



ANNUAL REPORT

2024-25



FirstStepsNashville.org

A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The first five years of life are a time of incredible growth, with the brain developing faster than at any other stage. In fact, during the first three years alone, thousands of neural connections are forming every day – laying the groundwork for a child’s learning, health, behavior and well-being for years to come.

Because of you, families can focus on nurturing their child’s potential, knowing they have the guidance and resources they need during these crucial early years. *You make that possible.*

Thank you to all who have partnered with First Steps this past year, and as we look forward to the future, we are grateful for your continued support.



Executive Director



2024-25 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Sue Xiong

Young Leaders Council Intern

Alexis Hughes

Young Leaders Council Intern



The **mission** of First Steps is to educate and care for children with special needs and medical conditions alongside their typically developing peers in inclusive environments and support their families.

Our **vision** is to:

- Enhance the quality of life for children and their families
- Eliminate barriers to services for children with special needs
- Empower families as they seek to meet the needs of their children
- Improve the community as a whole child by child, family by family
- Celebrate each child's unique potential



HOW WE SERVE - INTEGRATED SERVICES

First Steps stands out as one of very few providers where therapists and classroom teachers are a team in the same facility, creating an inclusive, seamless way to learn. Some families choose to access First Steps' therapy services outside the classroom. Others may need therapy to come to their home or another facility. *We offer all of these options!*

CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER

First Steps' inclusive McWhorter Family Children's Center offers full time care and education for children with special needs alongside their typically developing peers (*ages six weeks to six years*).

PEDIATRIC THERAPY

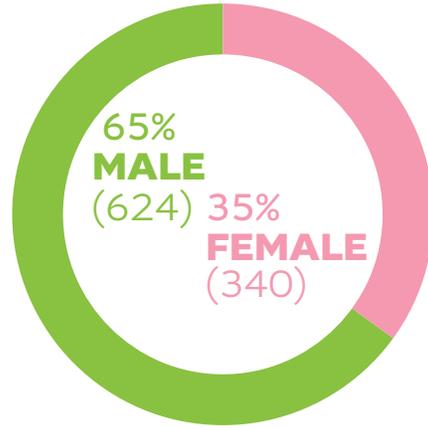
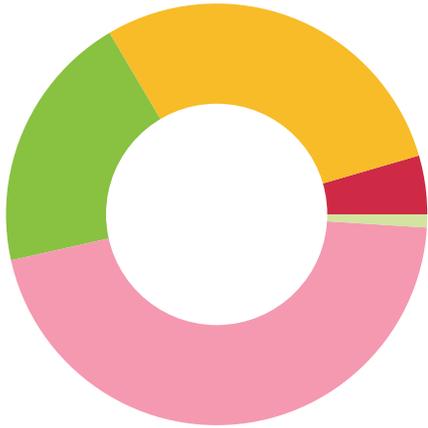
Pediatric Therapy at First Steps provides occupational, speech-language, physical and feeding therapies for children with special needs (*ages birth to 12*) in the McWhorter Family Children's Center.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROGRAM

The First Steps Community Outreach Program partners with parents and caregivers of children with disabilities or delays (*ages birth to five*). Developmental Therapy and support is given in home-based or community settings, as well as via telehealth.

IMPACT OF YOUR INVESTMENT IN FIRST STEPS' MISSION

In FY 2024-25, **964 children** received the education and care they needed to achieve their developmental success. Many children participated in more than one program throughout the year and **14,782 therapy sessions** were completed. Parents and caregivers were encouraged to share their experiences as each program strives to evolve and meet the needs of each family.



ASIAN	4.5% (44)
BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN	29% (281)
HISPANIC OR LATINO	20% (187)
CAUCASIAN OR WHITE	45.5% (439)
OTHER	1% (13)

100%
AGREE

I believe my child is making progress as a result of First Steps' services

PEDIATRIC THERAPY served 281 children with 5,497 therapy sessions. Therapies improved their overall health - occupational (*achieving a high percentage of their individual goals after 12 sessions*), feeding (*increased chewing skills and/or acceptance of a variety of foods/textures*), physical (*demonstrating increased functional mobility after 18 sessions*) and speech-language (*increased in comprehension, number of words, pictures/signs to communicate their need*).

“Each therapist is so passionate about helping and goes above and beyond to assist both my child and me.”

94% AGREE
My child's therapist gives me clear information that helps me perform exercises and activities in the home with my child

94% AGREE
The treatment activities provided are relevant to my child's individual needs



COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROGRAM served 672 children/families with 9,285 therapy sessions/11,750 hours of service. 90.92% of the children made progress with their individual developmental goals.

100% AGREE
During sessions I am able to practice and apply strategies shared by my Developmental Therapist within my daily activities and routines



As a result of participation in First Steps Outreach Program, my family and I experienced:

A better understanding of my child
100% AGREE

Reduced stress
78% AGREE

“I am very thankful for this program. The convenience of coming to the house and coming up with a game plan to help my son. It has been very helpful as I can see the growth.”



CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER served 95 children through the FY24-25. 81% met their benchmarks in social emotional, language, and literacy, while 83% demonstrated progress in cognitive skills. Even more inspiring, 85% achieved milestones in mathematics and social studies, and an outstanding 97% met their goals in physical development, showcasing the power of early learning and inclusive care in action.

96% AGREE

All learning activities at First Steps are designed with my child's individual needs in mind across all major learning areas

100% AGREE

The atmosphere and environment at First Steps is comfortable, warm, welcoming and appropriate for my child

“What I like best about First Steps is the warm and friendly environment and amazing teachers. I love having my child in a blended classroom. He gets to be a therapy friend to his peers and he is becoming a better friend and human because of it.”



ELIMINATING BARRIERS

Your investment immediately bridges the financial gap for families with limited assets who are unable to access early intervention services and reduces the need for special education and support services in the future.



QUALITY PERSONNEL

Your gift attracts and retains the best early intervention teachers and therapists, forming a consistent and dedicated team committed to each child's full and unique potential.



FUTURE SUSTAINABILITY

Your support ensures that First Steps has the capacity to navigate the changing landscape of funding necessary to maintain and expand its work.





For every child who receives early intervention, an entire family benefits. Parents gain confidence, hope and practical tools-thanks to programs made possible by generous donors like you.

Colin is one example of the long journey from birth to five years old for a child with multiple special needs. He was born two months prematurely and received home care from Vanderbilt for the first year of his life. In August of 2021 his family was referred to First Steps and he is still active in the program.

Communicating was a major challenge for Colin. He had difficulty following directions, staying on task, and expressing himself. First Steps' Developmental Therapist worked with Mom to learn how to model language. Mom's love of books became a simple goal for him- finish one storybook. She would sit with Colin to read a book - pointing and labeling and making fun voices and sounds, hoping for imitation and longer interest. Learning sign language gave Mom an additional skill and has increased Colin's ability to communicate. He is now reading stories to Mom and recalls details from the book the following day.

In the home his family responded to his sensory needs with creative solutions: an indoor swing and climbing system, a crash pad to take breaks to give him space to regulate his emotions and handheld sensory toys to keep him engaged.

In addition to Developmental Therapy, Colin has been enrolled in speech-language, occupational, physical and ABA (Applied Behavioral Analysis) therapies. He has learned to help in the kitchen, get dressed and complete simple chores. His biggest win? His imagination - most likely influenced by his mother. His pretend play is complex and includes family members and fun scenarios. Colin and his family chose to stay enrolled in all the therapies through TEIS (Tennessee Early Intervention System) and with his fifth birthday approaching, we will soak up our time together, knowing he is continuing to grow, acquire skills, and blossom into the next phase of his life.

The Weavers have had an amazing journey to celebrate Charlie.

Her parent's words say it all.



“When Charlie started at First Steps, she didn't have a diagnosis yet. We just knew she needed extra support, qualified for early intervention services, and hoped we had found the right place. A couple of months later, when we finally got the diagnosis, I completely broke down, sobbing into the director's arms. I will NEVER forget when she held me and said, “It's going to be okay. We're going to take care of her. And we're going to take care of you.” That promise has never been more true.

Because of First Steps, Charlie's life trajectory has changed forever. She is walking. She is playing. She is learning. She is thriving. Every single day, her teachers and therapists work together, believing in her, challenging her, and celebrating her victories, big and small. They see her, not just her diagnosis, not just her delays, but the bright, capable, determined little girl she is.



And one of the most amazing things? She's doing it all in a classroom with both neurotypical and developmentally delayed peers. This means Charlie gets to play, interact, and learn from kids without disabilities, and just as importantly, those children are learning from HER. They're growing up knowing that inclusion isn't just an idea, it's a way of life.”



VOLUNTEERS & INTERNS

Thank you to the volunteers and interns who generously gave their time and talents to First Steps in 2024-25.

**COMMUNITY
OUTREACH &
PEDIATRIC
THERAPY**

Bertha Gunter
Jamie Hortwitz
Samirah Tunks

CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER

Colin Finn	Megan Kelly
Hope Francis	Sara Ludlam
Berta Gunter	Alexandra Norton
Lauren Hanner	Amory Taylor
Jamie Hortwitz	Samirah Tunks
Julia Johnson	Anne Marie Turan



Dorothy Cate and
Thomas F. Frist
Foundation



Volunteers

Sam Balthrop- Grand Marshal
Isaiah Brooks – Spring Hill
Spider-Man
Isabella Davis
Mindy Grimes, Barre3
Mary Kate Jackson
Coach Dillon Seigenthaler,
Lipscomb Academy Athletics
Lisa Van Wye



VINO



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HONORARY CHAIRS - Monica Mackie, Bob Martineau
EVENT CHAIR - Megan Kelly

COMMITTEE

Anne Louise Branstetter, Molly Brooks, Christy Farrell,
Claire Francis, Maggie Johnson, Kates Potempa,
Mollie Reed, Andrea Robinson, Liz Tardio

We are grateful for two HCA Healthcare groups who volunteered their time to assist with facility projects.

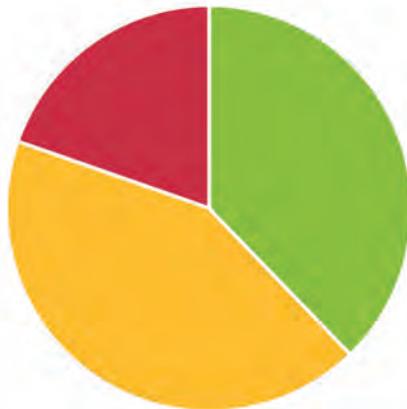


EXPENSES



- Program Services - 85%
- Administrative - 9%
- Fundraising - 6%

REVENUE

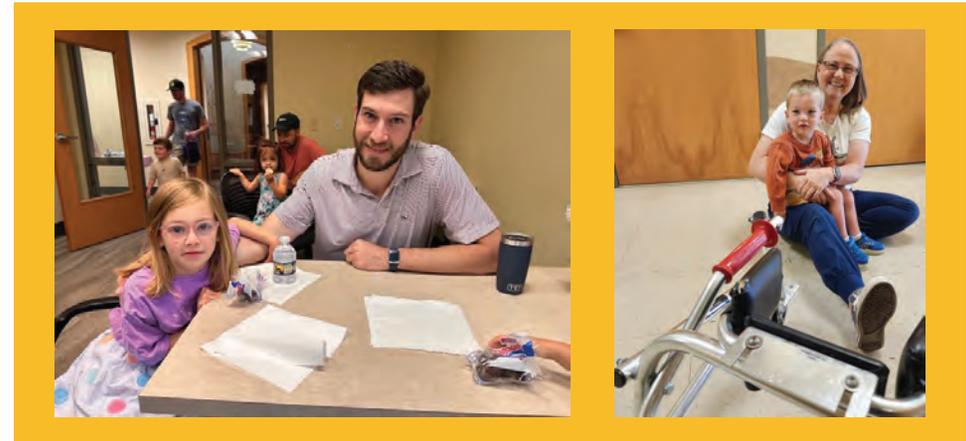


- Government* - 38%
- Program Revenue - 42%
- Fundraising and Events - 20%

First Steps partners with the Tennessee Department Disability and Aging and United Way of Greater Nashville



Have a **Donor Advised Fund (DAF)**? Donor Advised Funds are an excellent tool for unrestricted or designated giving. If you already have a DAF, simply request a grant distribution using First Steps' Tax ID #62-0674974.



CONSIDER A LEGACY GIFT

We invite you to sit down with your financial planner to explore unique ways to extend your philanthropic legacy. Make a significant impact while taking advantage of tax-saving strategies and income-production assets. Wills and living trusts, IRA charitable rollovers, stocks and insurance beneficiaries are just some of the many options you can consider.

Contact hhiggins@firststepsnashville.org if you have any questions about the agency's gift acceptance policy.



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