



# Annual Report FY24-25

Rooted in Community; Growing Futures Together

## A Message from Our CEO

"I just need to know my child is safe and learning while I'm at work." That's what we hear from parents across Forsyth County—working families doing everything they can to provide for their children while finding quality care they can trust and afford.

As President and CEO of Smart Start of Forsyth County, I am honored to share this 2024–2025 Impact Report and the stories of hope it represents. Behind every number is a family that found the care they needed, a child who started kindergarten ready to learn, and an educator who received the support to keep their doors open.

Early childhood is where futures begin. When families have access to nurturing, high-quality early learning experiences, children don't just survive—they thrive. They build confidence, discover their potential, and arrive at school ready. And parents can work and grow, knowing their children are in good hands.

This work is possible because of our extraordinary child care providers, educators, and community partners who show up every day with love and commitment, creating environments where children feel safe, valued, and excited to learn.

Together, we are building a Forsyth County where every child has access to the early experiences that shape healthy, hopeful futures. As you read through this report, I hope you feel the same sense of possibility that drives us forward.

Thank you for standing with Smart Start.

With deep appreciation,



Dr. Louis A. Finney Jr.  
President & CEO

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## Numbers at a glance

# 20,000+

served/impacted annually in Forsyth County.

### 300+

 North Carolina Family Resource Center

Families served through our S.T.A.R. Family Resource Center



### 797

children served through our North Carolina Pre-K program

### 4



formal apprenticeship site partnerships established

### 61



fathers & father figures served through our M.A.L.E. Fatherhood Initiative

### 24

parents/guardians accessed resilience resources to address adverse childhood trauma

### 177



child care professionals participated in professional development

### 28

child care facilities received technical assistance through our child care health consultation program.

### How We Count Impact

Child counts reflect the number of children directly served through Smart Start programs. Total individuals impacted includes parents, caregivers, and household members supported through those services, estimated using a consistent household multiplier.

# Strengthening Forsyth County's Early Childhood System



Smart Start of Forsyth County serves as the local backbone organization for early childhood education and family support. As part of North Carolina's statewide Smart Start network, we coordinate funding, partnerships, and services that ensure children from birth to age five have access to high-quality early learning experiences.

Across Forsyth County, families face barriers that can limit access to quality care — including cost, limited infant and toddler slots, workforce instability, and complex licensing systems. Providers often navigate fragmented supports, shifting regulations, and staffing shortages that affect classroom stability.

Smart Start responds by building a coordinated, equity-centered early childhood system. We remove barriers for families and strengthen the infrastructure providers rely on to deliver quality care

## How We Expand Access for Families

- Directly fund child care scholarships so working parents can afford quality care
- Manage and expand NC Pre-K classrooms across public schools, centers, and family child care homes
- Provide resource and referral services to help families make informed child care decisions
- Deliver home visiting and parent leadership programs that strengthen family resilience

By reducing financial and informational barriers, Smart Start ensures families can secure stable care environments that support children's development and allow parents to remain in the workforce.

## How We Strengthen Providers and the Workforce

- Provide one-on-one technical assistance to child care facilities countywide
- Support providers navigating licensing requirements and the star rating system
- Offer professional development and coaching to improve classroom quality
- Supplement educator salaries through WAGE\$ to reduce turnover
- Launch apprenticeship pathways to build the next generation of early educators

Through sustained partnerships with more than 150 child care facilities and community organizations, Smart Start strengthens both program quality and workforce stability.

## A Coordinated System, Not Fragmented Services

Early childhood systems work best when funding, quality supports, and family services are aligned. Smart Start integrates these efforts — connecting dollars, data, and partnerships to ensure investments translate into measurable improvements for children.

The result is a stronger early childhood ecosystem where families can access care, providers can sustain quality programs, and children enter kindergarten ready to succeed.



# Community Facing Funding



Smart Start of Forsyth County strengthens early childhood services by investing in trusted community partners that deliver child care, family support, early literacy, and workforce development across the county.

Over the past five years, Smart Start has received 18 grants totaling \$18,029,164 and awarded 294 grants to 106 organizations totaling \$38,808,985, serving as both a steward of philanthropic funds and a strategic investor in community-based impact.

In FY24–25, these partnerships expanded access, improved program quality, and supported families countywide.

## Our Community Investments:

### Child Care Scholarship - \$2,019,913

Invested directly in child care providers through scholarships across 46 centers and 13 family child care homes

### North Carolina Pre-K - \$4,085,890

Invested in high-quality Pre-K classrooms across Forsyth County

### Winston Salem/Forsyth County Schools - \$3,032,824

Supporting NC Pre-K classrooms and early childhood programs in public schools.

### Family Services - \$786,971

Providing comprehensive family support services that help parents navigate challenges and access resources.

### Child Care Resource Center - \$608,953

Offering technical assistance, training, and support to child care providers countywide.

### Early Years "WAGES" - \$401,000

Supplementing educator salaries to reduce turnover and retain experienced teachers.

### Imprints Cares - \$265,859

Home visiting program equipping parents with evidence-based strategies during the critical first five years.

### Forsyth Futures - \$199,717

Community-wide data collection through the ARPA Project.

### Prismatic Services - \$139,560

Community-wide evaluation through the ARPA Project.

### Hispanic League - \$103,140

Culturally responsive early childhood resources and support through the ARPA Project.

### Center for Exceptional Children - \$68,549

Research-based interventions building developmental skills for children with exceptional needs.

### Parenting Path - \$67,000

Evidence-based guidance and community connection during pregnancy and early years.



# Smart Start Funding and Additional Sources

Serving 20,000+ individuals annually across Forsyth County requires coordinated public and private funding that strengthens the entire early childhood system—from child care access to workforce support. From state contracts and federal relief funds to foundation grants and individual donations, each funding source plays a strategic role in ensuring Forsyth County's youngest children have what they need to thrive.



*"For four years, Smart Start's Imagination Library transformed our mailbox into a gateway of possibility. When COVID stole so much from our children, those monthly books reminded us that hope still arrives—one story at a time. My daughter would light up, asking 'Is my book here yet?'—and in that excitement, I saw her future taking shape. Today, she reads with confidence, surrounded by 48 books that are hers forever. But it's more than literacy—it's belief. Someone invested in her dreams before she could even read them. That's the power of this community. Your donation doesn't just send a book. It sends a message to a child: You matter. Your story matters. We believe in you. Please keep that hope alive for the next generation."*  
— Forsyth County Parent

## Our Funding Sources:

### NC Pre-K Contract – \$4,384,264

State funding supports high-quality pre-kindergarten classrooms for 747 children countywide.

### County ARPA Pre-K Cohort – \$3,700,000

Federal relief funds expanding Pre-K access during pandemic recovery.

### City ARPA Covid-19 Childcare Rescue – \$659,846

Emergency funding stabilizing child care providers and preventing closures.

### City ARPA Pre-K Cohort – \$350,000

City investment expanding early education access in underserved neighborhoods.

### United Way of Forsyth County – \$169,329

Partnership supporting multiple early childhood programs.

### Dolly Parton Imagination Library Private Donations – \$93,502

Community funding delivering 129,116 books to children's homes.

### Reynolds American Foundation – \$75,000

Corporate investment in early childhood infrastructure.

### Winston Salem Foundation – \$54,750

Local foundation support strengthening program quality.

### Special Event Fundraising – \$35,510

Community fundraisers providing flexible resources.

### Dolly Parton Imagination Library – \$34,000

Dollywood Foundation partnership supporting book distribution.

### Private Gifts, Grants and Interest – \$18,561

Individual donations enabling innovation and new opportunities.

### Program Income and Interest – \$6,348

Revenue from training fees and investments.

### Other – \$91,850.70

In-kind contributions and miscellaneous grants.



SSFC Leadership and Board Members at Forsyth County Board of County Commissioners Meeting

# ARPA GRANT OVERVIEW

2023-2025

## Staff Incentives

56

received salary equity and retention bonuses.

- \$475,371 paid in salary equity bonuses
- \$228,365 paid in retention bonuses

14

received tuition support. \$13,224 paid in tuition support.

Grant staff had an 82% retention rate.

## Professional Development

76 teachers/assistants received a total of 1,018 hours of professional development

## Translation Services

53 interpretation/translation services provided

## Family Advocates

13 Advocates served 36 classrooms and 762 students

## Health Services

90 students identified for screenings through 353 child health record audits



## Student and Classroom Outcomes

710 Students served in ARPA classrooms.

93% Students had literacy growth on the TS Gold and 62% on Brigance.

94% Students had language growth 6% on the TS Gold.

98% Students had math growth on the TS Gold and 62% on Brigance.

92% of parents were satisfied overall with their child's Pre-K.

# From Classrooms to Living Rooms: Direct Services Meeting Families Where They Are

Smart Start of Forsyth County delivers impact through strategic partnerships and direct services that strengthen families from multiple angles:

- \$11,086,478 total investment in early childhood education and family support
- Comprehensive services strengthening early childhood workforce
- Supporting thousands of children and families across Forsyth County
- Multi-faceted approach addressing education, health, and family needs

## Building a Stable Workforce: CHILD CARE WAGES®

Teacher turnover destabilizes classrooms and disrupts children's learning. When experienced educators leave due to low wages, children lose consistent relationships that support their development. The WAGES® program tackles this crisis head-on by supplementing salaries for early childhood professionals—making it financially viable to stay in the field they love.

### Program Impact:

- 152 early educators received salary supplements
- 72 child care programs participated countywide
- 3,709 children served by supported educators (ages 0–5)
- Turnover reduced to 12% vs. 38% statewide
- 96% of participants maintained or advanced their education

**What This Means:** By strengthening educator pay and retention, Smart Start ensures children experience stable, high-quality care with consistent teachers



## IMPRINTS CARES & PARENTS AS TEACHERS

These programs deliver personalized, research-based guidance directly to families' homes, helping parents understand child development and build nurturing environments.

### Program Impact:

- 128 children served through home visiting (ages 0–5)
- 134 parents/guardians participated in visits
- 95% reported increased parenting confidence
- 100% increased knowledge of child development

**What This Means:** Families gained practical tools and support to build nurturing home environments during the most critical early years.

## THE PARENTING PATH: WELCOME BABY

New parents face overwhelming decisions with limited support—from prenatal care to navigating the first years of life. These programs provide evidence-based guidance and community connection precisely when families need it most.

### Program Impact:

- 39 children served (ages 0–5)
- 26 parents/guardians participated in intensive home visits
- 100% of parents/guardians in support groups reporting increased parental knowledge
- 100% of parents/guardians in support groups reporting increased parenting skills

**What This Means:** New parents received trusted guidance and connection so they could navigate pregnancy and early childhood with confidence.

# From Classrooms to Living Rooms: Direct Services Meeting Families Where They Are

## CHILD CARE RESOURCE CENTER - STARS AND BEYOND

North Carolina's star rating system helps families identify quality child care, but many providers need support to improve. Our coaching and grants help child care homes achieve higher quality standards—transforming good programs into excellent ones.

### Program Impact:

- 21 family child care homes received quality improvement grants
- 54 coaching visits supported providers pursuing higher star ratings
- Average FCCERS scores increased by 1.9 points
- 100% of participants reported gaining new skills

**What This Means:** Providers strengthened classroom quality and families gained access to safer, higher-rated child care options.

## CHILD CARE RESOURCE CENTER - CHILD CARE RESOURCE & REFERRAL

Finding quality, affordable child care is one of the biggest challenges working families face. Our resource and referral services help families navigate options and make informed decisions about their children's care—connecting them with providers that meet their unique needs.

### Program Impact:

- 316 parents/guardians received referrals to child care providers
- 343 parents/guardians received consumer education support
- Over 89% reported information was accurate and helpful

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**What This Means:** Families don't navigate the complex child care landscape alone. They received personalized guidance to find affordable, high-quality child care that fits their needs.

## CENTER FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN - TRIPLE P

Effective parenting strategies reduce family stress and improve child outcomes, yet many parents lack access to proven approaches. Our Triple P programming delivers research-based techniques that build parenting confidence—equipping families with practical tools they can use immediately.

### Program Impact:

- 27 children served (ages 0-5)
- 26 parents/guardians participated in Level 2 Seminars or Level 4 Sessions
- 100% of parents/guardians in Level 4 Sessions reporting increased confidence caring for their children
- 97% of parents/guardians in Level 2 Seminars reporting sufficient knowledge gained to implement parenting advice

**What This Means:** Parents gained evidence-based strategies that reduce stress, strengthen relationships, and support healthy child development.

## A Comprehensive Support System

These programs work together to strengthen Forsyth County's early childhood ecosystem from multiple angles—empowering parents with effective strategies, elevating provider quality through coaching and grants, and connecting families to the right care. The result is a community where both families and providers have what they need to help children succeed.

# Building Strong Beginnings: Smart Start Programs & Services in Action



## DOLLY PARTON'S IMAGINATION LIBRARY

Throughout the 2024-2025 fiscal year, Smart Start:

- served 9,059 children across Forsyth County
- mailed 129,116 books directly to children's homes
- 80% of families reported reading with their children more frequently

**What This Means:** Children built early literacy skills and families established lasting reading habits at home.

## CHILD CARE SCHOLARSHIPS & EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE

### Program Impact:

- 334 children served through TANF child care subsidies
- 13 additional children supported through emergency assistance
- Scholarship placements supported 46 centers and 13 family child care homes
- 90% of families maintained employment due to child care assistance
- 100% reported improved access to high-quality care

**What This Means:** Affordable child care support stabilized working families and strengthened provider sustainability across Forsyth County.

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH & EDUCATION

### Program Impact:

- 24 community presentations delivered during FY24-25
- 174 outreach events attended across Forsyth County

**What This Means:** Smart Start connected families to resources by showing up directly in neighborhoods, schools, and community spaces.

## TEACHING & LEARNING SERVICES

### Program Impact:

- 69 child care staff received individualized technical assistance
- 177 child care professionals participated in professional development
- 48 licensed facilities engaged in quality improvement training
- ECERS-R scores increased by 0.9 points (preschool quality)
- ITERS-R scores increased by 0.8 points (infant-toddler quality)

**What This Means:** Educators strengthened classroom practices, improving learning environments and outcomes for young children.

## HEALTH CONSULTATION SERVICES

### Program Impact:

- 28 child care facilities received technical assistance
- 29 staff received individualized health consultation support
- 49 individuals participated in health and safety trainings
- 100% of classrooms rated "Needs Improvement" advanced in at least one area

**What This Means:** Providers improved health and safety standards, ensuring children are safer and families have greater peace of mind.



# Empowering Families, Building Workforce: Programs Creating Lasting Change



## FAMILY ENGAGEMENT & LEADERSHIP

Our leadership programming empowers families, fathers, and male caregivers with advocacy skills and child development knowledge to support their children's growth and well-being.

### Program Impact:

- 24 parents/guardians accessed resilience resources addressing adverse childhood trauma
- 54 parents/guardians attended at least one meeting during FY24–25
- 39 direct contact hours delivered through leadership and support programming

**What This Means:** Families strengthened advocacy skills, resilience, and connection, becoming stronger champions for their children's development.

## M.A.L.E. (Males Aspiring Long-Term Excellence)

Father engagement significantly impacts child development, yet programs often overlook the invaluable and sustaining impact of male caregivers. Our M.A.L.E. Initiative changes that—deliberately creating spaces where fathers and male caregivers are welcomed, valued, and equipped with tools to support their children's growth

### Program Impact:

- 61 fathers and father figures served through the M.A.L.E. Initiative
- 32 workshops delivered focused on fatherhood engagement and child development
- 48 instructional hours provided to participating caregivers
- 14 formal partnerships established with community organizations

**What This Means:** Engaged fathers strengthen children's academic, social, and emotional outcomes, and this program ensures male caregivers have support to show up fully.

## CAREER PATHWAYS INITIATIVES

Our apprenticeship program addresses critical early childhood workforce shortages by recruiting and training high school students for careers in early education, strengthening child care stability while creating new career opportunities.

### Program Impact:

- 4 formal apprenticeship site partnerships established with child care providers
- 5 high-performing students recruited into the apprenticeship pathway
- 12 foundational trainings completed in early childhood education and classroom practice
- Infrastructure established for full program launch in 2026

**What This Means:** By investing in young people now, Smart Start is building a stable early childhood workforce pipeline for Forsyth County's future.

## North Carolina Pre-K

Our NC Pre-K classrooms deliver comprehensive early education to children who need it most, driving strong demand and sustained impact.

### Program Impact:

- 747 children served through NC Pre-K during FY24–25
- 46 classrooms sustained across 25 center-based programs and 20 family child care homes
- 660 new applications submitted for the 2025–2026 school year

**What This Means:** High-quality pre-kindergarten prepared hundreds of children for kindergarten success, while growing demand reflects families' trust in the program.



## Lending Library

Access to quality learning materials should be available to support educators and apprentice educators. Our lending library provides educational toys, books, and resources that support child development.



## Diaper Bank

Thanks to Diaper Bank of North Carolina, Smart Start of Forsyth County received 108,410 diapers, 94,135 baby wipes, and 13,680 period products in 2025— with an in-kind value of \$50,377.70.



**DIAPER BANK**  
of North Carolina



## Family Resource Center

Families navigating early childhood often need help connecting to community resources. Our Family Resource Center serves as a one-stop hub for information, donated items, referrals, and support services.

**300+ Families assisted via Family Resource Center**



## City ARPA Transformational Child Care

COVID-19 devastated the child care industry, threatening the infrastructure working families depend on. City ARPA funding enabled us to expand high-quality Pre-K slots while strengthening the early childhood workforce through comprehensive supports.



children meeting Teaching Strategies Gold (TSG) widely held expectations in Math



children meeting TSG widely held expectations in Literacy



children meeting TSG widely held expectations in Language



children meeting TSG widely held expectations in Social Emotional





## **From Survival Mode to Confident Parenting: The Impact of This Partnership is Visible and Inspiring**

### **CFRC Stepping Stones: Finding Community in Crisis**

One participant in our Stepping Stones group, a mother with a Master's degree in Social Work and a medically involved child, had not walked since his birth. She provided valuable insights throughout the class and was surprised by how many new strategies she could implement in parenting. She shared the positive changes in her home, expressing how much more peaceful it became after the class. This was encouraging for us, as we know it's hard for parents in survival mode to think clearly about strategies, which can negatively impact their child's development. She would make a great facilitator for the class!

### **Smart Start CPI: Opening Doors to Career Pathways**

In May, we presented the SPARK Apprenticeship Program at Winston-Salem Preparatory Academy, engaging with five impressive high school students who had GPAs between 3.5 and 4.3 and 3 keen interests in early childhood education. They showed strong engagement with the program, all requesting follow-up contact, and 80% expressed interest in our paid training opportunities. Their enthusiasm continued and continues. The new provider is very excited to continue to build sustainable workforce pipelines

### **CCRC Stars and Beyond: From Nervous Beginner to**

**4-Star Provider:** A new family child care provider who just opened in February 2025, was very nervous through the new

FCCERS 3 assessment and scoring process, as this was her very first time. The Stars and Beyond coach helped to prepare her for the rating scale by working with her to learn each item on the scale, discussing in detail, as well as working on items strategically through a few coaching visits. The new provider was willing to absorb and learn all the information and take any feedback and apply it to her daily interactions and routines. The new provider is very excited to have scored as well as she did, being that it was her first time. The new provider is now a 4 star program.

### **Imprints Cares PAT: Building Connections That Last**

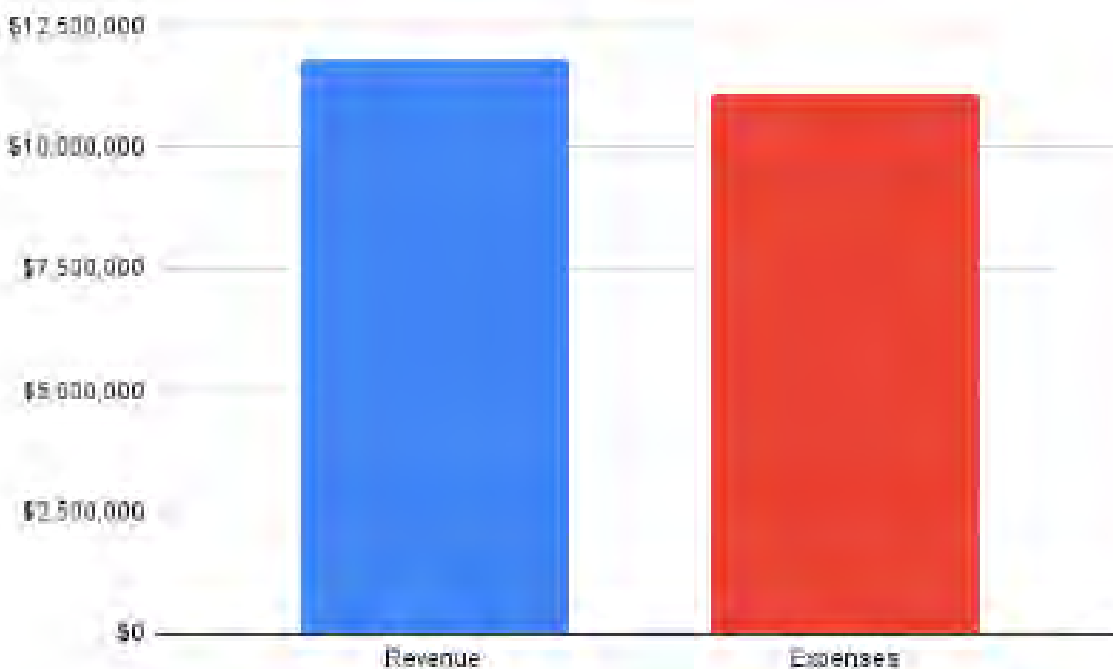
We have had 35 dads participate in our home visits thus far this year, and have had 24 dads attend a group connection. This year, we've had an impressive turnover of 35 dedicated dads who responded to one or more enriching home visits, fostering meaningful connections and learning opportunities. In addition, 24 dads joined us for a collaborative group connection, where they engaged in supportive discussions and shared experiences as a community.

### **Stories That Inspire Action**

These aren't isolated successes—they're examples of what happens when families and providers receive the right support at the right time. Behind every statistic in this report is a real person whose life changed because Smart Start showed up with resources, expertise, and belief in their potential. This is the work that matters.



## Revenue vs Expenses



## Financial Monitoring and Audit Results

Smart Start managed \$11.79 million in total revenue and expended \$11.09 million in programs and operations during FY24–25. This represents real dollars going to real families—helping parents afford quality child care, supporting educators with better pay, placing children in Pre-K classrooms, and delivering books to doorsteps across Forsyth County.

But investing community resources comes with serious responsibility. That’s why Smart Start undergoes rigorous annual reviews to ensure every dollar is managed properly and used effectively.

**Independent Financial Audit:** An independent auditor performed an OMB Uniform Guidance (Single) Audit. The audit report states that the financial statements are presented fairly, in all

material respects, and that the organization complied, in all material respects, with the requirements of its major federal programs.

**State Program Review:** The NC Division of Child Development and Early Education reviewed both our finances and our programs. The result? A strong fiscal summary and no programmatic concerns identified across any of our services—from NC Pre-K to child care scholarships to family support.

**Partnership Monitoring:** The North Carolina Partnership for Children monitored our operations and found no concerns in how we manage contracts, track finances, or run our board. Where they offered suggestions to make our procedures even stronger, we adopted and implemented them immediately.

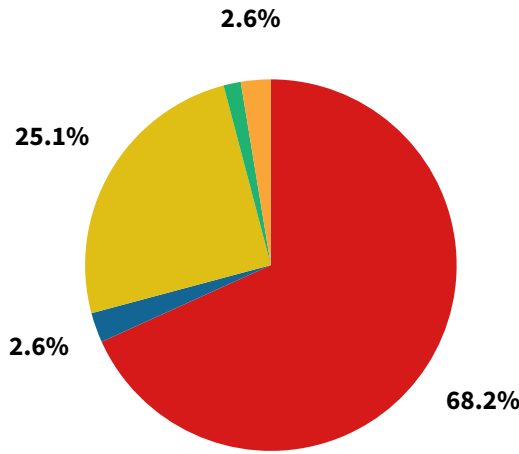
# Financials

## Revenue

Reporting Period: July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025

Federal- \$2,957,732  
 State- \$8,052,083  
 Local- \$303,211  
 Foundation- \$172,768  
 Other- \$300,664

**Total-\$11,786,458**



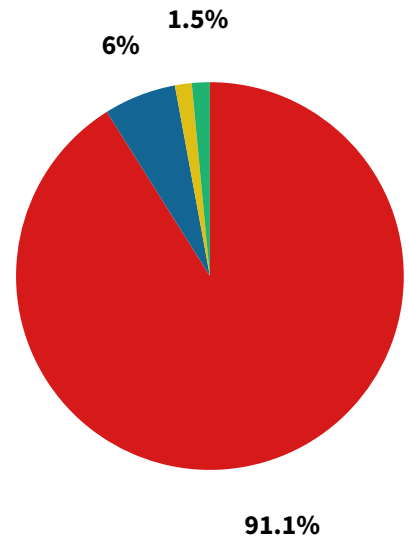
- State
- Local
- Federal
- Foundation
- Other

## Expenses

Reporting Period: July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025

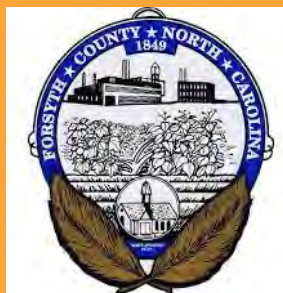
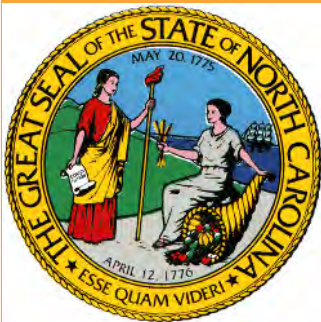
Programs- \$10,109,373  
 Management and General- \$662,024  
 Program Planning, Coordination, and Evaluation- \$162,279  
 Other- \$152,802

**Total-\$11,086,478**



- Programs
- Management and General
- Other
- Program Planning, Coordination, and Evaluation

# Thank You to Our Funders



# Donors



## Premier Sponsors

< \$7,000  
Anonymous Donor

## Next Generation Sponsors

\$5,000-\$6,999

KAPLAN  
Five and Below

## First Generation Sponsors

\$2,500-\$4,999

Canterbury Kids  
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## Tomorrow's Child Sponsors

\$1,000-\$2,499

Jessica McCrory	Family Services	Elite Benefits Group
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Melissa Womack	Celebrate	University
Novant	Success Early	Winston-Salem
Health	Learning	Police Department

## Today's Child Sponsors

\$500-\$999

Crossnore  
Doug Punger

## Friends of Smart Start Sponsors

> \$499

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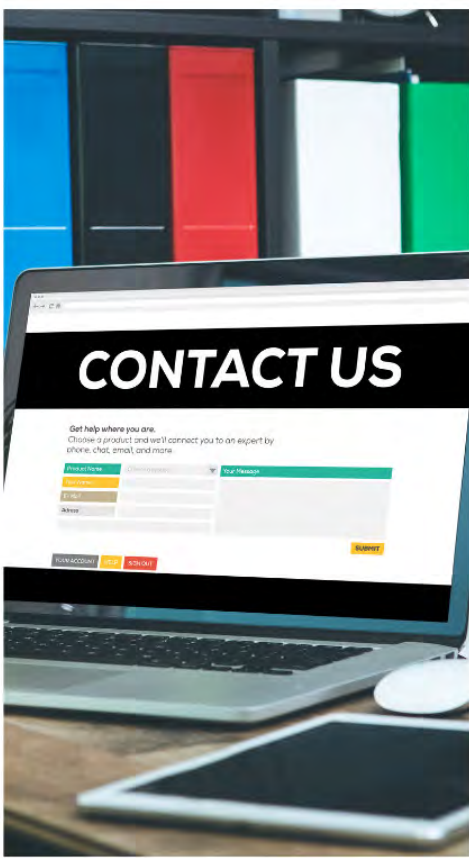
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