



## 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**

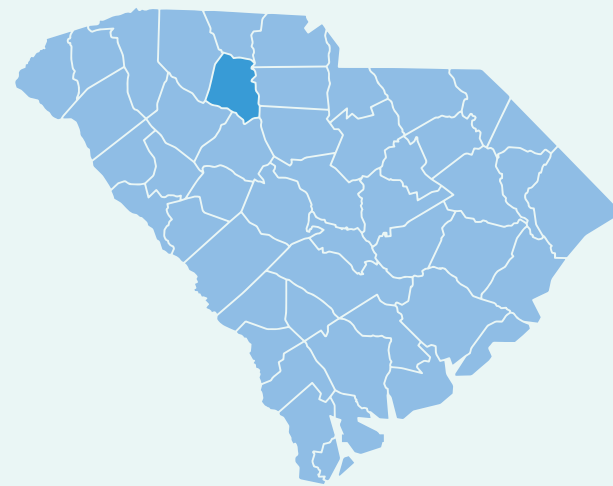
children birth to five

**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



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

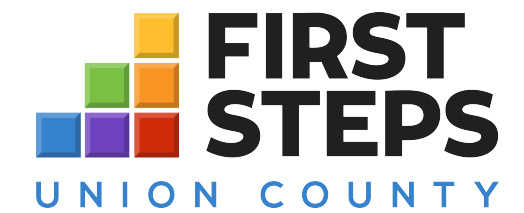
Jesse Kaylor  
Frank Charles  
Mary Thomas  
Robin Rodgers  
Amanda Newton  
Dena Addis  
Rhonda Hollingsworth  
Jan Carter  
Stacy Farr  
Taylor Atkinson

## Donor List

SC First Steps  
Molina Healthcare  
City of Union  
SC Endeavors  
La Fogata Mexican Restaurant  
Community Mortuary Inc.  
Word of Life Chirstian Church

## CONTACT US

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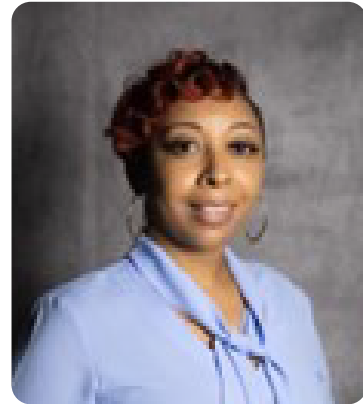


# ANNUAL REPORT 2024-2025



## 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

#### Child Care Scholarships

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

**9** children served  
**3** providers 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.

**10** children served  
**60** home/school visits

### 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

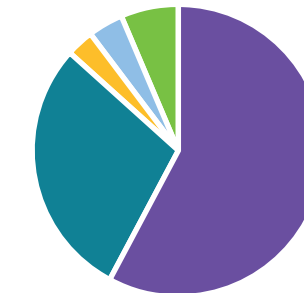


**\$1 = \$1.31**

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

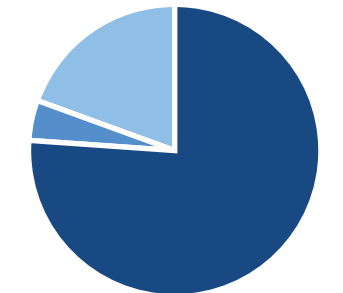
Total: \$350,961.84



- Parenting - \$209,509.42
- Early Care & Education - \$100,738.29
- School Transition - \$11,250.23
- Administrative - \$13,051.07
- Core Functions - \$22,412.83

### FUNDING SOURCES

Total: \$371,990.22



- State Funding - \$283,525.69
- Private Funding - \$17,087.77
- In-kind Contributions - \$71,719

### 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