



ANNUAL REPORT

2024-2025





FIRST STEPS IS HERE

Last year, because of Marion County First Steps:



1,218 children

were directly served in Marion County



1,051 parents & caregivers

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



312 educators

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

THE NEED PERSISTS IN MARION COUNTY

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

1,678

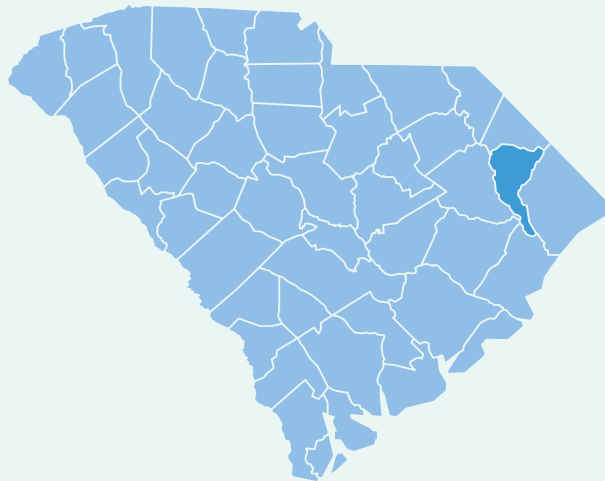
children birth to five

76%

of young children live in poverty or low-income households

70%

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

Marion County First Steps is a local nonprofit that works collaboratively to ensure that all children start school ready to reach their highest potential. We achieve this goal by engaging families, caregivers, and community partners in high-quality programs and services that improve early childhood development, from before birth through age five. We also serve as a connector and convener of all early childhood stakeholders in Marion County.



Spencer Scott
Executive Director

As I reflect on this past year, I am filled with gratitude for the incredible progress we have made together for the children and families of Marion County. Our mission to ensure that every child arrives at school ready to succeed remains both urgent and inspiring.

This year, we have seen firsthand the power of collaboration. Through strong partnerships with schools, childcare providers, community organizations, and dedicated families, we expanded access to high-quality early learning, strengthened family support, and invested in the future of our youngest learners. Whether through scholarships, literacy initiatives, or parent engagement programs, every effort has been centered on building a foundation that lasts a lifetime.

We have also faced challenges. Changing policies, funding uncertainties, and shifting community needs required us to adapt quickly. Yet, in every challenge, we found an opportunity to innovate, to advocate, and to stand firmly for what matters most: our children.



Dr. Farrah Owens
Board Chair

The goal of Marion County First Steps is to strengthen early education and provide parenting support for families during the critical birth-to-five years. This is the period when foundational, language, social, and emotional skills begin to develop. Through high-quality early learning experiences and evidence-based parent programs, we aim to give every child the strongest possible start.

We are proud to have successfully implemented Raising a Reader in local childcare centers and the Academy of Early Learning, as well as the Nurturing Parenting and HIPPOY programs. Marion County First Steps has been recognized regionally and nationally for its commitment to early childhood education. Under the leadership of Executive Director Spencer Scott, our staff and board remain dedicated to collaborating with childcare providers, schools, business leaders, and community partners to ensure every child is ready for kindergarten.

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	1,219	18
children served	home visits	group meetings and events

Nurturing Parenting

Designed to build nurturing parenting skills as an alternative to abusive and neglecting parenting and child-rearing practices.

129	94	1,620
children served	families served	home visits

Raising a Reader - Enhanced

Helps families develop, practice, and maintain home literacy habits.

148	146	13,412
children served	families served	books distributed

Library-Based Programs

Connect librarians with child care programs and preschool classrooms, providing books, storytelling, and staff training.

77	17
children served	providers served

EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

Quality Enhancement

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

366	5	100
children served	providers served	visits

Training & Professional Development

Certified and registered training hours for the early childhood workforce.

521	16	24.5
children served	providers served	certified training hours

Child Care Scholarships

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

86	8
children served	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.

41	2	245
children served	schools served	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.

103	5	613
children served	schools served	home/school visits

FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

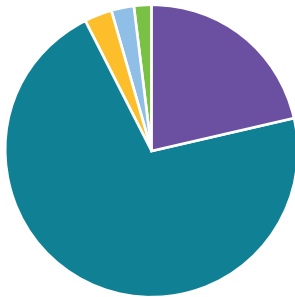


\$1 = \$2.71

Marion County First Steps leveraged \$703,247.11 from sources outside of state government, providing a match of \$1.71 for every state dollar invested.

EXPENDITURES

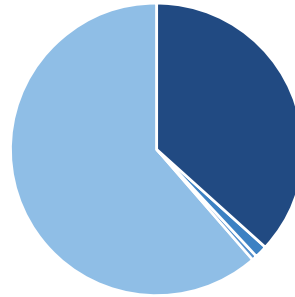
Total: \$1,068,645.20



Parenting	- \$229,060.44
Early Care & Education	- \$762,052.20
School Transition	- \$32,732.35
Administrative	- \$24,512.66
Core Functions	- \$20,287.55

FUNDING SOURCES

Total: \$1,115,205.93



State Funding	- \$411,958.82
Federal Funding	- \$14,613.79
Private Funding	- \$4,121.62
In-kind Contributions	- \$684,511.70

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

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As a first-time mom, this program has truly helped me and my son Brayden. We enjoyed the meetings, field trips, and one-on-one sessions. First Steps supported us with learning, daycare, and encouragement. I'm grateful!

Tiffany Bartell



Board of Directors

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Donor List

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 SC Endeavors
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CONTACT US

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