

South Carolina First Steps e-Spotlight

July 21, 2016



Orangeburg County First Steps: Prioritizing Community Collaboration to Meet the Needs of Children and Families

According to First Steps Legislation, local partnerships, “shall serve as a community convener around the needs of preschool children and their families.” Orangeburg County First Steps is fully embracing this role as demonstrated by their successful efforts, detailed below, to engage the community in the work of school readiness.

This past Friday, in collaboration with the SC Regional Housing Authority, OCFS held an inaugural “Motivating our Mothers” meeting in Santee for mothers who reside in the local affordable housing. The goal of these meetings is to provide supportive programming for mothers including parenting instruction, exploring news ideas for personal and parental growth, and instructing mothers how to develop their children’s literacy skills. The idea for this group came from the Early Childhood Community Engagement Network, a community group convened by OCFS that works to collaborate on and provide services to the children and families of Orangeburg County. This year, it is the expectation that the “Motivating our Mothers” group will meet monthly with the goal of ten mothers attending each meeting.



A mother and her daughters at OCFS’ Reading Rocks Literacy Night.

Another collaborative effort between the SC Regional Housing Authority and OCFS, along with the Orangeburg County Department of Public Safety, is the Reading Rocks Program. This initiative uses books from the Dolly Parton Imagination Library program and provides learning opportunities to children who have not yet been exposed to a formal academic environment. A certified teacher offers instruction to ten children ages 3 and 4 years old at the St. Paul/Williams Chapel Housing Complex in Orangeburg. Through the program, students are involved in Read Alouds, music and movement activities, literacy-based instruction, small group lessons, and technology instruction. In addition to

this early literacy instruction, the Ages and Stages Questionnaire to determine if children have any developmental delays. Parents receive notification and information on where to go next if the scores indicate a delay. Moreover, this past year, parents of children enrolled in Reading Rocks were involved in literacy night in which a certified literacy coach gave them tools needed to assist their children with learning to read in the home environment.



A police officer talks with two young children at last year’s OCFS Community Day Celebration.

OCFS also hosts an annual Community Day celebration in partnership with the Orangeburg County Department of Public Safety and the Sheriff’s Department. This year, the celebration will take place next Thursday, July 28th and an anticipated 115 children will be in attendance. The event is open to children ages 3 and 4 and their parents and will feature a petting zoo, music and movement activities, story time, games, and the Columbia Marionette Theater. The Department of Public Safety will bring a fire truck and ambulance for children to “climb in” and learn about. Members of the Sheriff’s Department will be painting children’s faces and conducting a K-9 demonstration; they will also bring the D.A.R.E. truck and police cars for children to explore.

OCFS has made community collaboration a priority and, as a result, is recognized as a leader for early childhood in the county. By engaging community stakeholders in developing a shared vision for meeting the needs of Orangeburg County’s children and families, OCFS exemplifies First Steps’ goal of being a community convener.

For more information on OCFS’ Community Collaboration efforts, please contact Executive Director LaMyra Sanders at LSanders@scfirststeps.org.