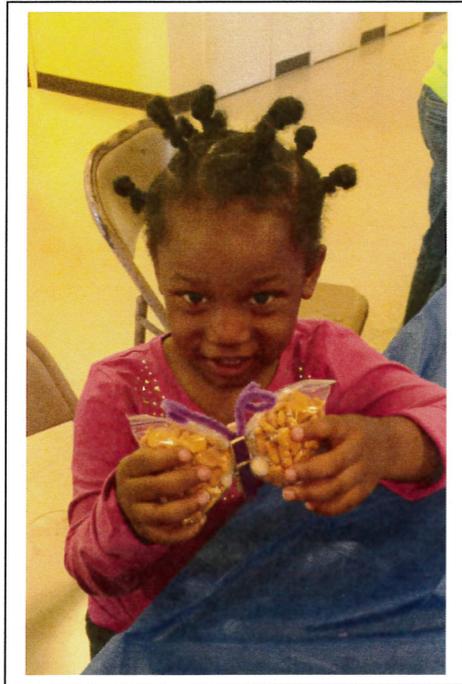




Getting children ready for school.



Early Steps to School Success

Imagination Library

Countdown to Kindergarten

Child Care Training

Annual Report

2014-15



OUR VISION:

All children enter school with the tools necessary to succeed

First Steps WORKS for the children of Union County.

Union County First Steps Works for the Children, Parents and Taxpayers of Union, South Carolina

Catherine M. Childers, Executive Director

What does it mean when something “works”? I propose that when something is working, it means that the intended result is being realized. In our case, it means that children and families are receiving services and support that help prepare children to enter school ready to be successful. Since its inception, First Steps has been “working” towards this goal, and what we have been doing “works.” I am excited to share with you how it has been working in our community.

Union County First Steps increases the quality of services for children 0-5 and their families

The Early Steps to School Success home visitation program continues to provide a valuable resource to parents of young children in our community. This past year alone, the program served 54 children and their families through home visits and served an additional 116 children with a book bag exchange program. Child care workers were able to completed training courses to help Union’s youngest citizens be better prepared for school. Countdown to Kindergarten provided quality early learning experiences for 15 children and their families this year. As we continue our partnership with United Way of the Piedmont, many children in our community received age appropriate books delivered to their homes again this year through Imagination Library.

Union County First Steps leverages resources for children and families through public-private partnerships

Our programs and resources are working in our community because of the support of the community and the many partners that we have. Partnerships like the one we have with the United Way of the Piedmont and the many groups that serve children and families in our community help us all “work” towards meeting our goals. Through our partnerships and with the support of the community, we were able to add additional funding and resources to the *state funds*. *What we have learned over the years is that* early childhood development programs and services “work” when it comes to having our children ready to be successful in school. What we’ve also learned is it certainly takes many partners and supporters to make it “work.”

Board Chair
 Kelli Johnston

Executive Director
 Catherine M. Childers

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 Union, SC 29379

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 cmchilders@union.k12.sc.us

Who We Serve

First Steps serves South Carolina’s young children and their families, with the goal of ensuring each is prepared for school success.

Number of Union County children under 5:
1,500

Number of Union County children living in poverty:
1,758

Babies born each year in Union County to a mother less than a high school diploma:
1 in 4

Our Programs

- Early Steps to School Success
- Imagination Library
- Countdown to Kindergarten
- Child Care Training

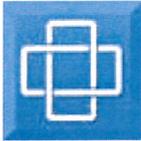
MISSION:
 CONNECTING FAMILIES TO THE RESOURCES THEY NEED FOR THEIR CHILDREN TO BE SAFE, HEALTHY AND READY FOR SCHOOL.



What We Do

Each of the six color blocks of the First Steps logo represents a core area of service, outlining our comprehensive strategy to prepare children for long-term school success.

With **measurable outcomes across each of its six school readiness strategy areas**, First Steps is getting results.



Healthy Start

We begin with a focus on providing a healthy start to life. This includes prenatal and post-partum services for both mother and baby. In 2007, First Steps collaborated with key philanthropic and agency partners to bring Nurse-Family Partnership to SC having a significant impact on reducing premature births and Medicaid costs.



Quality Childcare

Quality childcare starts with quality childcare providers. Our quality enhancement and training strategies lead to improved teacher-student interaction, which research shows has a significant impact on a child's development and success in school.



Family Strengthening

Our home visitation strategies, such as Parents as Teachers, Parent-Child Home and Early Steps to School Success, are helping parents understand their responsibilities to care for and be positive models for their children. As a result of First Steps' intervention and parenting support, 66% of clients initially assessed at "low" levels of parenting have achieved moderate or high levels of parenting skill.



Early Education

Private-public partnerships through First Steps 4K have led to significant cost efficiencies in the delivery of publicly funded 4K. One recent analysis suggests First Steps is achieving comparable results, without the need for costly capital construction, for 80 cents on the dollar.



Early Intervention

According to recent federal evaluations, outcomes for clients participating in BabyNet early intervention programs are above national averages. BabyNet matches the special needs of infants and toddlers who have disabilities and/or developmental delays with customized, community-based resources.



School Transition

Each of the corresponding blocks of services leads ultimately to the goal of transitioning children successfully to school. Programs like Countdown to Kindergarten and From Day One to Grade One are ultimately preparing children for school success.

Based on the needs of our community and available funding, Union County First Steps focuses its investments in Family Strengthening, Quality Childcare and School Transition.

Early Steps to School Success

Parents play a critical role in their child’s development.

Program Description

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.

Program Components

1. Home visits at least twice monthly from a trained early childhood educator
2. Parent/child education groups in school and community settings
3. Child play groups and storybook hours
4. Raising a Reader book bag lending program
5. Transition to school activities
6. Community referrals and follow-up

Union County First Steps serves families in greatest need. Among our ESSS families:

95% ... live in poverty
 18% ... didn’t graduate from high school
 21% ... were teen parents

Why Home Visits Work

Clients in First Steps home visitation programs, including ESSS, saw **significant increases in their pre- and post-assessments**. Overall, **54%** of participants who scored at a low quality of parenting improved to a moderate quality of parenting, **44%** who had moderate parenting skills moved to high quality, and **11.9%** who had low quality parenting at pre-test increased their skills to high quality.

*First Steps Evaluation
 High Scope Educational Research Foundation, 2009*

“I like the books. My daughter loves the book with flaps- it’s her favorite! I like that the lessons you bring give information about language development.”

-ESSS Client

ESSS by the Numbers 2014-15

Families Served	47
Children Served	54
Total Home Visits	538
Hours Spent Serving Families	684

Program Outcomes:

- ✓ Increasing children’s language and pre-literacy skills essential for school success
- ✓ Increasing parent knowledge of how to support their child’s language development and pre-literacy education
- ✓ Fostering positive home/school connections early in the child’s life
- ✓ Transitioning children successfully to preschool or kindergarten
- ✓ Increasing early childhood knowledge and expertise through the community

Thank you to our partners!

Union County Schools
 Save the Children

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Children’s reading scores improve dramatically when parents are involved in helping them learn to read.

Program Description

According to the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, the peak period for children developing neural connections related to language is around **nine months of age**. **One of the easiest and most effective ways to build the language neural connections in a young child’s brain is to read to them.**

The United Way of the Piedmont is the local sponsor of Dolly Parton Imagination Library, which provides free age-appropriate books to children age birth to 5 years. Operated by the Dollywood Foundation, Imagination Library is currently in more than 1,600 communities internationally and mails books to about 700,000 children each month.

Children who register with the United Way of the Piedmont receive one book per month by mail through the month of their fifth birthday. All books are quality, age-appropriate books carefully selected for each age group by a committee of educational specialists.

A major benefit of the Imagination Library program is that it requires very little overhead or administrative obligation. Since the Dollywood Foundation in Tennessee administers the operation and book distribution, the cost to local communities is just \$30 per child per year.

Union County First Steps ensures that all children in our home visitation program are enrolled to receive books through the Imagination Library Program. We also provide registration cards to the hospital, pregnancy center, pediatrician office, and other community partners.

Imagination Library by the Numbers, 2014-15

Children Served	702
Books Given to Children 0-5	8,424

Why Imagination Library Works

Kindergarten teachers reported that **CTK children have greater familiarity, confidence and excitement** about attending kindergarten, and that **CTK parents are more involved in school** and more likely to contact them. CTK parents felt a **stronger connection with their child’s teacher**, and saw in their children increased confidence and excitement about school. Teachers also said the CTK experience **had a significant positive impact on their professional practice.**

*First Steps Evaluation
 High Scope Educational Research Foundation,
 2009*



Thank you to our partners!

- Dollywood Foundation
- United Way of the Piedmont

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Child Care Training

Those who care for young children need high-quality, accessible, and affordable professional development.

Program Description

High-quality child care hinges on high-quality professional development that meets the needs of the local child care workforce.

First Steps-sponsored training is certified through the SC Center for Child Care Career Development and includes topics in the areas of nutrition, health and safety, curriculum, child guidance, professional development and program administration. Best practices in training include not only the training itself, but follow-up in the classroom.

First Steps has been a blessing to us. They not only offer the classes we need but they keep us from having to go out of town to take them. These classes are very educational and help us to have a better child care center. We have been able to use what we have learned to become better teachers to our children.

-Pat Hendrix (Bethel Childcare Center)

Child Care Training Sponsored by Union County First Steps, 2014-15

Topic:	Sessions:
Medication Administration & Poison Prevention	Health & Safety
Managing Childhood Illnesses	Health & Safety
Blood Borne Pathogens	
The Powerful Role of Stories	Curriculum
The Role of Meaningful Experience	Curriculum
Building Partnerships with Families/ Effective Methods of Evaluating Staff	Program Administration
Follow-up on Instruction for for Curriculum Training	Curriculum
Health and Hygiene in Early Care/ Sanitizing in Your Center	Health & Safety



Union County child care workers learning about *The Role of Meaningful Experiences* as part of their curriculum training.

Training by the Numbers, 2014-15

Total Training Attendance	139
Child Care Teachers and Directors Served	23
Number of Training Sessions Offered	8

Thank you to our partners!

- City of Union
- Spartanburg Community College
- Union County Schools

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Countdown to Kindergarten

Bringing parents and teachers together as partners sets the foundation for success in school.

Program Description

Countdown to Kindergarten (CTK) is a summer home visitation model connecting rising kindergartners and their families with their future teachers. The program is designed:

- ✓ to forge strong and lasting home-school relationships,
- ✓ to acquaint children and families with the state and classroom expectations to increase the likelihood of school success,
- ✓ to increase parent involvement in the early grades (particularly in hard-to-reach communities), when children’s learning is foundational for life success; and
- ✓ to increase public awareness of the importance of school readiness and provide ways for parents and communities to impact children’s early school success.

Countdown to Kindergarten integrates all of the following:

Home Visitation. Teachers make six visits over the summer to the homes of participating students and families. Children and families are introduced to actual materials used in kindergarten and are given a Kindergarten Transition Toolkit to keep.

Learning Celebration. The last visit is a “field trip” to the school where the child will attend class in the fall.

Public Awareness. Throughout the summer, First Steps releases tips to media to help parents and caregivers get children ready for kindergarten.

Children are referred to the program by a 4K teacher or are identified during the registration process in the spring as a potential student for the CTK program. The following schools participate in the program:

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Buffalo Elementary | Foster Park Elementary |
| Jonesville Elementary | Monarch Elementary |

Union County Schools place as many CTK children as possible in their home visitor’s classroom for kindergarten, thereby building upon the teacher-child and parent-teacher relationships built over the summer.

Thank you to our partners!

- Union County School District
- Kaplan Early Learning Company

Why CTK Works

Kindergarten teachers reported that **CTK children have greater familiarity, confidence and excitement** about attending kindergarten, and that **CTK parents are more involved in school** and more likely to contact them. CTK parents felt a **stronger connection with their child’s teacher**, and saw in their children increased confidence and excitement about school. Teachers also said the CTK experience **had a significant positive impact on their professional practice.**

*First Steps Evaluation
 High Scope Educational Research Foundation, 2009*

*CTK by the Numbers, Summer 2014

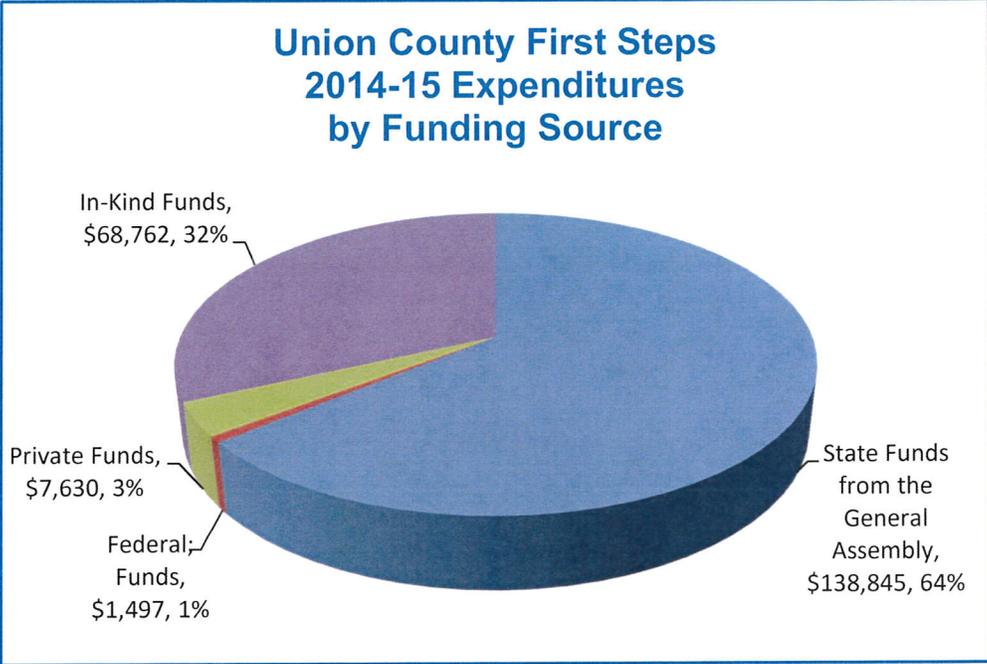
Children Served	15
Families Served	15
Home/School Visits	90

*CTK program data is for June-August 2014, whereas CTK fiscal data includes expenditures from July 1, 2014 through June 30, 2015.



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Financial Impact



Total 2014-15 Expenditures: \$216,733

State Funds Leveraged in 2014-15*: 56%

*Percentage of state dollars matched by additional federal, private, and/or in-kind funds

2014-15 Expenditures by Strategy

	State \$	Federal \$	Private \$	In-Kind \$	Total \$	% of 2014-15 Expenditures
Early Steps to School Success	\$65,301	\$0	\$5,270	\$37,804	\$108,375	50%
Imagination Library	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$21,060	\$21,060	10%
Countdown to Kindergarten	\$3,922	\$1,497	\$406	\$0	\$5,825	3%
Child Care Training	\$16,272	\$0	\$1,000	\$914	\$18,186	8%
Early Identification & Referrals	\$1,124	\$0	\$0	\$1,371	\$2,495	1%
Program Support	\$31,368	\$0	\$0	\$5,699	\$37,067	17%
Administrative Support	\$20,859	\$0	\$953	\$1,914	\$23,726	11%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$138,845	\$1,497	\$7,630	\$68,762	\$216,733	

Unaudited numbers for the period July 1, 2014 through June 30, 2015

Since inception, Union County First Steps has leveraged \$1,016,760 from sources outside of state government. That's 40 cents for every state dollar.

A Community that “Works” Together

Week of the Young Child 2015

Being a small rural community has both challenges and benefits. While we may not have significant local investment in terms of monetary contributions, there is no lack of support when it comes to community partners recognizing the importance of early childhood education. This year’s Week of the Young Child celebration was no exception. First Steps held its annual “Touch-A-Truck” celebration in partnership with community agencies and groups.



Preschool Story Time



Also this year, First Steps started Preschool Story Time. We invite the public to bring their preschoolers to the Community Center in Union several times during the school year. The children and their parents enjoy the reading of a book, crafting together, and having a healthy snack. Not only do children from around the community attend, child care centers bring their preschoolers as well. Thanks to our local churches, each child who attends leaves Story Time with a book or two to take home with them.



Thank you to our partners!

Funding Support

State of South Carolina
(through South Carolina First Steps)

Civitan

Lockhart Power

Union City Council

Union County Schools

United Way of the Piedmont
 Community Impact Grant

In-Kind Support

Save the Children

DHEC

Union County Churches

Union County Housing Authority

Union County Schools

United Way of the Piedmont

First Steps Partnership Board

2014-2015 Union County First Steps to School Readiness Board

Name	Position	Board Category
Kelli Johnston, Chair	Pediatrician	Healthcare Provider
Ashley Turner, Vice Chair	State Farm Insurance Agent	Business Community
Margie Ruff, Secretary	Save the Children Teacher	Pre-Kindergarten through Primary Educator
Christy Casey	Elementary Teacher	Family Education, Training and Support Provider
Christy Latham	First Steps Home Visitor	Childcare and Early Childhood Development/Education Provider
Sonya Crank	DSN Case Worker	Nonprofit Organization that Provides Services to Families & Children
Lou Stackhouse	Retired Director of DSN	Nonprofit Organization that Provides Services to Families & Children
Jeff Stribble	Director of Personnel and Student Services- Union County Schools	Business Community
Cathey Parker	At Home Mother/Grandmother	Grandparent/Parent of Preschool Aged Child Served By First Steps
Margie Boyd	Retired Educator	Early Childhood Education
Terrez Henderson	Supervisor	DSS
Page Rogers	Health Educator	DHEC/Public Health
Barbara Jeter	Director	Head Start
Ben Loftis	Director	County Library
Anita Maness	Elementary Principal	School District
Connie Springs	Retired Educator	Legislative Appointee



The Goals of First Steps

- (1) **provide parents with access to the support they might seek and want** to strengthen their families and to promote the optimal development of their preschool children;
- (2) **increase comprehensive services** so children have reduced risk for major physical, developmental, and learning problems;
- (3) **promote high-quality preschool programs** that provide a healthy environment that will promote normal growth and development;
- (4) **provide services** so all children receive the protection, nutrition, and health care needed to thrive in the early years of life so they arrive at school ready to succeed; and
- (5) **mobilize communities** to focus efforts on providing enhanced services to support families and their young children so as to enable every child to reach school healthy and ready to succeed.

-- Section 59-152-30



Interested parents can contact any participating 4K providers to complete an application. To view a list of participating First Steps 4K providers, visit:

<http://scfirststeps.org/4k>



BabyNet

South Carolina's Early Intervention System

BabyNet in Union County:
LOCAL SPOE PHONE # - 864-591-8641

<http://scfirststeps.org/babynet/>

What Is First Steps?

South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness was created in 1999 by the South Carolina General Assembly for the purpose of **having every child in South Carolina arrive at kindergarten ready to learn**. Sadly, many South Carolina children possess one or more risk factors that put them at high risk (greater than a 1 in 3 chance) for "early school failure" – either being retained or scoring below grade level in reading or math – by third grade.

First Steps exists to bring together efforts in early childhood at the state and local level, public and private, to focus and intensify services and assure the most efficient use of all available resources to serve the needs of South Carolina's young children and their families. First Steps works to accomplish its mission through a state coordinating office and a network of county partnerships (46), each a private non-profit organization led by a board of early childhood stakeholders.

Each First Steps county partnership determines how to spend its funds based on an annual needs and resources assessment and collaboration with community partners to fill gaps in local services for young children and their families. First Steps has proven its impact through strong program and fiscal accountability and independent evaluations - a requirement of its enabling legislation.