

# Community Heart & Soul®

— Guided by what matters most —

## KERSHAW, SOUTH CAROLINA

Founded in 1888, Kershaw, South Carolina began as Welsh's Station on the railroad from Charleston to Chicago. Kershaw residents still refer to the town as the ideal spot because of its central location between Charlotte and Columbia, as well as between Blue Ridge Mountains and the Atlantic Coast.

POPULATION:  
2,100

CHALLENGE:  
Community  
connection, civic  
participation

FOCUS: Building  
community  
networks

KEY TOOL:  
Collaborative  
events

A midlands jewel of the Palmetto State, Kershaw residents have contributed to South Carolina's economy through mining gold and granite, growing soybeans and corn, and producing textiles - all the while building community resiliency, hope, faith, and cherished family memories. With a rich history behind it, but an uncertain future, the Town of Kershaw and its residents embraced the potential that Heart & Soul had to offer.

### Kershaw "by the numbers":

- 15 local partners engaged the Heart & Soul Team to gather stories and commit to large scale community action.
- 1,300 – The number of surveys collected by the Heart & Soul Team.
- 200 – Individual resident interviews hosted to determine what matters most.
- 10,000 –Easter Eggs hidden at the 2019 joint Easter Egg Hunt hosted by over 25 churches and organizations in Kershaw.

### Local conditions:

With financial and mentoring support from the Arras Foundation in Lancaster, South Carolina, Kershaw initiated Heart & Soul to build local communication networks, involve youth, seniors, and the faith community in revitalizing community life, and to create a new culture of collaboration and connection to act upon shared community goals. Town leaders envisioned increased local participation in municipal life so more voices could be heard. Business owners relished the chance to build stronger relationships within the community, and nonprofit partners dreamed of rebuilding the trust and pride needed to expand and strengthen educational and social services.

### Partnership:

The Arras Foundation brought the Community Heart & Soul initiative to this region of South Carolina and supported our community efforts. A vital partner to Kershaw's Heart and Soul initiative, the Arras Foundation contributed shared learning opportunities, a designated Heart & Soul coach, overall staff support, and funding to our project.



## Volunteer and Community Response:

From October 2018 through September 2019, the Heart & Soul Team gathered the thoughts of residents regarding “the good, the bad, and the ugly of zip code 29067”. The process involved several styles of story gathering including:

- Hosting special events to promote grassroots conversations.
- Collaborating with local organizations and churches to provide resourceful, family-friendly events which demonstrated a renewed spirit of community to all involved.
- Surveying residents about what matters most at local events, while gathering individual stories during events such as the “Sit-a-Spell” (rocking chair interviews).
- Popping into churches and showing up in classrooms to keep the Heart & Soul buzz alive.
- Setting up COVID friendly action idea prioritization activities for passerby’s (walking or driving) to maintain contact during the pandemic.

Kershaw residents grew leadership skills alongside the community’s work and increased communication and collaboration between residents and the Town along the way. As one Heart & Soul Team member shared, “The overall take away here is that we discovered the joy of collaboration. Heart & Soul served as a shared agenda and centerpiece to keep everyone together and moving in the same direction...”

## Heart & Soul Outcomes:

According to Kershaw’s Collaborative Community Action Plan, “Relationships and partnerships will be a key component of stewardship. Our stewardship will be the fulfillment of what matters most to Kershaw, based on input from the community in its entirety. The end goal is to empower, through collaboration among all stakeholders, the voice of the community in the decision-making for Kershaw.”

Even before the Action Plan started, Kershaw residents saw the following successes:

- *New South Carolina First Steps Program* - Currently under construction, this state-of-the-art facility is the restoration of an iconic downtown landmark and is scheduled to open Fall 2022. The program will provide much needed early childhood education.
- *Placemaking and Library Relocation* - Lancaster County purchased the vacant Wells Fargo Building to relocate the branch library in the heart of downtown Kershaw. The second floor will include offices for community organizations and a public computer lab, contributing to the “education corridor” in the heart of Downtown.
- *Engaged Local Youth* - Continued engagement with local schools is encouraging youth involvement in sharing their hopes and dreams for Kershaw. Interest exists to continue student engagement with Heart and Soul during stewardship.
- *Prioritization of Health* - Lancaster County and the Lancaster Recreation Advisory Council unveiled plans for a new sports complex in the Heath Springs area. In addition, partners are collaborating to expand walking trails and access for people with mobility challenges at Stevens Park and the Marion Boan Center.
- *Increased Communication* - Through improved social media and web presence, communication of events, news, and alerts has become much more efficient. Relationships with local media have been established and strengthened. Heart & Soul reports at Town meetings.
- *Town Action* – The Town has a renewed focus on solving zoning challenges, engaging the community, and working closely with the Heart & Soul Stewardship Team on the Collaborative Community Action Plan.