville and distributed materials to parents about our program services.

PUBLIC AWARENESS & COMMUNITY EDUCATION BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

23,267

materials distributed

14

events



ADDITIONAL SERVICES

Welcome Baby Bags/Literacy Kits are delivered to parents of newborns at Carolina Pines Regional Medical Center. These bags, which contain reading materials, child development and child rearing information and baby supplies, are provided through a partnership with Carolina Pines Regional Medical Center and the Darlington County Library System. This year we delivered **482** Welcome Baby Bags!

Diva Den and Dad Cave are safe spaces for mothers, fathers and guardians to unwind, share and learn with peers, and receive services. These spaces are also used for community convenings and can be reserved for use by partnering organizations.

Family Care Packages: The Greater Hartsville Chamber's 2020 Leadership Hartsville Class, United Way of Hartsville, DHEC, and members of the community donated infant and toddler supplies (diapers and wipes), clothes, formula, and books. We redistribute these donated items to families enrolled in our programs, partner's programs, or families who come to us physically or virtually through our online referral form and online service request form. Through the PAF program, **30** Family Care Packages were specifically created and distributed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These care packages included such items as hand sanitizer, toilet tissue, baby wipes, face masks and learning activities for children.

Parent Cafes are safe spaces where parents and caregivers talk about the challenges and victories of raising a family. Through individual self-reflection and peer to peer learning, parents explore their strengths, learn about the Protective Factors, and create strategies from their own wisdom and experiences to help strengthen their families. **20** parents participated in sessions this year.

ADDITIONAL SERVICES BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

614

adults served



COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Addressing the needs of young children is a shared endeavor. In addition to providing services to families and support for childcare providers, Darlington County First Steps mobilizes partners and community members to ensure all children in Darlington 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

57

local partners

7

statewide and
national partners

“My experience working with Darlington County First Steps has been more than great. They provide several opportunities to network and collaborate to enhance our service delivery to community members in the county. I am glad to share a partnership with First Steps.

**Jacquetta Graham, Community Outreach Specialist,
CareSouth Carolina**



OUR SUPPORTERS

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

FUNDING SUPPORT

Children's Trust of South Carolina
(SFP):
\$75,000

Children's Trust of South Carolina
(Parent Training):
\$65,000

Fact Forward/Duke Endowment:
\$14,214

Fact Forward/DSS:
\$20,566

Fact Forward (PREP):
\$19,023

Kiwanis of Hartsville:
\$1,500

New Morning Foundation:
\$55,358

S.C. Cancer Alliance:
\$10,000

United Way of Hartsville: \$18,000

IN-KIND SUPPORT

Art Bug Studio of Hartsville

CareSouth Carolina

Darlington County Adult Education

Darlington County CAA Head Start

Darlington County DHEC

Darlington County Library System

Darlington County School District

The Duke Endowment

Genesis Health Care

Greater Hartsville Chamber of
Commerce

Leadership Hartsville Class of 2020

Lowe's of Hartsville

Macedonia Family Life Center

Macon Hunter State Farm Insurance

Nurse Family Partnership

Pee Dee Healthy Start

Rosenwald Elementary School

Senator Gerald Malloy

The Byerly Foundation

Thornwell School for the Arts

Tommi Mack

United Way of Hartsville

JOIN US

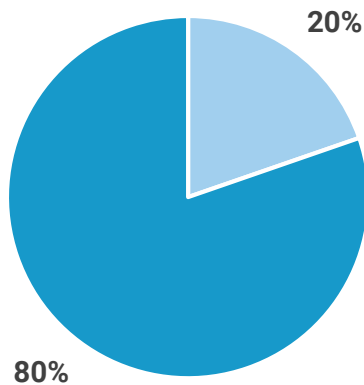
For more information on partnership opportunities, visit our website at
darlingtoncountyfirststeps.org




FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

OUR INVESTMENT IN QUALITY

Expenditures of State Funds by Program Type



 Evidence-based  Evidence-informed

ESTIMATION OF COST SAVINGS

Since inception, Darlington County First Steps has leveraged **\$3,608,763** from sources outside of state government.

That's **\$0.68** for every state dollar.

	State Funding	Federal Funding	Private Funding	In-Kind Contributions	Total
Administrative Functions	\$23,600.14	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$23,600.14
Core Functions	\$26,063.95	\$1,506.60	\$99,558.44	\$0.00	\$126,778.99
Parents As Teachers	\$67,997.74	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$67,997.74
Motheread/Fatheread	\$21,931.46	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$21,931.46
Parent Training	\$5,738.61	\$51,722.80	\$1,675.93	\$0.00	\$59,137.34
Fatherhood Initiatives	\$13,251.71	\$0.00	\$2,286.12	\$0.00	\$15,537.83
Reach Out & Read	\$17,954.19	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$17,954.19
Strengthening Families Program	\$300.35	\$0.00	\$55,408.40	\$0.00	\$55,708.75
Early Education for Children Under 4	\$31,357.56	\$0.00	\$9,007.60	\$0.00	\$40,365.16
Countdown to Kindergarten	\$3,251.57	\$0.00	\$340.00	\$0.00	\$3,591.57
HHS Service Coord.	\$11,994.63	\$0.00	\$505.85	\$0.00	\$12,500.48
Total Expenses	\$223,441.91	\$53,229.40	\$168,782.34	\$0.00	\$445,453.65



LEADERSHIP

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Brandy Weaver, CTK Coordinator

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