**First Step Annual Report 2020**

**First Step Child Care Center—Partner Agency**

**Program Name: First Step Child Care Center, Inc.**

**Address: 22025 Governors Hwy, Richton Park, IL 60471**

**Phone Number:**   (708) 747-3000

**Fax Number:**   (708) 747-5000

**Head Start Director Name:**  Ellie Giberson

**Head Start Director Email:**  egiberson@fs3c.com

**Agency Web Site Address:**   firststepofrichtonpark.com

**Agency Type:**   For-Profit

**Agency Description:**

First Step Child Care Center is a for-profit child care and early learning center which facilitates the development of the whole child through carefully designed experiences that tap into the child’s natural curiosity and developmental readiness. We know that every child’s emotional well-being is vitally important to their development, and our warm and loving staff provide a stable, nurturing environment where children can thrive. All our learning experiences are individualized to meet each child where they are in their development. Our teaching and administrative staff are dedicated to continual research and professional learning in child development and the best practices in early childhood education.

First Step Child Care Center has been providing a safe and nurturing environment in Richton Park, IL since 1999. This family-owned business cares for children from 6 weeks to 5 years of age. We are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and are a Gold Circle Center with the Illinois ExceleRate System for child care centers.

**Community Areas Served**

* Crete
* Park Forest
* Richton Park
* Matteson
* Steger
* University Park
* Chicago Heights

# 

# Overall Grantee Budget 2020

**Total Public and Private Funds received:** $

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Public Funds** | | **Private Funds** | |
| **Source** | **Amount** | **Source** | **Amount** |
| Federal | $905,913 | Individuals, Corporations,  Foundations, etc. |  |
| State |  | In-kind | $326,090 |
| Local School District |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
| **Total** | $905,913 | **Total** | $326,090 |

­­­­­­­­­­­**2020 Budget and Actual Expenditures**

**Summary of your most current Community Assessment**

# Children and Families Served in 2020

**Grantee Funded Enrollment**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Head Start Enrollment** | **Early Head Start Enrollment** |
| **Center-based Program** |  |  |
| **a. 5 days per week** |  |  |
| **1. Full-day enrollment** | 58 | 47 |
| **2. Part-day enrollment** |  |  |
| **b. 4 days per week** |  |  |
| **1. Full-day enrollment** |  |  |
| **2. Part-day enrollment** |  |  |
| **Home-based Program** |  |  |
| **Unallocated Slots** |  |  |
| **Total:** | 58 | 47 |

**Site:**

Total Children Served: 105 Total Families Served: 65

Average monthly enrollment (as percentage of funded enrollment): 51%

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Number of Eligible Children in Community, ages 0-5 | 1052 |
| Percentage of children served in agency | 10% |
|  |  |

# Health

**Percentage of enrolled children who received medical and dental exams**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Received Medical Exams** | **Received Dental Exams** |
|  | 80% | 82% |

# Parental involvement in Directly Operated, Delegate and Partner Agencies

**Community Assessment Summary:**

Parents contribute to our community assessment survey annually. Their input about the strengths and challenges in the community, both for their family and specifically for their Early/Head Start child, are valuable parts of the Community Assessment we put together annually. This input helps us plan for future recruitment, community partnerships, and program offerings that can mutually benefit our families and our center.

**Parent Education Activities**

Our Parent Committee meetings are held on the first Monday of every month, providing an opportunity for families to connect, share their experiences and get involved in the operations of the program. Parents are encouraged to be active participants in the decision-making process and their input is invaluable to planning at First Step. Staff changes, curriculum changes, fiscal reports, and policy decisions are presented to our Parent Committee for consultation. In 2020, we started using a virtual platform for our meetings due to the COVID pandemic. While virtual attendance dropped, our dedicated parents continued to influence our decision-making as we navigated the ever-changing requirements of the pandemic.

While the pandemic put a halt to our in-person family events, we continue to offer virtual family activities for our families. From Male Involvement activities like Fitness with Dad and Building Butterfly Houses, to family activities like Skittles Science and Stories and Snacks, families continued to spend quality time with their child and their child’s classmates.

We value the ability and opportunities to help our parents learn more about their child’s development, and we continue to offer virtual events that facilitate this learning. We provide monthly virtual Parents as Teachers activities, which offer opportunities for parents and children to come together for age-appropriate learning activities with other parents and children. Activities are facilitated by our Family Support Specialists and utilize simple materials found in every home. We also offer periodic trainings focused on wellness, nutrition, health, and safety.

**Health**

In 2020, our focus shifted to helping families navigate the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges the pandemic created around routine healthcare. We provided ongoing education and resources about immunizations, well-child visits, and oral health, and utilized community partners to help secure needed services. We also brought greater focus to learning activities for the children around nutrition, exercise, and hygiene as we worked hard to keep everyone healthy.

**Mental Health**

Both the pandemic and the events in our world in 2020 caused a great deal of stress, fatigue, and trauma in the lives of everybody. Our children, staff, and families were no exception. We continued to utilize our Wellness Consultant in 2020, with an intense focus on recognizing and responding to signs of stress and trauma in young children. We started a staff wellness program that incorporated trainings and activities designed to help them deal with everything affecting them, including the new stresses of caring for children in light of the pandemic.

We introduced a wellness program to our children, staff, and families in 2020 called Conscious Discipline. This focuses on helping adults to recognize their own emotional states of being, so they can help young children begin to regulate their emotions. Using fun tools like puppets, books, and activity boards, children learn to create a safe and supportive classroom community as they build developmentally appropriate social skills.

**Community and Social Services**

Our Family Support Specialists consult individually with families to identify their needs and work diligently to assist them in accessing services they need. The COVID-19 pandemic brought many new challenges to families, and we worked with many community partners to help families navigate these new challenges. This has led us to focus on the partnerships we have in the community, and to work on developing others that we see a need for.

**Education and Literacy**

The education of your child is one of our top priorities. First Step Child Care Center uses Creative Curriculum, which aligns with the Head Start Framework and the Illinois State Learning Standards and Guidelines. Creative Curriculum focuses on creating a learning environment that fosters a child’s growth in all developmental areas, using play, small group activities, and whole-class instruction. Special attention is given to the development of literacy and mathematic skills by incorporating opportunities to develop these skills throughout every transition, activity, and learning center. The curriculum supports the use of Teaching Strategies, which is used to assess children’s growth and development as they learn. Utilizing all these tools and continually evaluating our children’s needs as well as our practices, we seek to respond to the data in order to meet the child’s individual needs.

We value and recognize parents as their child’s very first teacher. Our desire is to partner with the parents to prepare children for future academic and social success. Quarterly conferences offer our Head Start families an opportunity to ask questions about the program, give voice to their concerns and provide input on the individual needs of their child. Parents and teachers work together to create goals for each child, which teachers reference when planning classroom activities and experiences. Observations are gathered weekly to help teachers assess each child’s progress towards meeting these goals.

# Kindergarten Readiness

Special consideration is given to those children entering Kindergarten the next year. Parents and teachers work together to ensure the child is learning all the skills they will need for a successful transition to kindergarten throughout the entire school year. In 2020, we celebrated 23 Head Start children who completed our program and transitioned to the various local schools in our communities.

Because of the pandemic, we were not able to take these children to visit their new schools like we usually do, but we provided several other transition events to help them prepare for their new experiences. Each family received a bag of books and activities to work together on at home. Classrooms took a virtual web-based tour of a typical Kindergarten classroom and watched videos about riding a school bus, going to assemblies, eating in a cafeteria, and other activities that may be new to them. We also helped families prepare for the transition by holding a virtual event with a local Kindergarten teacher who provided additional information for families.

# Summary of Audit Findings

# Summary of Information Required by the Secretary

The Ounce Board of Directors and Policy Council were given brief summaries and links to all Program Instructions and Information Memorandums