

# South Carolina First Steps e-Spotlight

May 20, 2016



## **"T.E.A.M."-work in the Lowcountry: First Steps of Beaufort, Jasper, Hampton and Allendale Counties Come Together for Early Childhood Conference**

On Friday, April 15<sup>th</sup> and Saturday, April 16<sup>th</sup>, the 11<sup>th</sup> annual Teachers, Educators, Advocates, and Mentors (T.E.A.M.) Lowcountry Early Childhood Conference took place in Ridgeland. The conference is the result of a collaborative effort by Beaufort, Jasper, Hampton, and Allendale County First Steps, along with SC Child Care Resource and Referral, Head Start, SC Department of Social Services (DSS) ABC Program, and Ridgeland Baptist Child Care Ministry. Other participating organizations included Hope Haven, SC Child Care Inclusion, and the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Scholarship Program. Focusing on the development of early childhood programs, this year's conference totaled 201 attendees and included a diverse group of participants from across the state, including early childhood teachers, child care providers, 4K owners, childcare center directors, school administrators, parents of young children, and Parents as Teachers (PAT) staff.

Over 80 sessions took place over the course of the conference, covering the themes of Curriculum, Child Guidance, Program Administration, Professional Development, and Health & Safety. The keynote address was delivered on Saturday afternoon by Randy Mack, a national trainer, former South Carolina principal and assistant principal, and two-time Teacher of the Year. Mr. Mack spoke on the importance of effective professional relationships with parents, students, and the community in building the necessary tools to help students achieve. The conference gave attendees the chance to choose sessions based on areas of interest, gather relevant information related to their field, find inspiration, and network with other early childhood experts and professionals.



*Attendees and organizers of the T.E.A.M. Lowcountry Early Education Conference wear [I Can] t-shirts.*



*At the conference, participants decorated "trees" with their personalized [I Can] statements written on children's handprints.*

The theme of this year's conference was adopted from SC First Steps [I Can] School Readiness campaign. Participants wore [I Can] lanyards provided by SC State Office of First Steps with name tags displaying the [I Can] logo as well as the TEAM Lowcountry logo. The church was also decorated to reflect the theme, with vases holding small yellow spray painted tree limbs. On the tables sat tiny blue handprints created by the children at Ridgeland Baptist Church Child Care Ministry, and participants were given the instructions to decorate the tree with hand printed [I Can] statements. Some sample statements included: "[I Can] help build self-confidence in young children.", "[I Can] encourage children to love who they are.", "[I Can] provide a safe and happy environment.", and "[I Can] help children learn to read." Each hand served as a constant reminder during the course of the conference of how, together, [We Can] continue to make a difference in the lives

of children.

The conference was made possible because of communities, organizations, businesses, and individuals coming together for early childhood development and education. For years, Ridgeland Baptist Church has generously hosted the event. There were also several student volunteers from the Technical College of the Lowcountry and Beaufort County First Steps Board members, Julia Burns and Lauren Furman-Boggs, who assisted in the coordination and day-of logistics. In addition, donations and support were provided by Kaplan Early Learning, Discount School Supply, Environments Early Learning, SCECA District Two, the Sandbox Interactive Museum, Traci Lynn Jewelry, Sam's Club, CAJD Apparel & More, Missionary Swamp Church, 31 Gifts, Scentsy, YMCA and J.B. Apparel & Accessories.

The T.E.A.M. Lowcountry Early Childhood Conference was a tremendous opportunity for professional collaboration, learning, and growth, allowing participants from all areas of the early childhood field to explore new ideas and translate lessons-learned into action.

**For more information on T.E.A.M. Lowcountry's Early Education Conference, please contact Beaufort County First Steps Executive Director Betty Washington at [bjw1steps@hargray.com](mailto:bjw1steps@hargray.com).**