FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Learning Starts Early Seeks to Ensure Kindergarten Readiness for All

WARENTON: Did you know that nearly 1 in 5 children entering kindergarten in Fauquier County do not meet state-established reading readiness benchmarks and that another 22% of kindergartners have not attended a pre-kindergarten program? Each of these statistics is sobering because quite often, these children find it difficult or impossible to catch up with their peers, which can lead to more difficult life obstacles.

Late in 2013, a group of parishioners from Saint James’ Episcopal Church in Warrenton, including Bob Dart and Eileen Burgwyn, set in motion a program to reverse the tide. They established a fund called “Learning Starts Early” through the Northern Piedmont Community Foundation, which currently oversees more than 100 customized funds that support both broad and specific community causes.

Most recently, the fund was officially converted to a 501(c)(3) organization through the Community Foundation, whose investment teams continue to grow Learn Starts Early’s assets. Acquiring nonprofit status also gives the organization the ability to apply for grants, thus greatly increasing their potential impact on immediate and long-term concerns.

While there are preschool programs available to at-risk children, including Head Start and the Virginia Preschool Initiative, it’s important to note that many families aren’t eligible for them yet still can’t afford to send their child to preschool. Learning Starts Early seeks to reach these families.

One of the organization’s earliest initiatives was to partner with Fauquier County Public Schools to form a preschool coalition—a group that meets monthly with directors of private and public preschools to discuss their needs and concerns. These discussions have been a guiding force in Learning Starts Early’s fund distribution to urgent causes.

To date, the nonprofit has provided funding for a variety of crucial preschool needs, including:
- Professional development on various early childhood education topics for private and public preschool educators in the county
- Mats and other supplies for Caring for Angels, an early childhood program run by Community Touch
- A SMART board and supplies to enhance the Head Start reading program
- Scholarships for seven children to attend Saint James’ preschool
- Peter McCory performances at Head Start in 2018 and 2019
- A simultaneous translation system to support ESL children and parents

Please consider donating to Learning Starts Early; checks can be sent to P.O. Box 3385, Warrenton, VA 20188, or you can donate directly through the Northern Piedmont Community Foundation’s website—visit www.npcf.org and click on “Donate Now.”

You can also support the organization by participating in its signature fundraiser, “Gobble, Bobble, Run or Wobble 5K and Kids’ Dash,” to be held on Saturday, November 23. Learn more about the event at https://runsignup.com/Race/VA/Warrenton/GobbleGobbleRunorWobble.