

Annual Report

2019-2020



THE NEED

IN LEE COUNTY:

903

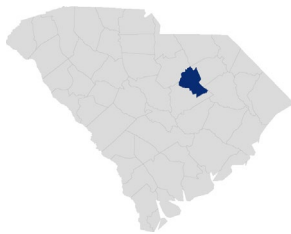
children under age 5

185%

of young children live in poverty
or low-income households

60%

of kindergartners are considered "not
ready" for school



THREE MOST COMMON RISK FACTORS:

1. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP - formerly Food Stamps) or Free School Lunches eligibility.
2. Single parent household and has need of other services.
3. TANF Eligibility (50% of Federal Poverty or below)

OUR MISSION

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

OUR APPROACH



High quality programs and services
for children and families



Intensive training, resources and
support for childcare providers



Strategic partnerships and
community education

OUR IMPACT

582

number of children and adults served by
Lee County First Steps in 2019-2020

JOIN US

We rely on a community of partners, donors, and volunteers – **people like you** – who believe in a brighter future for children and families in our community.

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Elder Alexis D. Pipkins, Sr., Ed.S.

Executive Director
Lee County First Steps

Fiscal Year 2020 was a highly successful and impactful year for Lee County First Steps (LCFS) even though we experienced unprecedented and new experiences as a result of COVID-19. LCFS as with other agencies, locally, state-wide, and nationally had to quickly adapt, adjust, and realign our operational delivery to children, families, and our local community to ensure that our agency would continue to be effective and relevant in our service area during this worldwide pandemic. Virtual Reality was LCFS' response to the pandemic for the delivery of all programs and services as we limited our office access, and diminished home visits and travel of our staff to only pandemic relief and assistance by providing high quality services via the virtual platform- ZOOM, Facebook Messenger, YouTube, Microsoft Messenger Conference Calls, Google Duo. In addition, the partnership has managed to sustain effective collaborations and partnerships to ensure that children, parents, and families received high quality, research-based programs and quality services. Although, LCFS receives limited funding from SC First Steps, the partnership board has innovatively and aggressively partnered with state, and national agencies to expand the scope and quality of funding and staff: home visiting programs, child care scholarships and center staff training and professional development to both early care professionals and parents, Kindergarten Readiness, Strengthening Families Program (6-11), and early literacy with the Vroom Curriculum. LCFS reinstated and launched a new local website:

<https://leefirststeps.wixsite.com/lcfs>

Recognizing the importance of ensuring that our young children would be counted in the 2020 Census, LCFS collaborated with the Lee County Interagency Council to implement the Complete Count Committee and received several Get Out the Census Grants, which LCFS served as the fiscal agent. For such unprecedented times, and new challenges, LCFS has steady the course of the uncharted worldwide pandemic with hope and perseverance.

GETTING CHILDREN READY FOR SCHOOL

All children are ready to benefit from a quality kindergarten experience when they are five years old by September 1 of that school year. But kindergarten readiness—the critical stage at which children are prepared for learning and success—is more than a matter of age. For a strong start in school, children need positive relationships and supportive learning environments beginning at birth. At First Steps, we partner with families, caregivers, and communities to ensure that all children are prepared for success.

South Carolina's Profile of the Ready Kindergartner

Developed by SC First Steps and the SC Department of Education, the state's description of school readiness includes 60 developmental milestones across 5 categories:



**Approaches to learning
& inquiry**



Emotional & social development



**Physical development,
self-help & motor skills**



Mathematical thinking



Language & literacy development

In support of the Profile of the Ready Kindergartner, our approach is focused on advancing Lee County toward the following strategic goals:

- By 2021, increase diversity (age, race/ethnicity, gender, and geographic location) of the board to have 33% of the current county population reflected on the local partnership board.
- Increase community outreach through more partnerships to include the annual meeting, state of the young child, health and community fair, more partnerships, Blue Print for Lee County Health, Child's Trust, Prevention Child Abuse and Neglect Awareness Month, and Kindergarten Ambassador Program.
- By 2021, increase board's funding goal by 100%.
- Increase the awareness and commitment of state local and state official on the needs of Lee County First Steps.
- Increase services to the rural areas outside of the city limits of Bishopville to include the Tri County, Pee Dee and Wateree regions.
- By 2021, increase the implementation of county programs which are promising practices and/or research-based.

OUR GOALS



PIVOTING FOR COVID-19

When the coronavirus pandemic forced South Carolina to shut down in March 2020, Lee County First Steps quickly pivoted to provide much-needed support to young children, their families and child care providers.

Our work has never been more critical. While children are at low risk for the serious health effects of the virus, the crisis is having a profound impact on their wellbeing and development. For children of color and low-income communities, these impacts are expected to be even more damaging. That is why Lee County First Steps is enhancing our efforts to provide parents and caregivers with the services and resources they need to weather this storm.

IMPACT ON LEE COUNTY

HEALTH

Through June 30, Lee County had a total of **304** confirmed COVID-19 cases and **24** COVID-19 deaths.

JOB LOSS

145.2%

increase in unemployment, 2019-2020

CHILD CARE

42%

children under 5 in Lee County lived in a child care desert* before COVID-19

71.2%

children under 5 in Lee County lived in a child care desert as of May 28, 2020



"Our families were really appreciative"
Felecia Evans, LCFS ESSS Early Childhood Coordinator



*The Center for American Progress defines a child care desert as a ZIP code with at least 30 children under the age of 5 and either no child care centers or so few centers that there are more than three times as many children under age 5 as there are spaces in centers.



COUNTDOWN TO KINDERGARTEN



an evidence-informed program

Developed by South Carolina First Steps – and identified as a promising state practice by the National Governor’s Association in 2005 – Countdown to Kindergarten (CTK) is a home visitation program pairing the families of rising kindergartners with their future teachers during the summer before school entry. Teachers complete six visits with each family, establishing strong connections during the summer that facilitate classroom learning throughout the year.

CTK BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

3

kindergarten teachers
trained as home visitors

44

children served

264

total home and school
visits



COUNTDOWN to
KINDERGARTEN

SOUTH CAROLINA



CHILD CARE TRAINING



an evidence-based program

High-quality child care hinges on high-quality professional development that meets the needs of the local child care workforce. Our training programs are certified through SC Endeavors and include topics in the areas of nutrition, health and safety, curriculum, child guidance, professional development and program administration. Our 2019-2020 trainings included:

Training Topics Include:

Nutrition
Growth and Development
Guidance
Curriculum
Professional Development
Program Administration

TRAINING BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

371

total training attendance

141

child care teachers and
directors served

16

number of training
sessions offered



We like the collaboration with people coming from both the child care centers and family homes being able to share and learn from each other.



Jerlene Atkinson, Family Child Care Provider



Early Steps to School Success



an evidence-based program

Early Steps to School Success (ESSS) is a language and pre-literacy development program operated by Save the Children, a leading international nonprofit helping children in need. ESSS is the birth-to-five component of a continuum of Save the Children programs which focus on literacy and language development, physical fitness and nutrition programs for children birth to age 12. ESSS provides early childhood education services to pregnant women and children birth to five years of age, education services to their parents, and ongoing staff training to the community early childhood educators involved with the program.

In Lee County, ESSS is implemented in collaboration with Lee County School District. The West Lee Elementary position was vacant from 9/25/2019 thru 3/2/2020.

Lee County First Steps EI&R program:

- Provides early detection of developmental delays and health issues;
- Promotes services and activities that promote child development; and
- Increases children's school readiness and school success.

BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

65

families served

1422

total home visits



Save the Children



PARENTS AS TEACHERS



an evidence-based program

Parents as Teachers (PAT) is a home visiting program designed to build strong communities, thriving families and children who are healthy, safe and ready to succeed. PAT services include:



Personal visits from a parent educator at least twice monthly



Monthly group connections with other PAT families



Screenings and assessments to identify developmental concerns



Connections to outside resources that families may need to succeed

PAT GOES VIRTUAL

Due to COVID-19, Parents as Teachers (PAT) National provided guidance for affiliates to deliver virtual services via interactive video conferencing and phone calls. South Carolina PAT affiliates rose to the occasion by engaging families in creative and meaningful ways while continuing to meet the Essential Requirements of implementing a quality PAT program during the pandemic.

PAT IN LEE COUNTY IS A COLLABORATION WITH KERSHAW COUNTY FIRST STEPS 2019-2020

10

families served

220

total home visits



Parents as Teachers®



CHILD CARE SCHOLARSHIPS



an evidence-based program

For many families in Lee County, the cost of quality child care is out of reach. Our scholarship program makes payments to child care providers to care for children from low-income families so their parents can return to school or work.

Lee County First Steps offers scholarships to families enrolled in our ESSS and high quality child care programs, as well as income-eligible children whose parent attends school or works at least 20 hours per week.

SCHOLARSHIPS BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

20

number of children
served

3

number of providers
served

40

number of
developmental
screenings provided

95% of the money paid to child care providers goes back into our local economy to benefit the citizens of Lee County.

4K

FOUR-YEAR-OLD KINDERGARTEN



an evidence-based program

South Carolina First Steps provides eligible children with free enrollment in full-day four-year-old kindergarten. In coordination with First Steps local partnerships and more than 230 private, community and faith-based preschool providers, First Steps 4K expands access to quality early education across the state.



ELIGIBILITY

To qualify for enrollment, a child must be:



4 years old on or before September 1



Eligible for Medicaid, SNAP or TANF, experiencing homelessness or transiency, or in foster care

FIRST STEPS 4K IN LEE COUNTY 2019-2020

21

children enrolled

1

First Steps 4K providers

PIVOTING FOR COVID-19

When schools closed due to COVID-19, First Steps 4K classroom converted to distance-learning, with teachers creatively supporting their young learners through video chat, take-home materials, and hands-on projects that caregivers could facilitate at home.





VROOM



an evidence-based program

Children's first five years are when they develop the foundation for all future learning. Every time we connect with a child, it's not just their eyes that light up – it's their brain, too. During these moments, half a million neurons fire at once, taking in all the things which adults say and do. Save the Children has established a partnership with Vroom, an initiative of the Bezos Family Foundation, to help turn shared moments into brain building ones. Regardless if it is during mealtime, bath time, or anytime in between, there are many opportunities for parents to nurture a child's growing mind.

Vroom has five principles – look, chat, follow, stretch, take turns – that Vroom teaches parents helps them understand the science behind their child's learning.

vRoom BY THE NUMBERS **2019-2020**

37

families served



Strengthening Families Program- SFP (6-11)



The Strengthening Families Program (SFP) 6-11 is an evidence-based family skills training program designed to strengthen the skills of both parents and their children so that they will be better equipped to deal with life's challenging situations. The SFP provides 14 weekly sessions of family educational training for both parents and their children age 6–11 in addition to meals, prizes and program incentives.

Here is what our SFP Program provides:

- 14 weekly educational skills training sessions for both parents and their children age 6 – 11.
- Child care services for non-participating children.
- A delicious family meal during each training session.
- Transportation provided for families, if needed.
- Prizes and program incentives i.e., gift cards, gas cards, household items, etc.
- Incentive for families who successfully complete and graduate from the program by attending 12 or more training sessions.
- Incentive for families for perfect attendance who attend all 14 sessions with Perfect attendance.
- 83 families served
- 125 Group Meetings
- Because of COVID-19 in March 2020 the program suspended face to face and implemented ZOOM Sessions twice per week

SFP (6-11)BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

53

families served



49

Children 0-5
Served



PUBLIC AWARENESS



Addressing the needs of young children is a shared endeavor. In addition to providing services to families and support for child care providers, Lee County First Steps mobilizes partners and community members to ensure all children in Lee County begin school ready to succeed. We serve as a:

2019-2020

8510

materials
distributed

36

events held

3974

total events
attendance





COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Addressing the needs of young children is a shared endeavor. In addition to providing services to families and support for child care providers, Lee County First Steps mobilizes partners and community members to ensure all children in Lee County begin school ready to succeed. We serve as a:

LOCAL PORTAL

connecting preschool children and
their families to services

CONVENER

of community stakeholders to develop an effective
and comprehensive early childhood system

CHAMPION

of the importance of school
readiness to our children's future

OUR PARTNERSHIPS BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

8360

Books Distributed

3974

Children impacted by
Evidenced-Based
Programs





OUR SUPPORTERS

Through partnerships and collaborations, as well as financial support from grants and contributions, Lee County First Steps leverages state dollars to enhance and expand services to children and families.

FUNDING SUPPORT

State of South Carolina: \$195,405.43
(through South Carolina First Steps)

Children's Trust of South Carolina: \$295,618.22

Save The Children (ESSS): \$228,820.67

South Carolina Office of Rural Health \$5,160.92

Department of Social Services: \$21,000.00

Census 2020 Grants: \$5,160.92

JOIN US

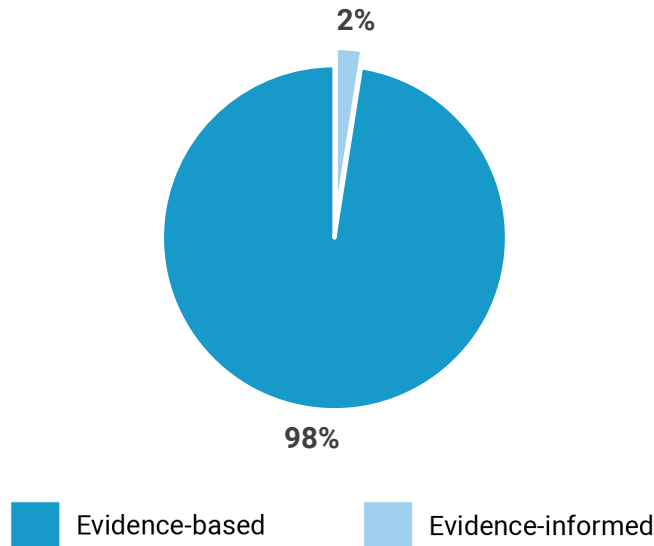
For more information on partnership opportunities, visit our website at
<https://leefirststeps.wixsite.com/lcfs>



FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

OUR INVESTMENT IN QUALITY

Expenditures of State Funds by Program Type



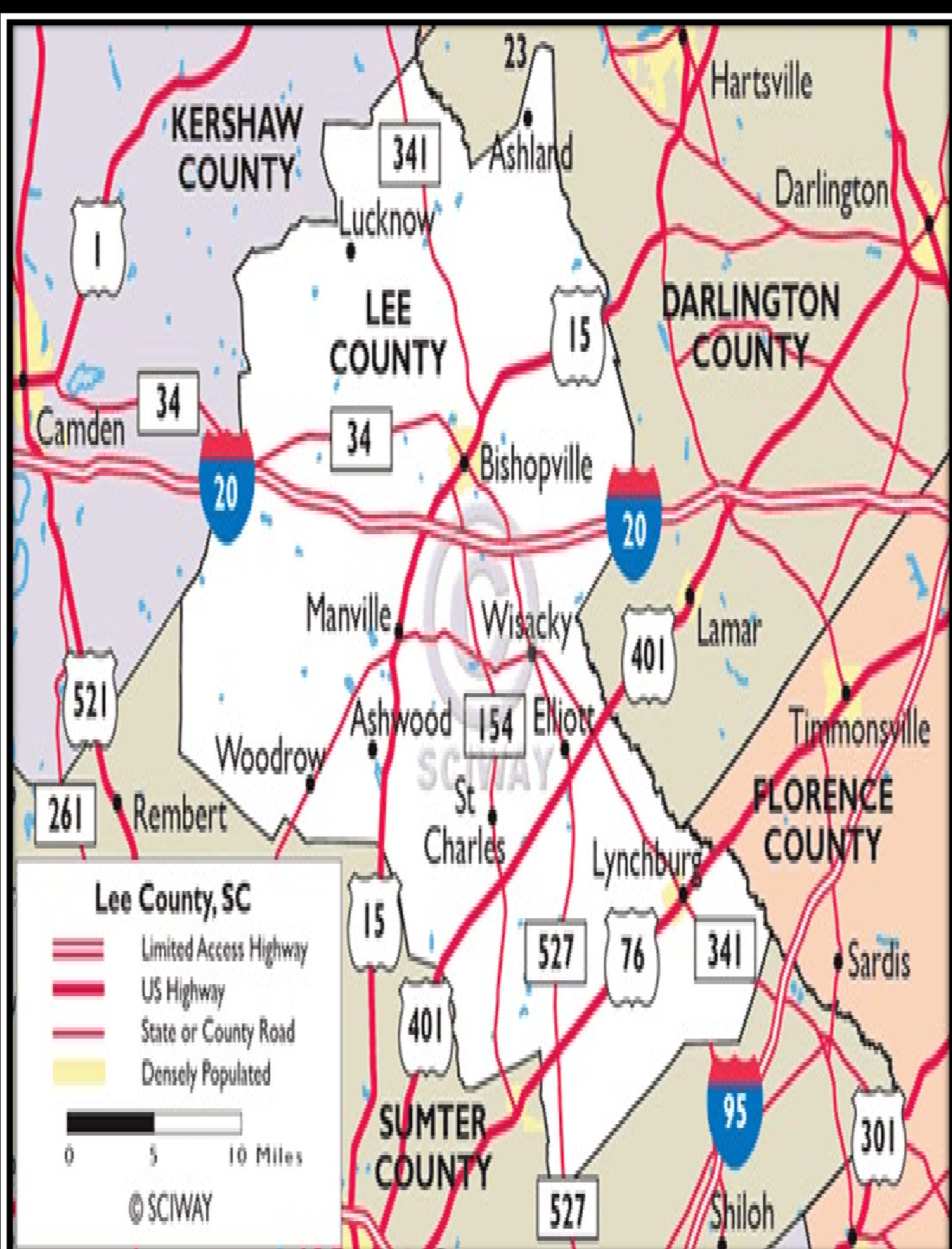
ESTIMATION OF COST SAVINGS

Since inception, Lee County First Steps has leveraged **\$4,539,953** from sources outside of state government.

That's **\$0.94** for every state dollar.

SUMMARY OF EXPENDITURES BY STRATEGY

	State Funding	Federal Funding	Private Funding	In-Kind Contributions	Total
Early Steps to School Success	\$70,940.88	\$0	\$146,083.51	\$82,737.16	\$299,761.55
Parent Training	\$4,120.41	\$0	\$5,160.92	\$9,281.33	\$18,562.66
Child Care Training	\$11,324.31	\$0	\$1,706.88	\$0	\$13,031.19
Raising A Reader	\$3,620.00	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$3,620.00
Countdown TO Kindergarten	\$5,378.10	\$1,047.16	\$412.70	\$0	\$6,837.96
Strengthening Families Program (6-11)	\$6,357.51	\$0	\$296,618.22	\$0	\$302,975.73
Scholarship	\$65,549.21	\$0	\$0	\$21,000.00	\$86,549.21
Core Functions	\$16,839.73	\$0	\$2,030.52	\$0	\$18,870.25
Administrative Support	\$11,275.28	\$0	\$3,169.78	\$0	\$14,445.06
Total Expenses	\$189,840.98	\$1,047.16	\$456,321.79	\$113,018.49	\$749,947.09





LEADERSHIP

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Board Member	Place of Employment	Board Category
Andrew Moses, Chair	Lee County School District	Legislative Appointee
Belinda Butler	Select Health	Business Community
Bertha Scott	Retired, Lee County School District	Family Ed. Training & Support Provider
Betty D. Addison	Retired, Lee County School District	Non-profit Organization
Crystal Buffkin	H&R Block	Parent of Preschool Children
Danielle Boyd, Secretary	Wateree Head Start – Bishopville Site	Head Start
David “Keel” Addison	Addison Barber Shop	Parent of Preschool Children
Deanna Rollins	Lee County Library	County Library
Diana C. Williams, Assist. Secretary	Retired, Lee County School District	Early Childhood Education
Dr. Harold Conyers	New Zion AME Church	Faith Community
Jacqueline Josey	Lee County Council	Lee County Council
Jarrell Rogers	Lee County DSS	Lee County DSS
Jeanette Isaac	Lee County School District	Preschool through Primary Education
Jerlene Atkinson	Kiddie Land Daycare Center	Early Childhood Education
Julia Young	Colonial Neurology	HealthCare Provide
Katetcia Simmons	Parent of Preschool	Lee County School District
LaToya Hopkins	Wateree Head Start	Parent of Preschool Children
Lillie M. Patterson	Bishopville Lee Child Development Center	Childcare & Early Childhood Dev. Ed. Provider
M. DeLoris LeGrant	Retired, Sumter County School District	Early Childhood Education
Mary Lee Arthur	Lee County School District	Lee County School District
Maverick Wilson, Treasurer	Wateree Correctional Inst./ Retired	Legislative Appointee
Mr. Grady Brown	Mayor of City of Bishopville/ Barber	Philanthropic Community
Patricia Toney	Retired, Lee County School District	Faith Community
Regina Nesmith-Dimery	DHEC	DHEC
Rev. Adeira Black	Mt. Herman Missionary Baptist Church	Faith Community
Sandra Holmes	Lee County School District	Health Care Provider
Sandy Jenkins	Wateree Regional Trans. Authority	Transportation
Sheila Moses, Vice-Chair	Fresenius	Health Care Provider
Victoria McCray	Bishopville Lee Child Dev. Center	Legislative Appointee



LEADERSHIP

STAFF

Full-Time Staff:

Elder Alexis D. Pipkins, Sr., Ed.S., Executive Director

Mrs. Gloria M. Burris, Early Childhood Coordinator, ESSS

Ms. Felicia Evans, Early Childhood Coordinator, ESSS

Ms. Anderia Wilson, Early Childhood Coordinator, ESSS

Program Consultants:

Ms. Danielle Boyd, Vroom Coordinator, ESSS

Mrs. Mamie C. Bostic, MBA, Senior Program Manager SFP (6-11)

Mrs. Bessie Sanders-Gordon, MA, Program Manager, SFP (6-11)

Ms. Diana C. Williams, Site Coordinator, SFP (6-11) Lee County

Ms. M. DeLoris LeGrant, Site Coordinator, SFP (6-11) Sumter County

Ms. Debra Judge, Site Coordinator, SFP (6-11) Florence County

Mrs. Sharon Hunter-Graham, Site Coordinator, SFP (6-11) Sumter County

Ms. Rudine McLeod, Data and Program Support

Mrs. Rosa Bowman, Fiscal Support

CONTACT US

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<https://leefirststeps.wixsite.com/lcfs>

