

CHEROKEE COUNTY



Getting children ready for school.



Imagination Library

Countdown to Kindergarten

Child Care Training

Child Care Scholarships

Talk to Me Initiative

Annual Report

2015-16



OUR VISION:

Every South Carolina child will arrive at kindergarten ready to succeed.



By The Numbers

Indicator	SC	Cherokee County
Children Under Five	289,990	3,480
Children In Poverty	26.4%	31.6%
3 rd Graders Below Standard in Reading	21.1%	30.3%
Births to Mothers With Less Than a High School Diploma	15.7%	24.4%

KIDS COUNT data provided by



- Since inception, Cherokee County First Steps has leveraged **\$1,787,531** from sources outside state government. **That's \$.46 for every dollar received.**
- **1,890 children were enrolled in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library.**
- **28 children received home visits during Countdown to Kindergarten to help them prepare for school.**
- **103 unduplicated child care professionals received 30 hours of high-quality training to meet licensing standards.**
- **13 children received child care scholarships.**
- **Total Children Served in FY16: 1,931**

Cherokee County First Steps

PO Box 23
 Gaffney, SC 29342
 Phone: 864.487.9466
 Fax: 864.487.9461

Board Chair
 Dr. Ronald Cope

Email address
cc1ststeps@yahoo.com

www.cherokeecountyfirststeps.org
[Facebook.com/cherokeecountyfirststeps](https://www.facebook.com/cherokeecountyfirststeps)
www.talktomecherokee.com
[Facebook.com/talktomecherokee](https://www.facebook.com/talktomecherokee)

Cherokee County First Steps Dr. Ronald Cope, Chair

FY 2016 was another very active year for Cherokee County First Steps as we continue to advocate for young children. Our primary focus continues to be providing books for children ages birth to five years old through Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. We are truly thankful for the participation and assistance from the Dollywood Foundation, all of our local supporters, and partners that allow us to be able to provide these wonderful learning tools.

In addition to Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, we also were able to sponsor and conduct Countdown to Kindergarten, a school transition program; provide training programs for child care workers; become a founding partner in the Talk to Me Initiative; offer child care scholarships for a limited number of families; and participate in the [I CAN] campaign. Through all of these programs and activities we were able to be a positive influence in the lives of over 1,900 young children in Cherokee County.

The members of the Board of Directors of Cherokee County First Steps actively support, and more importantly, actively participate in each of the programs mentioned above. I would like to take this opportunity to personally thank each of them for investing their time, effort, and money in order to enrich the lives of our youngest citizens. We also receive support and assistance from numerous individuals and organizations in the county. Space does not allow me to list all of those supporters, but please know that your efforts are sincerely appreciated. Without your support we could not succeed.

Cherokee County First Steps has been an advocate for young children for over seventeen years. With continued support and effort, we will still be advocating for young children seventeen years from now. Thank



Healthy Start



Family Strengthening



Early Intervention



Quality Child Care



Early Education



School Transition

County Programs

Imagination Library Program
 Talk to Me Initiative
 Child Care Training
 Child Care Scholarships Initiative
 Countdown to Kindergarten

State Programs

BabyNet
 First Steps 4K

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, Cherokee County First Steps focuses its investments in Family Strengthening, Quality Child Care, and School Transition.

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 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.**

Cherokee County First Steps 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 Cherokee County First Steps receive one book per month by mail through the month of their fifth birthday. Each book is carefully selected by a committee of educational specialists.



Sheriff Steve Mueller and Dolly at the National Night Out Event.

Imagination Library by the Numbers, 2015-16

Children Served	1,890
Books Given to Children 0-5	17,670



This year, our Imagination Library program:

- ✓ Provided one book per month to 1,890 children who were referred from pediatricians, hospitals, 3K and 4K programs at local elementary schools, churches, child care centers, BabyNet, Head Start/Early Head Start, Cherokee County Public Library, Cherokee County School District's Parents of Preschoolers and Special Services programs.
- ✓ 70% of parents reported reading to their child daily.
- ✓ Received donations totaling over \$10,000 from multiple community members and organizations in support of children's literacy; including 100% board giving!

Thank you to our partners!

- | | |
|--|----------------------------|
| Broad River Electric Charities | Kiser Development Company |
| Dollywood Foundation | KNOW(2) Cherokee |
| Cherokee County Public Library | Nestle Prepared Foods |
| Cherokee County School District | Talk to Me Initiative |
| Daren Carling, MD | United Way of the Piedmont |
| Fatz Café of Gaffney | |
| Piedmont Community Action - Head Start/EHS | |
| Spartanburg Community College, Cherokee Campus | |

"My child loved getting the books in the mail in his name. He loved having the book read to him and then learning to read them himself."

Julie, Parent of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library Graduate

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cc1ststeps@yahoo.com
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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.

"Ms. Scott covered the topic very good and told us a lot of information that we can share with children and parents."
 Local Child Care Provider

Child Care Training Sponsored by Cherokee County First Steps, 2015-16

Topic:	Sessions:
Engineering Adventures: STEM for Young Children	One Session
What am I Missing? Exploring Concept Development In Visually Impaired Children	One Session
Navigating Child Care Without Stress	Two Sessions
Brain Rules: Smart Baby/Moral Baby	Two Sessions
Effective Child Care Management	One Session
Musical Movement/Titles for Rhymes	Two Sessions
It's More than Just a Business: Director 411	One Session
Blood Borne Pathogens	One Session
Sing & Dance for Fun and Fitness/Hearing Children Benefits from Singing and Signing	Two Sessions



Local child care providers discovering new methods to encourage children to participate and learn.

Training by the Numbers, 2015-16

Total Training Attendance	149
Child Care Teachers and Directors Served	103
Number of Training Sessions Offered	13

This year, our Training program provided:

- ✓ 103 unduplicated early childhood staff with high quality training
- ✓ 27.5 hours of certified training and 2.5 hours of registered training for staff to meet annual re-certification requirements
- ✓ 4 Directors Association meetings were held with local child care directors as follow-up to training

Thank you to our partners!

- Cherokee County Child Care Directors Association
- Kiser Development Company
- Midway Baptist Church
- Piedmont Community Action - Head Start/EHS
- SC Center for Child Care Career Development
- SC Child Care Resource & Referral Network

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Child Care Scholarships

Too many families in Cherokee County cannot afford quality care for their children.

Program Description

Access to quality child care is essential for children while away from their primary caregivers. Yet, of those families income-eligible for child care assistance in South Carolina, only a small fraction receive it due to lack of funds. In the absence of nurturing and consistently available family, friends or neighbors, parents are faced with few - or no - affordable care options.

Cherokee County First Steps serves families in greatest need. Among our scholarship families:

- 100% ... live in poverty
- 23% ... didn't graduate from high school
- 31% ... were teen parents

In addition to regular monitoring of child care providers that receive First Steps scholarships, First Steps conducts at least one developmental screening each year with scholarship children and connects families to needed services within the community.

Cherokee County First Steps integrates the scholarships with Dolly Parton's Imagination Library as well as Child Care Training & Professional Development.



Cherokee County First Steps Board Member, Reverend Anitonette Gardner, volunteering to read to a group of children.

Scholarships by the Numbers, 2015-16

Children Served	13
Providers Served	4

This year, our Scholarship program:

- ✓ Provided 13 children with scholarship assistance enabling their parents to work or attend school
- ✓ Identified and addressed 5 potential developmental delays among scholarship children
- ✓ 2 children's families were connected to services such as BabyNet, Preschool Special Services Program, and counseling services (substance abuse, domestic violence, and/or mental health)
- ✓ Supported 4 small businesses in Cherokee County by subsidizing child care tuition for families who would not otherwise be able to afford quality care

Thank you to our partners!

- Cherokee County Child Care Directors Association
- Kiser Development Company
- Local Child Care Facilities
- SC Department of Social Services

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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.

"I loved seeing my child interact with the teacher and trying new things."

Mother of child participating in Countdown to Kindergarten

*CTK by the Numbers, Summer 2015

Children Served	28
Families Served	27
Home/School Visits	158

**CTK program data is for June-August 2015, whereas CTK fiscal data includes expenditures from July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2016.*

Back to School Tips Provided by the US Department of Education

This year, our Countdown to Kindergarten program:

- ✓ Increased the amount of time parents spent reading to children by 21%
- ✓ According to kindergarten teachers, 29% of CTK children performed as well as, or better than, their fellow students in approaches to learning; mathematical thinking; self-help and motor skills; language and literacy progress; emotional and social growth, and physical development during the 2015-16 school year
- ✓ According to kindergarten teachers, 36% of CTK parents were as involved, or more engaged than other parents in their child's education, in the areas of volunteering in the school, maintaining contact with the teacher, joining parent groups, and attending parent/teacher conferences

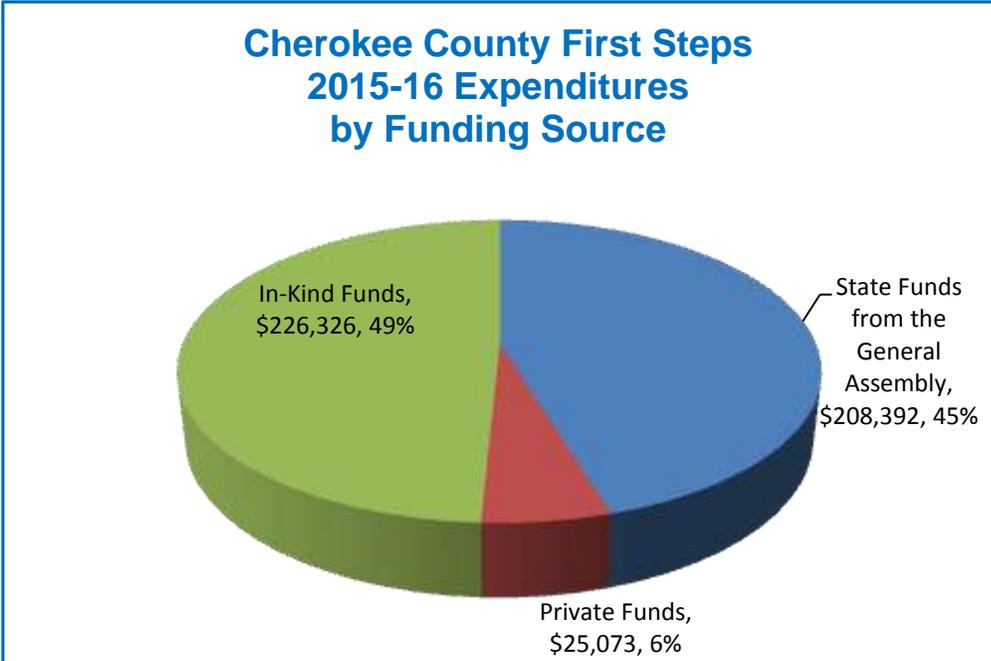
Thank you to our partners!

Cherokee County School District	Alma Elementary School
Funtastic Inflatables	Blacksburg Primary School
Kaplan Early Learning Company	Mary Bramlett Elementary School
Kiser Development Company	

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Financial Impact



Total 2015-16 Expenditures: \$459,791

State Funds Leveraged in 2015-16*: 121%

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

2015-16 Expenditures by Strategy

	State \$	Private \$	In-Kind \$	Total \$	% of 2015-16 Expenditures
Imagination Library	\$18,335	\$18,335	\$219,126	\$255,796	56%
Countdown to Kindergarten	\$10,353	\$371	\$0	\$10,724	2%
Child Care Training	\$51,399	\$3,594	\$3,600	\$58,593	13%
Child Care Scholarships	\$16,270	\$0	\$0	\$16,270	4%
Program Support	\$78,569	\$77	\$2,700	\$81,346	18%
Administrative Support	\$33,466	\$2,696	\$900	\$37,062	8%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$208,392	\$25,073	\$226,326	\$459,791	

Unaudited numbers for the period July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2016

Since inception, Cherokee County First Steps has leveraged \$1,787,531 from sources outside of state government. That's 46 cents for every state dollar.

Community Impact

[I CAN] PROMOTE SUCCESS

Article from the Gaffney Ledger 12/7/15

First Steps releases “Profile of the Ready Kindergartner”

Columbia, SC – South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness today unveiled the “Profile of the Ready Kindergartner” – the new description of school readiness for the State of South Carolina and the ‘I CAN’ public awareness campaign to promote it statewide.

Designed in collaboration with the South Carolina Board of Education, the “Profile of the Ready Kindergartner” describes what families and caregivers, communities, and schools can do to help children arrive at kindergarten ready for success.

“Preparing the state’s young children for school is a responsibility we all share,” said Ken Wingate, Chairman of the South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness Board of Trustees. “The idea that we all have an important role to play is also the cornerstone of our new, public awareness campaign, I CAN. Helping our children succeed in kindergarten begins at birth and takes all of us working together.”

“The message of ‘I CAN’ is the message of First Steps,” Cherokee County First Steps execu-

tive director Dorothy Priester said. “It takes all of us, each playing a role to ensure our children have the best possible start in life. The public-private partnership that is Cherokee County First Steps works collaboratively with families, schools and communities to support children’s readiness for school.”

“This week, ‘I CAN’ signs began popping up along roadways in every county, courtesy of local First Steps partnerships. “The idea is to spark interest about what ‘I CAN’ is all about,” Priester said.

In 2014, the SC General Assembly passed Act 287, which includes the state’s first-ever legal definition of school readiness. The law also charged First Steps with working in collaboration with the State Board of Education to develop a family-friendly description of the ready kindergartner.

“School readiness is about more than academic content,” Wingate added. “Certainly, numbers and letters are important, but it’s also important that families



Ann’s Playland owner and director Vanessa Jefferies is shown with an “I Can” sign with Cherokee County First Steps executive director Dorothy Priester.

provide for the physical, social and emotional needs of their children and that schools and communities support families.”

The “Profile of the Ready Kindergartner” aligns with both state standards and the “Profile of the South Carolina Graduate” released by TransformSC in September of 2013.

“Where the ‘Profile of the South

Carolina Graduate’ highlights skills and characteristics needed for college, career, and citizenship readiness, benchmarks found in the ‘Profile of the Ready Kindergartner’ serve as the building blocks for these traits,” added Susan DeVenny, Director of South Carolina First Steps. “Skills that foster adult success are firmly rooted during a child’s early years.”

Initial Endorsers of the “Profile of the Ready Kindergartner” are: SC First Steps to School Readiness, SC State Board of Education, SC Council on Competitiveness’ TransformSC, SC Chamber of Commerce, The LARCUM Bishops’ Education Initiative, SC Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and Palmetto State Teachers Association.

Alyssa D’Angelo says...

have interactive story times at the library to promote early literacy skills.

What can YOU do? www.iCan.sc

POWERED BY FIRST STEPS

Alyssa D’Angelo
Youth Services Manager, Cherokee County Public Library

J. W. Sanders, Jr. says...

pray, inspire, invest, and inform students with attention, listening, and involvement to get them ready to succeed in school.

What can YOU do? www.iCan.sc

POWERED BY FIRST STEPS

J. W. Sanders, Jr. – Pastor, Bethel Baptist Church Board Member, Cherokee County First Steps

Novella Kelly says...

read to children and volunteer in local Early Childhood Programs at my local First Steps Office.

What can YOU do? www.iCan.sc

POWERED BY FIRST STEPS

Novella Kelly
Board Member, Cherokee County First Steps

➤

Little Angels’ Director, Paige Wright is shown with an [I CAN] sign along with Cherokee County First Steps Executive Director, Dorothy Priester

➔

Support Cherokee County First Steps today through a tax-deductible donation, or volunteer.

Community Impact

Talk to Me Initiative

Closing the Thirty Million Word Gap

Talk to Me is based on results of the Hart and Risley study, *The Thirty Million Word Gap*. Since its inception, the Initiative’s partners have worked together with the goal of bringing community awareness of the importance of a rich language environment to a child’s developing brain. They have also worked on ideas to implement programming that will increase vocabulary usage in children’s lives. “The Cherokee County Team” originally consisted of the following community members:

- KNOW(2) Cherokee Initiative
- United Way of the Piedmont
- Cherokee County School District
- Piedmont Community Action - Head Start/EHS
- Spartanburg Community College – Cherokee Campus
- Institute for Child’s Success
- Gaffney Visitors Center
- Limestone College
- Cherokee County Library



Dorothy Priester, Laura Camp, and Dr. Arthur Brewton presenting at the Talk to Me Initiative Launch in April 2016.

Newest Partners to join the team are:
 VersaMe
 SC Education Oversight Committee
 LENA Foundation

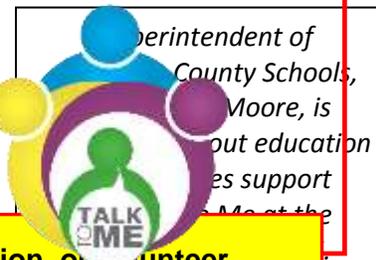
Since the launch of the public awareness campaign in April 2016, Talk to Me partners have also had opportunity to collaborate with other organizations including Cherokee County Baby and Me Tobacco Free, VersaMe, and Chick-Fil-A.

On August 12, 2016, “The Team” will host Family Talk Night at Chick-Fil-A in Gaffney. During this event, families will be encouraged to store their cell phones in specially designed “chicken coops” and talk with one another during dinner. VersaMe plans to provide Starling devices which the families will use to count the number of words they speak during the meal. We hope to continue the campaign with Chick-Fil-A and begin hosting events in other restaurants in Cherokee County.

The Cherokee County School District was awarded a South Carolina Block Grant, and is using these funds to further the mission of the Talk to Me Initiative. This grant is part of a project designed to encourage partnerships among South Carolina school districts and community groups with a focus on enhancing the quality of full day 4K programs to improve kindergarten readiness.

“[They] are confident that Cherokee County School District, in partnership with Talk to Me can provide an example of a successful model to be used throughout South Carolina to help all of our youngest children get the ‘language nutrition’ needed to set them on a path of school and career success.”

Laura Camp
 Coordinator for Early Childhood,
 Cherokee County School District



Support Cherokee County First Steps today through a tax-deductible donation, or volunteer.

First Steps Partnership Board

Visualize Where You Want to Be and Make It Happen!

This year, the board decided that additional training would stimulate them to move forward in preparing the strategic plan. Cherokee County First Steps held a retreat for staff, Executive, and committee chairs. During this retreat the main focus was our vision for the future. Board members and staff were in separate meetings in the morning, but met together in the afternoon to discuss joint goals. The discussions highlighted that progress was needed in areas such as public awareness and fundraising. We discussed how to set realistic objectives, action steps needed to meet these goals, and designating appropriate people to handle each task. The board members and staff were enthusiastic about being able to influence this process, contribute their experience, and to carry out assigned roles, including



Cherokee County First Steps Partnership Board, 2015-16

Name	Position	Board Category
Dr. Ron Cope, Chair	Retired Principal	Pre-K Primary Educator
Brian Lawson, Vice Chair	Director of Operations, American TransMed Inc.	Parent
Novella Kelly, Secretary	Retired Nurse	Healthcare
Melissa Green, Treasurer	Director, Iron City Ministries	Non-Profit
Cliffietta Cochran, Member-at-Large	Retired Army & Healthcare	Parent
Pennie Bevis	Food Technician, Nestle Prepared Foods	Business
Alisa Britt	Child Services Manager, PCA Head Start/Early Head Start	Head Start Representative
Kim Camp	Principal, Alma Elementary School	Pre-K Primary Educator
Jacquelyn Childers	Sam's Optical	Business
Alyssa D'Angelo	Youth Services Manager, Cherokee County Library	Library Representative
Denise Dyer	Human Resource Director, City of Gaffney	Local Government
Anitonette Gardner	Pastor, Hopewell Presbyterian Church/Hope Broadcasting	Faith-Based
Sandra Greene-Tucker	Retired Social Services	Family Education/Training
Deborah Hamrick	Principal, Blacksburg Primary School	Pre-K Primary Educator
Karen Henderson	Asst. Principal, Limestone-Central Elementary School	Pre-K Primary Educator
Vanessa Jefferies	Director, Ann's Playland Day Care	Child Care
Dr. Joette Johnson	Retired School Administrator	Legislative Liaison
Audrey McClary	Principal, Mary Bramlett Elementary School	School District Representative
Dr. J. W. Sanders, Jr.	Senior Pastor, Bethel Baptist Church/Bethel Day Care	Faith-Based
Iyonia Simmons	Workforce Consultant, Department of Social Services	DSS Representative
Kristen Smith	Cherokee County DHEC	Health Dept. Representative
Renee Smith	Branch Manager, Carolina Premier Bank	Philanthropic Community
Jeff Taylor	Manager of Engineering Maintenance Facility, Timken	Business
Paige Wright	Director, Little Angels Day Care	Child Care



Getting children ready for school.

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 in Cherokee, Spartanburg, and Union Counties: Office: 864.591.8641.

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

Thank you donors and partners!



Funding Support

State of South Carolina: \$208,392
(through South Carolina First Steps)

Fatz Café Fundraiser: \$1,916

Broad River Electric Charities: \$1,000

Nestle Prepared Foods: \$500

SC Center for Child Care Career Development: \$2,000

United Way of the Piedmont: \$7,500

In-Kind Support

Allegra Print & Imaging

Dollywood Foundation

Fatz Café of Gaffney

Kiser Development Company

Midway Baptist Church

II Sisters (Event Planners)

Spartanburg Community College, Cherokee Campus



Check presentation by
Broad River Electric Charities
to multiple local organizations
including Cherokee County First Steps.

How you

County:

- ✓ \$30 provides a young child a book per month for one year!
- ✓ \$4-9 return on investment for every dollar spent in early childhood programs such as the Talk to Me Initiative!
- ✓ \$327 will fund one child for Countdown to Kindergarten during the summer!

HOW TO GIVE: Cherokee County First Steps always welcome donations from the public.
Please call our office at 864.487.9466 or email us at cc1ststeps@yahoo.com to donate.

Save the Date!

Cherokee County First Steps Annual Meeting

- 📅 **Date:** November 17, 2016
- 📅 **Time:** 4:00 PM
- 📅 **Location:** City of Gaffney Visitors Center
Board and Community Leader Awards

Support Cherokee County First Steps today through a tax-deductible donation, or volunteer!