

STRATEGIC PLAN

2024 – 2026





Mission

Collaborating with other entities, First Steps helps South Carolina families and caregivers prepare their children for school success by maximizing public and private community resources to deliver, enhance and expand high-quality early childhood services.

Vision

Every South Carolina child will be prepared for success in school.

Values

The years of early childhood are a critical window of development during which much of human potential is shaped.

Families are the single most important influence on the development of their young children.

The work of supporting families and caregivers is a collaborative effort between state and local stakeholders within the public, private and faith sectors.

School readiness is the result of a child's development in many areas, with each contributing to the child's success.

Services must be individualized and adaptable to meet the unique needs of children and families.

We value, and demonstrate in our collaborative work and advocacy, diverse perspectives in the development of public policy and programs.

To achieve desired results, services must be high-quality and grounded in strong evidence. First Steps operates within a culture of accountability.

Strategic Plan Process

CONVENE

Held community convenings to develop a vision for young children and their families

October 2022 – February 2023



UNDERSTAND

Reviewed local data and map assets to understand the state of young children, their families, and the early childhood system

October 2022 – February 2023



PRIORITIZE

Organized the insight gathered from the convenings and data to prioritize the concerns, needs, and gaps the partnership wants to address and formalized Needs Assessment

January 2023 – February 2023



PLAN

Wrote the partnership's three-year Strategic Plan using the Needs Assessment

March 2023 – April 2023



APPLY

Utilize the Strategic Plan to inform the partnership's Annual Formula Funding Grant Application

April 2023, April 2024, April 2025



IMPLEMENT

Execute the programs and services outlined in the Strategic Plan

July 2023 – June 2026



MONITOR

Track the partnership's progress on implementing programs to fidelity and on achieving the Strategic Plan

July 2023 – June 2026



Priority Needs: Summary

Through a series of community convenings, a needs assessment and asset mapping process, the following needs were prioritized for Cherokee County. See our full needs assessment here: [<link>](#).

1. Parent Training

Training is desired by families in several areas including work/life integration, basic family needs, and early education development. Strategies and information regarding early interventions for education, speech, behavior, and emotional challenges were discussed.

2. Quality Child Care and Child Care Deserts

Early childcare services lack availability in evenings and workforce development. Centers are understaffed and need help with staff training.

3. Supporting Families and Children

Children and families are in need of services, but they may not be aware of all resources available within the county. It has been suggested that pairing up with partners for outreach events would boost community awareness, allow access to a more diverse population, and provide families/children opportunities to interact in social settings that will teach them needed skills for success.

Objectives

1. CHILDREN ARE ACTIVELY SUPPORTED BY THEIR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Research shows that it is fundamental for parents to read with, talk to and interact with their children to facilitate success in school and life. Dolly Parton's Imagination Library aims to increase the amount of time parents spend reading with their children and to provide every child with his/her own library of books. Talk to Me Cherokee encourages parents to talk to their children and measures the amount of interaction between parent and child.

2. CHILDREN ARRIVE AT SCHOOL READY TO REACH THEIR HIGHEST POTENTIAL

Informing parents of available choices for early development and the importance of childhood transitions can promote interests in children's education levels. Quality Training for child care facilities will ensure that staff will increase their knowledge and skills. Further, it allows them to maintain the licensing required by the SC Department of Social Services.

3. CHILDREN ARE HEALTHY AND SAFE

Increasing the awareness of area resources about the importance of early education and literacy, local programs, and area resources can alter the family's comprehension of how they can help their child be better prepared. Strategic targeting through outreach including community events, education/health fairs, and presentations to local agencies can help connect families with needed services.

Objective One: CHILDREN ARE ACTIVELY SUPPORTED BY THEIR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

STRATEGY 1.1

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

SMART GOAL(S)

1. Cherokee County First Steps will increase enrollment in the program by 1% by the end of FY24, 1% by the end of FY25, and 1% in FY26 for a total of 3% by the end of FY26.
2. Each year, 60% of parents will report reading to their child 5 or more days each week, 80% of parents will note reading to their child more often than before enrolling in the program, and 75% will state that the number of books in the home have doubled.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)

- Our primary partner for this program is the The Dollywood Foundation. They assist with covering their administrative costs, selecting the books, and passing on a reduced rate for the books and shipping. Other partners support the program with distribution of enrollment forms including: pediatricians, schools, child care centers, Head Start, DSS, BabyNet, churches, and other community agencies including the Talk to Me Cherokee partners. Talk to Me Cherokee partners also collaborated with CCFS by promoting the importance of early literacy and ensuring children were enrolled.

Objective One: CHILDREN ARE ACTIVELY SUPPORTED BY THEIR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES CONTINUED

STRATEGY 1.2

Talk to Me Cherokee Initiative (LENA)

SMART GOAL(S)

1. Cherokee County First Steps will increase enrollment in the program by 3% by the end of FY24, 3% by the end of FY25, and 3% in FY26 for a total of 9% by the end of FY26.
2. Each year, reports will show that 50% of parents will increase words spoken to their child per hour, 50% will increase conversational turns with their child per day, and 70% will increase the amount of time spent talking with their child.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)

- Talk to Me Cherokee Initiative local partners will work with us to focus on and recruit low-income and at-risk families. These partner agencies include Piedmont Community Action Head Start/Early Head Start, United Way of the Piedmont, Cherokee County School District, Spartanburg Community College, Limestone University, Cherokee County Public Library, Gaffney Visitors' Center, and SC Department of Health & Environmental Control.

Objective One: CHILDREN ARE ACTIVELY SUPPORTED BY THEIR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES *CONTINUED*

STRATEGY 1.3

Outreach & Community Education

SMART GOAL(S)

1. In FY 24, Cherokee County First Steps will facilitate 4 community learning groups, conduct 2 quarterly educational/outreach presentations to local or statewide audiences, and participate quarterly in 2 education/health fair. By the end of FY26, we will increase these numbers to facilitate 6 community learning groups, conduct 3 quarterly educational/outreach presentations to local or statement audiences, and participate quarterly in 3 education/health fairs.
2. By the end of FY26, we will increase by 10% the number of families and individuals provided with information regarding CCFS programs and the importance of early language and literacy.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)

- We will partner with local agencies including: Piedmont Community Action Head Start/Head Start, Cherokee County Public Library, Regenesys, Cherokee County United United Lion's Club, Gaffney Visitors' Center, Cherokee County Chamber of Commerce, Spartanburg Community College, Limestone University, Access Health, KNOW(2), and other state and local agencies in planning and participating in presentations, community events and education/health fairs.

Objective One: CHILDREN ARE ACTIVELY SUPPORTED BY THEIR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES *CONTINUED*

STRATEGY 1.4

Local Portal and Mobilizing Communities

SMART GOAL(S)

1. Attend 10 meetings each year in the community as early childhood representatives including Cherokee Collaborative Council, KNOW(2) Neighborhood Ambassador's, Cherokee County United Lion's Club, and other community partners.
2. Each year, facilitate 4 meetings and coordinate activities/events for Talk to Me including 3 weekly Facebook posts.
3. Each year, facilitate a minimum of 3 meetings and host training for Cherokee County Child Care Directors' Association.
4. Conduct Board development training annually and update committee roles and responsibilities.
5. Work with partners each month to refer and enroll children in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, Talk to Me Cherokee, Triple P Positive Parenting Program, and partner services.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)

- We will collaborate with partners including Piedmont Community Head Start/Early Head Start, BabyNet, 4K regional representative, Cherokee County School District, child care directors, KNOW(2), Cherokee County United Lion's Club, pediatricians, Department of Social Services, Department of Health & Environmental Control, and other local agencies/ organizations to connect children to needed services.

Objective Two: CHILDREN ARRIVE AT SCHOOL READY TO REACH THEIR HIGHEST POTENTIAL

STRATEGY 2.1

Child Care Training & Professional Development

SMART GOAL(S)

1. Cherokee County First Steps will provide training for child care facility staff and directors totaling a minimum of 20 hours each year for FY24, FY25, and FY26 for a total of a minimum of 60 hours by the end of FY26.
2. Cherokee County First Steps will host a minimum of 3 Cherokee County Child Care Directors' Association meetings each year for FY24, FY25, and FY26 for a minimum total of 9 meetings by the end of FY26.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)

- Piedmont Community Action Head Start/Early Head Start, SC Child Care Resource & Referral, and local child care providers will collaborate with us to determine the core areas needed for instruction. The collaboration with these partners will ensure that quality training is provided with subject matter that is relevant. Further, the training will permit child care facility staff to maintain the licensing required by the Department of Social Services.

Objective Two: CHILDREN ARRIVE AT SCHOOL READY TO REACH THEIR HIGHEST POTENTIAL

STRATEGY 2.2

Countdown to Kindergarten

SMART GOAL(S)

1. Each year, reports will show that 85% of children will have received at least 5 of the home visits scheduled.
2. Each year, reports will show that 95% of children were placed into the Kindergarten classroom of their CTK teacher.
3. Each year, 90% of parents will report a better knowledge of the expectations for kindergarten and a commitment to working with the Kindergarten teacher to promote their child's learning. • Each year, 90% of parents will report a better knowledge of

COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)

- The primary partner for Countdown to Kindergarten is Cherokee County School District. Principals within the district will be the actual representatives with which CCFS and the Coordinator works. The teachers will be recommended by the schools. The school and teachers will suggest at-risk children for enrollment with the program.

Objective Three: CHILDREN ARE HEALTHY AND SAFE

STRATEGY 3.1

Triple P – Positive Parenting Program

SMART GOAL(S)

1. Cherokee County First Steps will increase enrollment in the program by 3% by the end of FY24, 3% by the end of FY25, and 3% in FY26 for a total of 9% by the end of FY26.
2. Each year, assessment reports will show that 30% of parents will decrease their depression, anxiety, and/or stress levels according to the DASS scale and 30% will increase their confidence in their self-efficacy according to the Parenting Tasks Checklist.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)

- Our primary partner for this program is the Department of Social Services. They will refer clients that are in need of parent training. Other partners that will support the program with referrals include: Piedmont Community Action Head Start/Early Head Start, BabyNet, pediatricians, churches, child care centers, and other community agencies. Talk to Me Cherokee has promoted the program to previous participants to provide a more inclusive family strengthening component.

Objective Three: CHILDREN ARE HEALTHY AND SAFE *CONTINUED*

STRATEGY 3.2

Outreach & Community Education

SMART GOAL(S)

1. In FY 24, Cherokee County First Steps will facilitate 4 community learning groups, conduct 2 quarterly educational/outreach presentations to local or statewide audiences, and participate quarterly in 2 education/health fair. By the end of FY26, we will increase these numbers to facilitate 6 community learning groups, conduct 3 quarterly educational/outreach presentations to local or statement audiences, and participate quarterly in 3 education/health fairs.
2. By the end of FY26, we will increase by 10% the number of families and individuals provided with information regarding CCFS programs and the importance of early language and literacy.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATOR(S)

- We will partner with local agencies including: Piedmont Community Action Head Start/Head Start, Cherokee County Public Library, Regenesys, Cherokee County United Lion's Club, Gaffney Visitors' Center, Cherokee County Chamber of Commerce, Spartanburg Community College, Limestone University, Access Health, Department of Health and Environmental Control, KNOW(2), and other state and local agencies in planning and participating in presentations, community events and education/health fairs.

Overarching Measure(s) of Success

INCREASE THE REACH OF FIRST STEPS SERVICES

By FY26, the percentage of children in need who are directly served by Cherokee County First Steps will increase from 100% to 103%.

In order to accomplish this measure, Cherokee County First Steps is dedicated to:

- increasing public awareness of the importance of early language and literacy and promoting parent-child interactions,
- providing quality training for child care facilities staff to allow them to maintain the licensing required for SC Department of Social Services,
- offering parent training to provide families with the tools needed to manage emotional challenges and difficult situations,
- expanding outreach efforts to increase participation in programs by targeting low-income and at-risk families at education and health fairs as well as partners' events.
- working with schools and child care facilities to promote the importance of a child's early development and of the options available to parents,
- conducting board development and staff training to empower our members/staff to more effectively support the needs of children,
- coordinating with the State Office and other partners on grant applications for Cherokee County programs

Acknowledgments

Cherokee County First Steps began the comprehensive planning process by gathering information from local community partners, parents, and child care directors to determine county needs and resources. After compiling the Needs and Resource Assessment and further discussions, we were able to determine the key strategies to implement for the next several years. The vision for the organization is to increase the reach of First Steps services. By increasing the number of families served through Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, Talk to Me Cherokee Initiative, Triple P Positive Parenting Program, Child Care Training & Professional Development, and at outreach events, we will achieve this measure of success.

On behalf of the staff of Cherokee County First Steps, we would like to express our gratitude to all board members, partners, clients, and volunteers for their assistance and participation.

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