

# Annual Report

## 2019-2020



## THE NEED

IN MARION COUNTY:

**1,986**

children under age 5

**67.1%**

of young children live in poverty or low-income households

**75%**

of kindergartners are considered "not ready" for school



### THREE MOST COMMON RISK FACTORS:

1. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP-formerly Food Stamps) or Free School Lunches eligibility
2. Single parent household and has need of other services
3. Exposure to parental/caregiver depression

## OUR MISSION

Collaborate with other entities, First Steps helps Marion County 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

**678**

number of children and adults served by Marion 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

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**Spencer R. Scott**

Executive Director  
Marion County First Steps

The 2020 fiscal year saw an unprecedented challenge in the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Many of the daycares in Marion County had to close (with a few closing completely), leaving 64.7% of Marion County being a “childcare desert”.

Daycare workers were left unemployed, and families who were part of the 94.4% effected by job losses were unable to send their children to daycare, leaving some families panicking about their next steps. However, the bad times do not last forever, and things are coming back to normal. Marion County First Steps (MCFS) is taking every precaution to ensure safety for staff and providers.

Despite the pandemic, the vision of MCFS carried on. A grand total of 678 people—parents and children—were served by MCFS for the 2020 fiscal year.

Our Child Care Scholarship program gave 16 children and 6 providers funds that would alleviate the costs of daycare and to encourage parents to keep moving towards their career and educational goals. 95 children in 4K programs were served through MCFS. Marion County First Steps partnered with Florence County First Steps from April through June to provide 5 training sessions that gave attendees 11 hours of training credits.

In good times or bad times, MCFS is deeply committed to ensuring that the smallest citizens of Marion County are ready for school and for life. Thanks to the board and staff of MCFS, as well as providers, community members, and partners, we can make this vision into a reality. In the words of Helen Keller, “Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”

*Spencer*



# 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 Marion County toward the following strategic goals:

- Increase Literacy Program to serve 150 children by one additional coordinator in faith-based and Head Start communities by 2020.
- Increase the number of certified trainers in Marion by 10%.
- Increase scholarships to serve 30 additional children in hard-to-reach rural areas of Marion County by 2020.
- Host community meetings concerning Early Education.

# PIVOTING FOR COVID-19

When the coronavirus pandemic forced South Carolina to shut down in March 2020, Marion County First Steps quickly pivoted to provide much-needed support to young children, their families and child care 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 Marion 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 MARION COUNTY

### HEALTH

Through June 30, Marion County had a total of **211** confirmed COVID-19 cases and **11** COVID-19 deaths.

### JOB LOSS

**94.4%**

increase in unemployment, 2019-2020

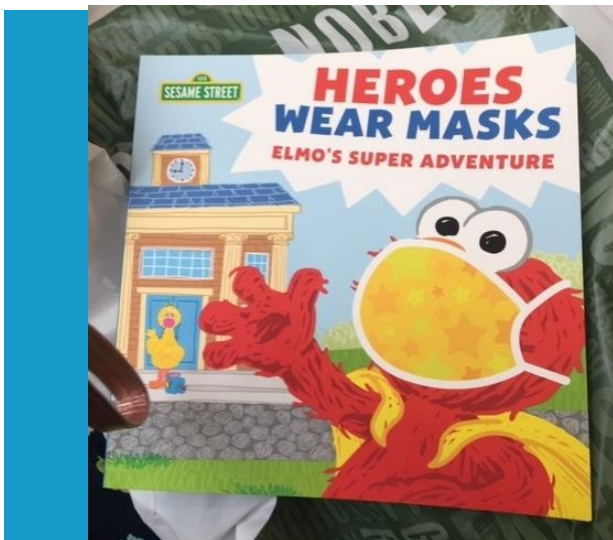
### CHILD CARE

**7.4%**

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

**64.7%**

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



"When it rains,  
look for rainbows.  
When it's dark,  
look for stars."

\*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.



# CHILD CARE QUALITY ENHANCEMENT



an evidence-based program

Many private child care centers strive to provide high quality care but lack the resources often available to publicly-funded early childhood programs. Our Child Care Quality Enhancement (QE) program aims to produce measurable improvements in the quality of care provided to young children.

Our services include:



Rigorous quality assessments



On-site technical assistance at least twice monthly



Funding for equipment and materials



Training and workforce development



Coordination with community partners

## QE BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

6

child care providers served

22

number of TA visits provided

187

number of children 0-5 enrolled in provider classrooms

“ Happy and secure children are ready to take on the next stage of life. ”



# 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:

- **Transitions & Behavior Management Oh My!**
  - **Preschool Teachers Matter**
- **A Place Called There: How to Make Your School a Place Where Everyone Wants to Be**
- **“The Great Eight”: An Early Childhood Leaders’ Top 8 Domains for a Highly Effective Child Development Center**
- **“The Checklist”: How to Keep Your Employees Happy and Fulfilled**

**\*Play is Children’s Work**

**# preschoolteachersmatter**

## TRAINING BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

# 20

total training attendance

# 20

child care teachers and directors served

# 2

number of training sessions offered

Marion County First Steps partnered with Florence County First Steps from April through June to provide 5 training sessions that gave attendees 11 hours of training credits.



## MARION COUNTY LITERACY PROGRAM



Marion County First Steps literacy program offers an integrated and family friendly approach, helping both parents and children to improve their literacy skills. Quality books are distributed to each child and the classroom gets a copy of the book. Trainings in story telling techniques are integrated in the read aloud sessions.

The literacy program also

- provides literacy experiences for birth to 4 year old children
- provides read aloud sessions for 3 and 4 year old children
- provides activities for parents to reinforce reading at home

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### Marion County Literacy Program **BY THE NUMBERS** 2019-2020

**2573**

books given out

**22**

providers served







## CHILD CARE SCHOLARSHIPS



*an evidence-based program*

For many families in Marion County, the cost of quality child care is out of reach. Our scholarship program makes payments to child care providers to care for children from low-income families so their parents can return to school or work.

Marion County First Steps offers scholarships to child care facilities that participate in our QE program, as well as income-eligible children whose parent attends school or works at least 20 hours per week.

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### SCHOLARSHIPS BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

**16**

number of children  
served

**6**

number of providers  
served

**16**

number of  
developmental  
screenings provided



# 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 MARION COUNTY 2019-2020

# 95

children enrolled

# 6

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.





## PUBLIC AWARENESS



Raising A Reader (RAR) is a proven and research-based family engagement and early literacy program for children ages 0-8 that helps families develop, practice, and maintain the home-based literacy routines necessary for success. The aims of Raising A Reader are four-fold:

- to foster healthy brain development;
- develop and enhance early literacy and language skills;
- promote and strengthen parent-child bonding; and
- develop, promote, and foster intrinsic reading motivation.

### Marion County BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

**113**

materials  
distributed

**8**

events held

**161**

total event  
attendance  
(unduplicated)





## COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

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

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## OUR PARTNERSHIPS BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

**289**

materials  
distributed

**703**

children  
served



“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”

–Helen Keller



## OUR SUPPORTERS

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

### FUNDING SUPPORT

State of South Carolina: \$200,000  
(through South Carolina First Steps)  
SC Department of Social Services \$100,375  
SC Center for Childcare Career Development: \$2,000

### IN-KIND SUPPORT

Marion County Academy of Careers and Technology Center  
Pleasant Grove Academy  
McGill's Bundle of Joy  
Academy of Early Learning  
Little Promise Learning Academy  
Troy Johnson Learning Korner  
Sugar Bears Daycare Center  
Florence County First Steps  
Marion County First Steps Board of Directors



## JOIN US

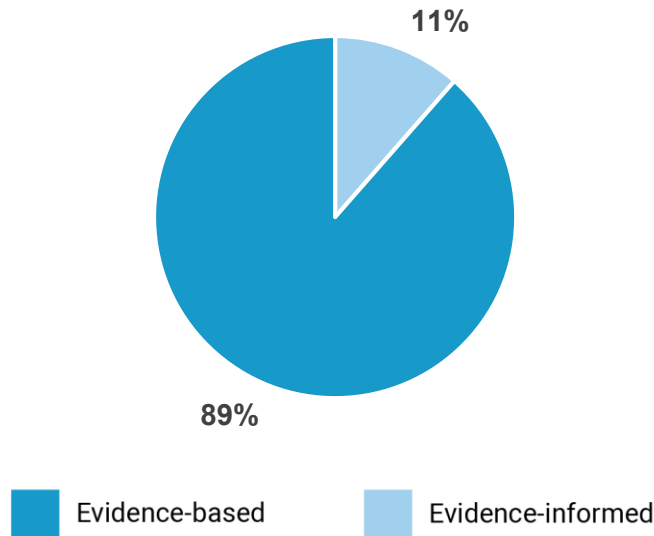
For more information on partnership opportunities, visit our website at [www.marionfirststeps.org](http://www.marionfirststeps.org)



## FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

### OUR INVESTMENT IN QUALITY

Expenditures of State Funds by Program Type



### ESTIMATION OF COST SAVINGS

Since inception, Marion County First Steps has leveraged **\$814,462** from sources outside of state government.

That's **\$0.17** for every state dollar.

### SUMMARY OF EXPENDITURES BY STRATEGY

	State Funding	Federal Funding	Private Funding	In-Kind Contributions	Total
Administrative Support	\$8,875	\$0	\$1,465	\$2,233	\$12,573
Core Functions	\$13,963	\$0	\$1,521	\$5,361	\$20,845
Family Literacy	\$17,639	\$0	\$2,973	\$6,161	\$26,773
Raising A Reader	\$47,408	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$47,408
Child Care Quality Enhancement	\$22,702	\$0	\$0	\$7,446	\$30,149
Child Care Training	\$7,589	\$0	\$165	\$6,811	\$14,565
Scholarship Initiative	\$93,005	\$0	\$0	\$3,625	\$96,631
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$211,182</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$6,124</b>	<b>\$31,637</b>	<b>\$248,942</b>



## LEADERSHIP

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### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Annette Gerald, Chairman

Tracey Hagan

Donald Fling, Vice-Chairman

Georgette Washington

Tanya Hodge, Asst. Treasurer

Farrah Owens

Victoria Belin, Treasurer

Holly Evans

Lula Coleman, Secretary

Myeshia Hughes-Rogers

Michelline Williams

Evelyn Grant

Donna Stackhouse

### STAFF

Spencer R. Scott, Executive Director

Beryl Collington, Literacy Coordinator

## CONTACT US

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[www.marionfirststeps.org](http://www.marionfirststeps.org)

