

# COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

2021 – 2023





## Mission

Collaborating 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.

## Vision

Every Marion County 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.

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

# Message from the Executive Director



**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 loss 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*

# Overarching Measures of Success

## **Increase the reach of First Steps services.**

By FY23, the percentage of children in need who are directly served by Marion County First Steps will increase from 34% to 39%.

## **Increase the number of children enrolled in high intensity programs funded by MCFS.**

By FY23, the percentage of children directly served by Marion County First Steps enrolled in high intensity programs will increase from 21% to 26%.

## **Increase the availability of high-quality early care and education opportunities offered by First Steps.**

By FY23, the percentage of children under age 6 who benefit from Marion County First Steps quality enhancement and training efforts will increase from 9% to 14%.

# Objectives

1. **Increase the number of children served by Marion County First Steps.**
2. **Families will have access to high intensity programs funded by Marion County First Steps.**
3. **Children will have access to high quality childcare facilities.**

# Increase the number of children served by Marion County First Steps.

## STRATEGY 1.1

Child/Family Strategy Self Assessment

### SMART GOAL

- By the end of FY '23, MCFS will increase the literacy program to serve at least 5 faith-based sites in Marion County.

### COMMUNITY COLLABORATORS

- Faith –Based Sites in Marion County

# Families will have access to high intensity programs funded by Marion County First Steps.

## STRATEGY 2.1

Community Education and Outreach

### SMART GOAL

- In FY'21,'22, and'23, MCFS will participate in at least 6 parenting workshops.

### COMMUNITY COLLABORATORS

- We will partner with the local school district, Head Start, and parents.

# Children will have access to high quality childcare facilities.

## STRATEGY 3.1

### Childcare Scholarships

#### SMART GOAL

- By the end of FY '23, MCFS will designate at least 10% of the scholarships for children living in rural areas attending high quality childcare facilities.

#### COMMUNITY COLLABORATORS

- SC Voucher Program
- Participating Child Care Facilities

## STRATEGY 3.2

### Child Care Quality Enhancement

#### SMART GOAL

- By the end of FY 23, MCFS will increase the number of participating childcare facilities in the Quality Enhancement Program by 10%.

#### COMMUNITY COLLABORATORS

- Participating Child Care Facilities