



ANNUAL REPORT

2024-2025





FIRST STEPS IS HERE

Last year, because of Union County First Steps:



1,282 children

were directly served in Union County



1,504 parents & caregivers

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



91 educators

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

THE NEED PERSISTS IN UNION COUNTY

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

1,817

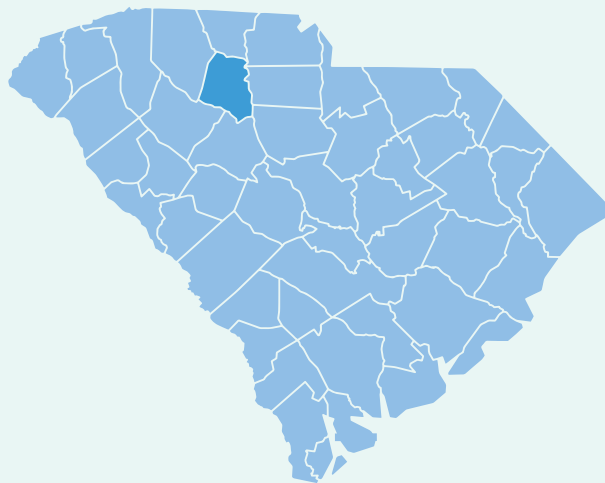
children birth to five

69%

of young children live in poverty or low-income households

75%

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

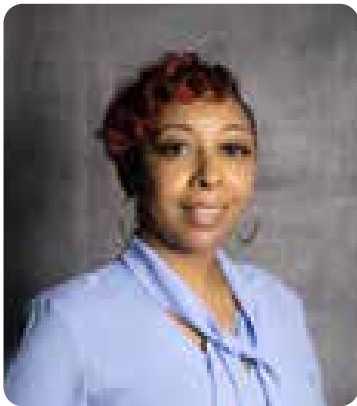


34% less likely

to be chronically absent in kindergarten

OUR MISSION

Connecting families to resources they need for their children to be safe, healthy, and ready for school.



Nicole Thomas
Executive Director

Dear Friends and Partners,

As Executive Director of Union County First Steps, I am proud to share this year's progress in our ongoing mission to ensure every child in Union County enters school ready to succeed. This past year, we deepened our commitment to supporting families during the earliest and most critical years of a child's life. Through the dedication of our staff, the strength of our partnerships, and the resilience of the families we serve, we've expanded our reach and strengthened our impact — one child, one home, one community at a time. We know that when we empower parents, invest in high-quality early care, and work hand-in-hand with our local schools and service providers, children thrive. Thank you to our Board of Directors, our community partners, and our generous supporters for standing with us. Together, we are building a brighter path for Union County's youngest learners — and laying the foundation for a stronger, more vibrant future.



Robin Rodgers
Board Chair

Union County First Steps continue to strive for excellence in reaching out and working with our families and all the community partners to encourage the importance of early learning. This past year has been one of resilience, determination, and collaboration. This program continues to put our children first to ensure that ALL have a chance to start school ready and on the right track. The First Steps presence in the community continues to be an outstanding one. The staff continues to receive training to better serve the children. Our First Steps program goes over and beyond to include the families, business, churches, and communities in understanding the importance of children getting an early start on learning to be prepared for school. Our Executive Director Nicole Thomas continues to make us proud in leading such a wonderful program. She is an awesome person who genuinely cares about children, and their well being.

PROGRAMS

PARENTING

Parents as Teachers

Offers research-based curricula that help families raise children to be healthy, safe, learning, and ready for school.

55

children served

723

home visits

18

group meetings
and events

EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

Training & Professional Development

Certified and registered training hours for the early childhood workforce.

129

children served

5

providers served

21

certified training
hours

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.

10

children served

60

home/school
visits

Child Care Scholarships

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

9

children served

3

providers served

HEALTH

Reach Out and Read

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

678

children served

1,375

books distributed

FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

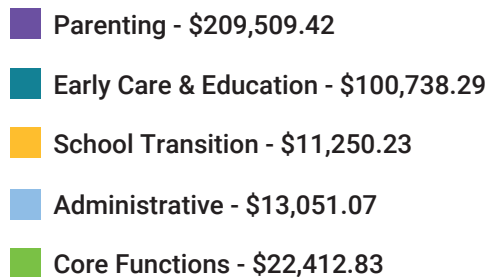
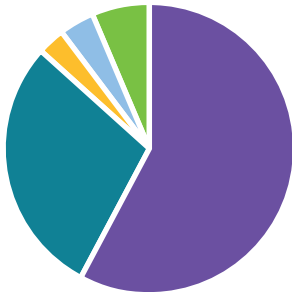


\$1 = \$1.31

Union County First Steps leveraged \$88,464.53 from sources outside of state government, providing a match of \$0.31 for every state dollar invested.

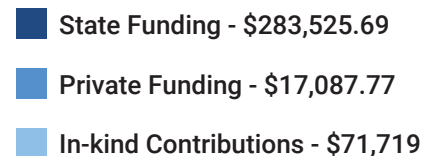
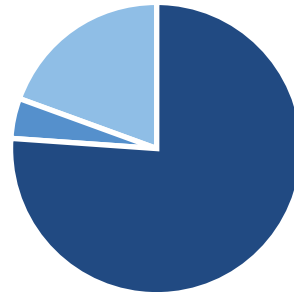
EXPENDITURES

Total: \$350,961.84



FUNDING SOURCES

Total: \$371,990.22



FUNDING SUPPORT

State Education Improvement Act (EIA) Funding

State READY Funding*

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

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



UCFS has been a blessing to my family! Mrs. Joni has completed assessments, screenings, and made sure our girls are developmentally on target. I'm constantly telling others about UCFS. I cannot say enough good things about our experience!

Union County First Steps Parent

Board of Directors

Jesse Kaylor
Frank Charles
Mary Thomas
Robin Rodgers
Amanda Newton
Dena Addis
Rhonda Hollingsworth
Jan Carter
Stacy Farr
Taylor Atkinson

Donor List

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SC Endeavors
La Fogata Mexican Restaurant
Community Mortuary Inc.
Word of Life Chirstian Church

CONTACT US

unionfirststeps.wixsite.com/my-site | (864)426-2519
nicoleglenn@unionfirststeps.org