



# ANNUAL REPORT

## 2024-2025





# FIRST STEPS IS HERE

Last year, because of Dorchester County First Steps:



**2,473 children**

were directly served in Dorchester County



**1,466 parents & caregivers**

received services and support to be their child's first and most important teacher



**120 educators**

participated in First Steps training and professional development, benefitting 500+ children

## THE NEED PERSISTS IN DORCHESTER COUNTY

First Steps works but we need to expand our reach to ensure that all children are ready.

**10,614**

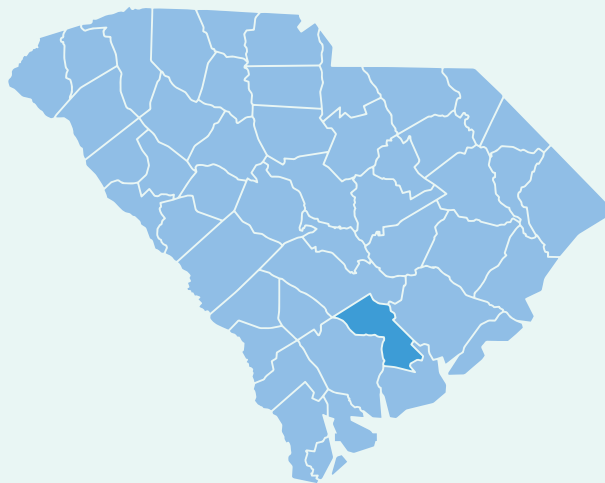
children birth to five

**33%**

of young children live in poverty or low-income households

**64%**

of kindergarteners are considered "not ready" for school



## PROVEN RESULTS

A 2019 study found that children who received First Steps local partnership services were:



**74% more likely**

to score at the highest level on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment



**34% less likely**

to be chronically absent in kindergarten

# OUR MISSION

Collaborating with other entities, Dorchester County First Steps helps families and caregivers in our county prepare their children, zero to five, for school success by maximizing public and private community resources to deliver, enhance and expand high-quality early childhood services.



**Dr. Crystal Campbell**  
Executive Director

"It always seems impossible until it's done." – Nelson Mandela

As I reflect on the journey through Fiscal Year 2025, these words resonate more deeply than ever before. We faced significant internal changes, layoffs, financial uncertainties within our community, programmatic restrictions, and the ever-evolving needs of the children and families we serve. And yet, together, we have accomplished what once felt impossible.

None of this would have been possible without the contributions of our dedicated staff: Monique Branagan, Mariah Woodward, Valencia Mackey, Maria Michalet, and Beverly Pringle. I recognize, too, the critical role played by our local board, donors, childcare providers, and the families who trust us as partners in this work. To all who have walked this path with us, we ask—"Do you like us now?" We hope you see what your support has built: an organization ready for the future, committed to every child's promise, and inspired to continue making the impossible, possible.



**Travis Shaffer**  
Board Chair

As the newly elected Board Chair, I have witnessed firsthand the complexities of our mission: preparing children birth to age five for school success. Despite challenges—supporting families facing homelessness, layoffs, food insecurity, and limited childcare—our staff has made the impossible, possible.

The Team's dedication has transformed obstacles into opportunities, giving hope to families and futures to children. On behalf of the Partnership Board, I extend our deepest gratitude. DCFS's unwavering commitment and compassion have ensured another year of remarkable achievement. Thank you for everyone's outstanding service. Job well done!

# PROGRAMS

## PARENTING

### HIPPY

Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) is a home visiting program that supports parents in their role as a child's first and most important teacher.

18

children served

17

group meetings  
and events

233

home visits

### Motheread/Fatheread

Offers adult literacy classes to parents of young children, with an emphasis on the importance of reading regularly as a family.

33

children served

26

families served

41

parent  
workshops

## SCHOOL TRANSITION

### Countdown to Kindergarten

Supports transitions into kindergarten by connecting incoming students, their families, and their teachers in a series of one-on-one sessions during the summer.

58

children served

348

home/school  
visits

### Countdown to 4K

Supports transitions into pre-kindergarten by connecting incoming students, their families, and their teachers in a series of one-on-one sessions during the summer.

39

children served

234

home/school  
visits

## EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

### Quality Enhancement

Intensive support to child care centers and preschool classrooms to improve quality.

175

children served

13

providers served

316

training hours  
provided

### Training & Professional Development

Certified and registered training hours for the early childhood workforce.

10

providers served

25

certified training  
hours

### Child Care Scholarships

Eligible children receive tuition-free enrollment at quality child care centers.

35

children served

12

providers served

## HEALTH

### Reach Out and Read

Free, high-quality books provided by a child's pediatric provider during doctor's visits.

1,214

children served

xx

books distributed

# FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

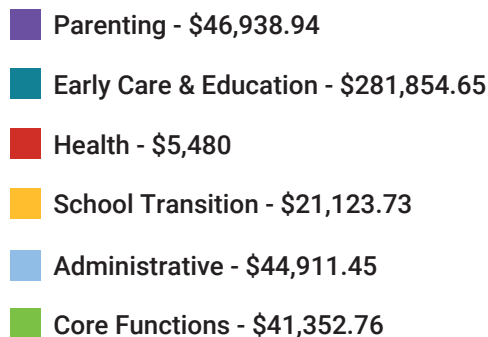
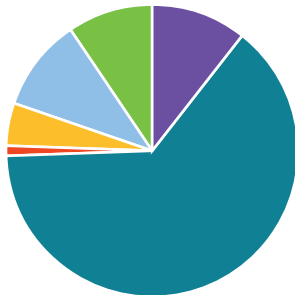


**\$1 = \$1.11**

Dorchester County First Steps leveraged \$43,941.29 from sources outside of state government, providing a match of \$0.11 for every state dollar invested.

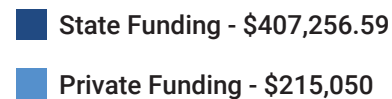
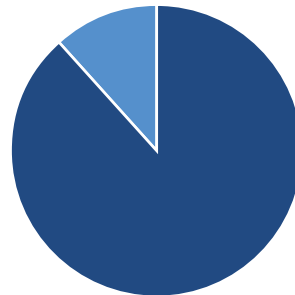
## EXPENDITURES

Total: \$441,661.53



## FUNDING SOURCES

Total: \$451,197.88



## FUNDING SUPPORT

State Education Improvement Act (EIA) Funding

State READY Funding\*

Federal AmeriCorps Service Site

State Income Tax Check-off and Private Donations to SC First Steps

\*Resources for Early Acceleration and Development in Youth (READY) Proviso 1.84

## **Board of Directors**

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Marie Scroggins  
Travis Schaffer  
Barbara Phillips  
Senora Waiters  
Sharon Bennet  
Betty Pressley  
Frank Strapoli  
Donna Alexander  
Tracey Jackson  
Robin Kurz

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Riverpointe Christian Academy  
Dorchester District Two  
Dorchester District Four  
St. George Branch of Dorchester County Library Systems  
Ms. Barbara Phillips  
Coastal Community Foundation  
Volvo Cars  
Dorchester Department of Social Services  
Dorchester Town Council  
Ms. Tiffany Outlaw  
Mr. Terez Legare, Owner-Riding Hard In and Out of State (RHINOS)  
Morningstar Storage

## **CONTACT US**

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