

# Annual Report

## 2019-2020



## THE NEED

IN PICKENS COUNTY:

**6,220**

children under age 5

**40.9%**

of young children live in poverty or low-income households

**65%**

of kindergartners are considered "not ready" for school



### THREE MOST COMMON RISK FACTORS:

1. Low maternal education (less than high school graduation)
2. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP-formerly food stamps) or Free School Lunches eligibility
3. TANF Eligibility (50% of Federal Poverty or below)

## OUR MISSION

We will continue to serve as a convener of early childhood champions to coordinate services to measurably improve the early childhood development of all children in Pickens County.

## 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

**2145**

number of children and adults served by Pickens 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

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**Amity Buckner, Executive Director**  
Pickens County First Steps

Pickens County First Steps continues to be an organization rooted in collaboration and partnership. With Pickens County being a very relational county, awareness of this unique culture informs everything that we do. We have never been more grateful for the generous and steadfast support of our collaborating partners than in the events of this year. The Covid-19 crisis has only highlighted our county's economic and opportunity disparities. Existing strong relationships with community partners has allowed us to link arms and work toward solutions for young children and families.

We are grateful for our board's forward-thinking commitment to the young children in Pickens County, and for an efficient and experienced staff that has enhanced the services, communication, and community involvement of Pickens County First Steps.

Most importantly, we are grateful for the children and families who allow us to step into their lives and offer our support. Each family has a unique story and we want to always seek to honor the experiences of others in our language, attitudes, actions, and services. Our hope is that our efforts always reflect the real and present needs of Pickens County families.

Amity Buckner

# 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**



## OUR GOALS

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

- **Goal 1:** Integrate the Palmetto Basics messaging into all programs.
- **Goal 2:** Increase access to high quality, stable childcare environments.
- **Goal 3:** Increase knowledge and parenting skills necessary to promote school readiness.
- **Goal 4:** Improve literacy outcomes for children 0-5.

# PIVOTING FOR COVID-19

When the coronavirus pandemic forced South Carolina to shut down in March 2020, Pickens County First Steps quickly pivoted to provide much-needed support to young children, their families and childcare 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 well being and development. For children of color and low-income communities, these impacts are expected to be even more damaging. That is why Pickens 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 PICKENS COUNTY

### HEALTH

Through June 30, Pickens County had a total of **849** confirmed COVID-19 cases and **12** COVID-19 deaths.

### JOB LOSS

**4.4%**

increase in unemployment, 2019-2020

### CHILD CARE

**34.6%**

children under 5 in Pickens County lived in a childcare desert\* before COVID-19

**74.1%**

children under 5 in Pickens County lived in a childcare desert as of May 28, 2020

*(Note: These numbers were taken from the Scchildcare.org and are only as accurate as the data reported.)*



With the loss of community events and in-person opportunities to connect with families, we have prioritized our social media outlets and DoBasics texting service to communicate timely and relevant resources for families.

Resources on Maximizing Love & Managing Stress (Palmetto Basic #1), as well as connecting families to vital social services, have been our focus during the Covid-19 crisis.

\*The Center for American Progress defines a childcare 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.



# EARLY IDENTIFICATION & REFERRAL



*an evidence-based program*

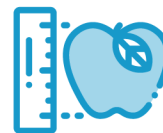
First Steps' Early Identification and Referral (EI&R) programs serve families with young children with suspected delays in development, acting as a local portal to connect families to community-based services they may need or desire to ensure the school readiness of their children. EI&R services include:



Screenings for children ages 0-5 with suspected delays in development



Referrals, based on screening results, to appropriate resources and support services



Patient information including strategies to monitor growth and development

## EI&R BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

4

children served

4

referrals to BabyNet or other local services



Early detection of delay is essential to the growing brains of our county's youngest learners. Early intervention services can change the trajectory of a child's developmental path and improve outcomes for children, families and communities.



# 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 PICKENS COUNTY 2019-2020

**44**

families served

**723**

total home visits



Parents as Teachers®



# 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

1

kindergarten teachers  
trained as home visitors

6

children served

30

total home and school  
visits



Thanks to our state's Preschool Development Grant, we were able to offer Countdown to Kindergarten to six rising kindergartners from West End Elementary.

Pictured here is Ruthie Chapman, our home visitor, reading *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* and doing school readiness activities with one of our children. Countdown emphasizes the importance of daily routines, such as, daily reading, counting, pointing and exploring.







# CHILD CARE SCHOLARSHIPS



*an evidence-based program*

Economic disparity is great in our county. In many homes this is due to the lack of resources to pay for childcare. Recent research tells us that this economic inequality is producing a generation of children who lack the exposure to meaningful early experiences necessary to later pursue the "American Dream."

Child Care Scholarships provide opportunities for vulnerable families to look for employment and/or seek education that will grant them the ability to provide better resources for their children, thus leading to self-sufficiency. Child Care Scholarships give participating children meaningful early experiences in a quality setting.

Our scholarships serve families with children that are most at risk for school failure. These at-risk families will also possess the desire to become financially stable but lack the resources to maintain employment and/or school attendance because of the financial barrier to quality childcare. Families served must be denied ABC vouchers and provide verification of employment or school attendance.

## SCHOLARSHIPS BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

15

number of children served

4

number of providers served

23

number of developmental screenings provided

**100% the money paid to childcare providers goes back into our local economy to benefit the citizens of Pickens County.**

Childcare Scholarships are made possible by grant funds from



United Way of Pickens County



Dabo's ALL IN TEAM FOUNDATION



# BOOK FLOOD



*an evidence-informed program*

According to the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, the peak period for brain development related to language is around nine months of age. One of the easiest and most effective ways to build this capacity in young children's brains is to read to them.

Book Flood is a literacy model designed to enhance book exposure and increase shared reading time at home. It also develops, enhances, and increases literacy awareness skills in a home / school collaboration while fostering a love of reading. It is implemented in the public 4K classrooms in the School District of Pickens County as well as private childcare centers.

Age-appropriate books are distributed by rotation among 4K teachers/providers in the county. Students take home a different book each school night to read with a family member.

## BOOK FLOOD BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

**818**

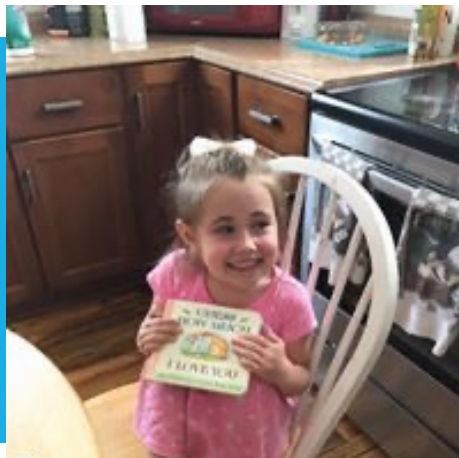
children served

**49**

4K programs served

**61,487**

books read





## RAISING A READER



*an evidence-based program*

Raising A Reader is a nationally recognized early literacy program designed to increase literacy and family engagement. The program includes teacher training and two parent education sessions that teach shared reading techniques.

Children 2-4 years old in participating childcare scholarship centers receive a take-home bag with 4 age-appropriate books each week. The take-home bags are rotated among participating children.

### RAISING A READER BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

**200**

children served

**9**

providers served



Over the course of the year, our friends read over 48,387 books. That equates to an average over 7,637 hours of reading!



## RAZOR READERS



*an evidence-informed program*

Taking place in local barber shops, Razor Readers is a community-wide literacy program for boys 0-10 years old. We partner with United Way of Pickens County and the Call Me Mister program. The “Misters” offer on-site support to participating barbershops on Friday afternoons or Saturday mornings. Boys read books and earn a free haircut upon completion of their “punch card.”

Relationships are a powerful vehicle for providing resources and programs to the children and communities that need them most. Razor Readers promotes literacy in a way that’s fun, in a setting that’s familiar, and with young men who are educational role models.

### RAZOR READERS BY THE NUMBERS 2019-2020

104

Children served

3

Barbershops served



“I learned that my impact as an educator is bigger than I thought it was! Not only did I affect the children that I read with, but also adults in the Barber Shop as well! It has been great to learn and grow from the whole Razor Readers experience!”

-MiSTER A. Richard





## PUBLIC AWARENESS



an evidence-informed program

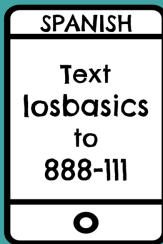
The Palmetto Basics are five fun, simple, powerful way to help all children become the happiest and most successful they can be. The Palmetto Basics Campaign is working to make sure that every parent and caregiver knows what they can do to make the most of every opportunity to give the youngest learners they love a great start in life!

### The Five Basics are:

1. Maximize Love, Manage Stress
2. Talk, Sing, Point
3. Count, Group and Compare
4. Explore through Movement and Play
5. Read and Discuss Stories

### DO YOU HAVE YOUNG CHILDREN?

Sign up for weekly parenting tips delivered straight to your phone. Available in English & Spanish.



The Basics: 5 fun, simple, powerful ways that every family can give every child a great start in life!

Learn more at [www.palmettobasics.org](http://www.palmettobasics.org).

Reply STOP to cancel, HELP for help. Message & data rates may apply.



We now have over 450 subscribers to our DoBasics text program. Parents and caregivers can sign up to receive free weekly parenting tips via text. Each text focuses on that month's Palmetto Basic theme.

When the Covid-19 crisis hit, we began using this service to ask families what their needs were and direct them to relevant resources and services. We are also using one text a month to highlight specific social services and resources, such as WIC.

### PALMETTO BASICS BY THE NUMBERS 2018-2019

# 1536

materials distributed

# 13

events held



# 253

total event attendance

# 456

DoBasics subscribers



## COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Pickens County First Steps mobilizes partners and community members to ensure the youngest learners in our county begin school on track and ready to learn. Our **“What About the Babies?”** (WATB) work this year has focused on strategies to ensure that babies in our county can be born healthy and reach critical milestones by age 3. This journey includes learning about neuroscience, relationships, Adverse Child Experiences (ACEs), and resilience, discussing how we can work together to refer and utilize the services available in our county.

### 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

4

events

82

community stakeholders in attendance

600

people saw the film, *Resilience*



“ I admire your [Amity’s] tenacity. You never give up all together for the good of children. ”

L. SOENEN, PRISMA HEALTH

(pictured left) Community partners at one of our WATB meetings playing the brain architecture game.



## OUR SUPPORTERS

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



**Dabo's All In Foundation**  
\$5,000

**United Way of Pickens County**  
\$37,900

## IN-KIND SUPPORT

School District of Pickens County

## JOIN US

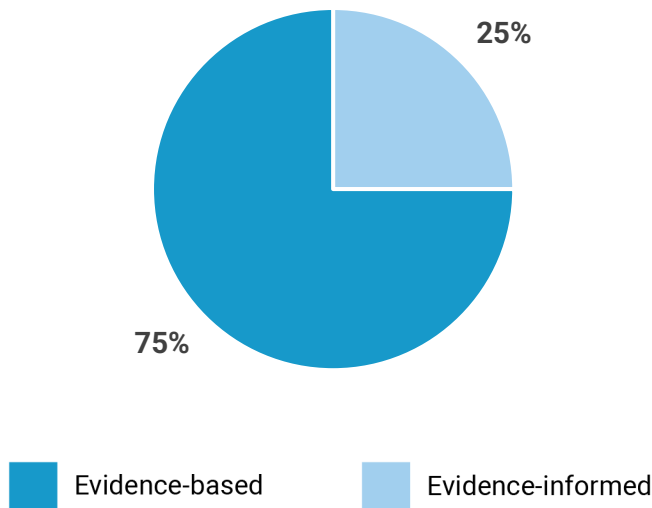
For more information on partnership opportunities, email us at [pickensinfo@gmail.com](mailto:pickensinfo@gmail.com).



# FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

## OUR INVESTMENT IN QUALITY

Expenditures of State Funds by Program Type



## ESTIMATION OF COST SAVINGS

Since inception, ABC County First Steps has leveraged **\$0,000,000** from sources outside of state government.

That's **\$0.00** for every state dollar.

## SUMMARY OF EXPENDITURES BY STRATEGY

	State Funding	Federal Funding	Private Funding	In-Kind Contributions	Total
Parents as Teachers	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
Child Care Quality Enhancement	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
Child Care Training	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
Nurse Family Partnership	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
Half Day 4K	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
Early Head Start	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
Partnerships & Community Education	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
Administrative Support	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>\$</b>





## LEADERSHIP

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### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Erika Hays	Katrice Seawright
George Hicks	Cecilia Vazquez, Secretary
Patti Hunnicutt, Chair	Erika Walters
Melanie Morgan	Heath Ward, Vice Chair
Faye Nichols	Carol Wiley
John Schafer	
Judy Melton	

### STAFF

Amity Buckner, Executive Director  
Tyla Hill, Programs Director  
Marian Vischer, Communications Director

## CONTACT US

PO Box 1113 Central SC 29630 | 864-654-3000 | [www.PickensCountyFirstSteps.org](http://www.PickensCountyFirstSteps.org)

