



# ANNUAL REPORT

## 2024-2025





# FIRST STEPS IS HERE

Last year, because of Pickens County First Steps:



**4,246 children**

were directly served in Pickens County



**2,973 parents & caregivers**

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

## THE NEED PERSISTS IN PICKENS COUNTY

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

**7,273**

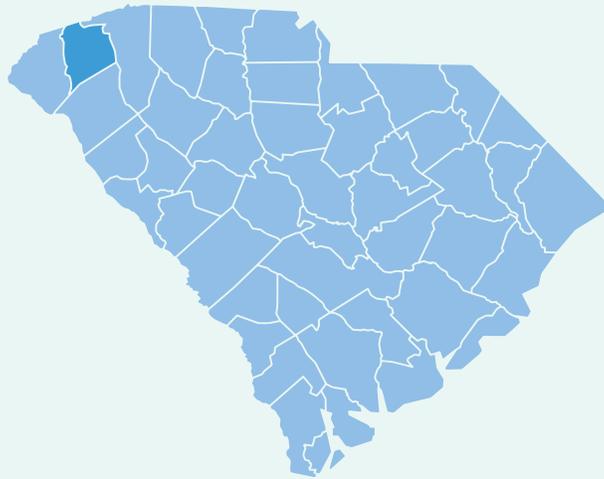
children birth to five

**40%**

of young children live in poverty or low-income households

**60%**

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

We serve as a convener of early childhood champions to coordinate services to measurably improve the early childhood development of all children in Pickens County.



**Amity Buckner**  
Executive Director

Our desire is always to equip caregivers, families and early childhood champions with the tools they need to give every child a great start in life! The strong relationships we have built over time with community partners have allowed us to collaborate in the crucial work of strengthening families, promoting early literacy and creating a culture of school readiness, meeting families where they are with the use of technology, and caring for the whole child.

We are grateful for our board's commitment to the youngest learners in Pickens County and their support of meeting parents where they are. Most importantly, we are grateful for the families that allow us to step into their lives and offer support.



**Lyle Jacks**  
Board Chair

As we present the FY25 Annual Report for First Steps Pickens County, I want to express deep gratitude to our executive director, Amity Buckner, and staff, Marian Vischer, for their dedication and generous sharing of their gifts for the youngest members of the county. Pouring into the lives of children during these first five years of development is the most effective way to promote a brighter future for the entire community. I am thankful for the many organizations we partner with and are funded by so that we can continue these important programs. Collaboration with other organizations is key to reaching the most vulnerable by weaving a safety net for their development. Finally, I am grateful for the Board of Directors as they have made some hard decisions related to funding declines and focused funding on serving the community, under the guidance of our executive director. It is an honor to chair this Board and to play a part in the future of Pickens County.

# PROGRAMS

## PARENTING

### Parents as Teachers

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

43

children served

885

home visits

33

group meetings  
and events

### Connected Families

Prevents the unnecessary removal of young children from their homes by providing parents and caregivers with voluntary, coordinated services.

23

children served

18

families served

360

home visits

### Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

Free, high-quality books mailed to the home of children from birth until age five.

1,269

children served

9,476

books distributed

## EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

### Nurse-Family Partnership

Home visitation for first time mothers, from pregnancy until the child turns two.

22

children served

29

families served

317

home visits

### Reach Out and Read

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

2,464

children served

4,928

books distributed

### Family Connects

Strengthening bonds within families of newborns and linking them directly to supportive community resources.

367

children served

2

clinics served

## 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.

30

children served

3

schools served

179

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.

28

children served

2

schools served

166

home/school  
visits

# FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

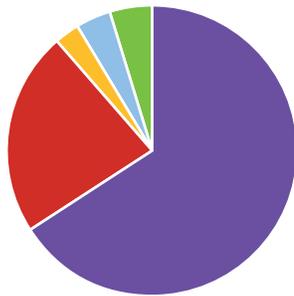


**\$1 = \$1.77**

Pickens County First Steps leveraged \$343,198.29 from sources outside of state government, providing a match of \$0.77 for every state dollar invested.

## EXPENDITURES

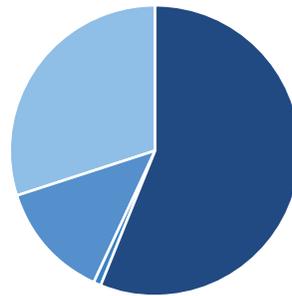
Total: \$802,619.34



- Parenting - \$530,601.28
- Health - \$182,178.84
- School Transition - \$21,641.44
- Administrative - \$31,266.08
- Core Functions - \$36,931.70

## FUNDING SOURCES

Total: \$786,635.29



- State Funding - \$443,437
- Federal Funding - \$5,444.25
- Private Funding - \$102,581.93
- In-kind Contributions - \$235,172.11

## FUNDING SUPPORT

State Education Improvement Act (EIA) Funding

State READY Funding\*

The Duke Endowment & Doris Duke Foundation

Enterprise Mobility Foundation ROAD Forward Grant

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

## **Board of Directors**

Melissa Sanders  
Brandon Watt  
Jeff Martin  
Nicole Matheny  
George Hicks  
Faye Nichols  
Liz Rampy  
John Schafer  
Lauren Willis  
Lyle Jacks  
Victoria Tate  
Traci Boyles  
Kate Wiltrout

## **Donor List**

Dabo's All In Foundation  
United Way of Pickens County

In-Kind:

Cliffs Resident Outreach  
School District of Pickens County  
Prisma Health-Upstate

## **CONTACT US**

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