



ANNUAL REPORT

2024-2025





FIRST STEPS IS HERE

Last year, because of Darlington County First Steps:



2,384 children

were directly served in Darlington County



2,489 parents & caregivers

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



4 educators

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

THE NEED PERSISTS IN DARLINGTON COUNTY

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

4,047

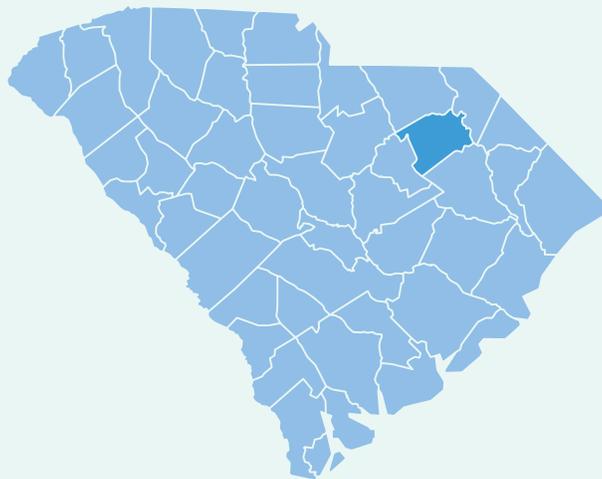
children birth to five

56%

of young children live in poverty or low-income households

71%

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

Our mission is to provide programs, services, and information to strengthen families and communities in Darlington County.



Darnell McPherson
Executive Director

Forward for Families is our mantra. We are inspired by the growth we see in families, yet we also recognize the challenge when needs outweigh resources. This reality has guided us to explore new ways of supporting parenting services, including connecting families with comprehensive community resources.

Our central focus remains preparing children for school and future success, always in partnership with their parents and caregivers. Meeting that goal means responding not only to educational needs but also to the basic needs that allow families to thrive. Thus, we have expanded our services to include community health navigation.

Looking ahead, being both forward and innovative will continue to propel the next generation into a strong, welcoming community. Parents must work alongside their children, children must be supported by the community, and we must remain steadfast advocates. With commitment, vision, and collaboration, we move forward always for families.



Howard Nettles
Board Chair

Dear Friends and Supporters,

As we reflect on the past year at Darlington County First Steps, we pause to ask meaningful questions. Have we fulfilled our vision of equipping families and engaging communities? Did we provide parents with the tools, knowledge, and support they needed to grow in confidence? Were we successful in offering strategies that made their parenting journey easier?

We also consider our broader impact. Has the community gained a deeper understanding of the importance of early learning and our mission to support it? Have more children received age-appropriate books and materials that build the foundation for school success? Did our partnerships strengthen to improve the quality of life for families in Darlington County?

These aren't just questions for reflection—they are measures of progress. Thanks to your commitment and generosity, we can proudly answer "yes." Together, we are creating lasting change.

PROGRAMS

PARENTING

Parents as Teachers

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

39

children served

12

group meetings
and events

508

home visits

Motheread/Fatheread

Offers adult literacy classes to parents of young children, with an emphasis on the importance of reading regularly as a family.

92

children served

46

families served

20

parent
workshops

Family Café

Parent discussion groups that promote social connections with other parents, support in times of need, learning about parenting and child development, and emotional awareness.

2

children served

4

group meetings
and events

HEALTH

Reach Out and Read

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

1,228

children served

XX

books distributed

Health Services

First Steps coordinates with partners to support the health and well-being of families with young children.

206

children served

280

materials
distributed

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.

57

children served

3

schools served

342

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.

23

children served

3

schools served

138

home/school
visits

Board of Directors

Lucretia Bellamy
Rudell Dubose
Linda George
Howard Nettles
Lilkenya Jenkins
Thomas Sawyer
Barbara Carraway

FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

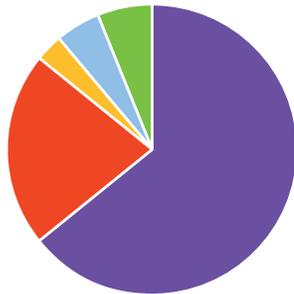


\$1 = \$1.30

Darlington County First Steps leveraged \$153,334.23 from sources outside of state government, providing a match of \$0.30 for every state dollar invested.

EXPENDITURES

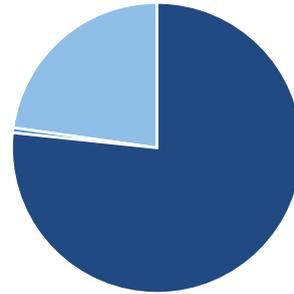
Total: \$653,105.44



- Parenting - \$420,868.63
- Health - \$140,738.62
- School Transition - \$20,259.78
- Administrative - \$31,832.77
- Core Functions - \$39,405.64

FUNDING SOURCES

Total: \$663,522.70



- State Funding - \$510,188.47
- Federal Funding - \$2,799.64
- Private Funding - \$150,534.59

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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Parents as Teachers was a blessing for my daughter, Aubrey, & me. We've grown together, not just in what we've learned but in how we communicate. Aubrey's love of reading was sparked. Ms. Britney's support helped us know we were not alone.

PAT Parent Participant



Donor List

Diapers, clothing, bedtime soap kit | Americorps Service Member, Janice Holmes | Blakney Family | Britney Dargan | Carolina Kid's Closet | Chrystal Taylor | Darlington County Farm Bureau Women's Leadership | Darlington Lee Adult Education | Darlington County School District | Darlington County Sheriff's Department | Darnell Byrd McPherson | Darris Johnson | Elijha Enoch | Farmer's Home Furniture | Frances Hicks | Genesis Health Care | Goodwill Senior Employment | Green Leaf | Hartsville IGA | Home Depot of Florence | Human Health Care | Jacqueline Bowman | Linda Bright-Edwards | Mayo High School's Beta Club | New Morning Foundation | New Vision Community Development Corporation | Patricia Sullivan-Steward | Public Health of the Pee Dee | SNO Services | The Byerly Foundation | Tiffany & DeQuincey Walker | United Way of Hartsville | Usborne Books | Wendy's Hartsville Restaurant | Whitney Davis

CONTACT US

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