



**The Newsletter for
Indiana Early Intervention**

August 2025

FirstSteps.IN.gov

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Transformative milestones

Dear Colleagues,

This year we are celebrating some truly transformative milestones that remind us why our work in Indiana First Steps matters.



Christina Commons
First Steps director

In Indiana, Head Start programs are a cornerstone of early childhood education and a testament to 60 years of transformative impact. Launched in 1965, Head Start was established to help children build a solid foundation for lifelong success—supporting their learning and development from the start, in partnership with families and communities. Over the decades, the program has prepared nearly 40 million children for academic success while building communities anchored in health, nutrition and family support.

Here in Indiana, these federally funded initiatives go beyond early learning by offering essential services like health screenings, nutrition support and family services to low-income communities. With programs available in every county, Head Start and Early Head Start work closely with local families and community partners such as First Steps to ensure that every child is not only prepared for school but truly thrives in an environment of support and opportunity.

Equally transformative is the legacy of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which marks its 50th anniversary this year. Since its passage in 1975, IDEA annually supports over 300,000 infants and toddlers and nearly 7.5 million children aged 3 to 21. It redefined educational policy and access by ensuring that children with disabilities receive a free, appropriate public education tailored to their unique needs. This landmark law has opened doors to countless students, challenging us to break down barriers and create environments where every learner is welcomed and empowered to succeed.

In Indiana, this vision is brought to life through the First Steps program, which provides early intervention services to almost 27,000 infants and toddlers showing developmental delays or disabilities. Through First Steps, our state connects families with a coordinated network of support, exemplifying IDEA's enduring commitment to inclusion and lifelong opportunity.

These milestones are a powerful reminder that the legacies of Head Start and IDEA aren't just historical achievements, they are the foundations of our everyday work. They inspire us to create real opportunities for every child and family. Thank you for being part of this collective work and for nurturing the potential of children and families across Indiana.

In appreciation,

Christina

Please like and follow us on Facebook  and Instagram 
You can find us by searching @FirstStepsIndiana.

The First Steps Interagency Coordinating Council is a governor-appointed body required by Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The role of the ICC is to advise and assist the state's early intervention team in developing and maintaining an early intervention system of the highest quality and balancing family-centered services with fiscal responsibility. Its membership is comprised of parents of children with delays and/or disabilities, state agency groups, early intervention service providers, legislators and others. The ICC meetings are open to the public. The next ICC meeting will be hosted in person **from 10 to 1 p.m. ET on Wednesday, Aug. 20**. There will also be an online option to attend virtually via Zoom. Please [click here for meeting details](#).



Check out these EIHub updates



The Bureau of Child Development Services continues to work collaboratively with Public Consulting Group to increase user effectiveness of EIHub.

Since March, the state team has successfully deployed the Progress Note into Service Logging. We have also released memo clarification on how to enter make-up visits and services

rendered by PTAs and COTAs into case management.

On July 24, we implemented our third of four case management and service logging releases. Within the Case Management module updates include ease of data entry, validations to improve data quality and functional changes that are foundational for upcoming releases. Specifics to Case Management include:

- FCP process safeguards
- Address entry simplicity
- Exit and re-opening validations
- New time-out logic
- Validations to ensure quality data at every stage

This release also included improve-

ments to the Service Logging module, including:

- Therapist discipline is now displayed on print to PDF of face-to-face and Progress Note forms
- Progress Note improvements

Following the fourth and final EI Hub gap release, the state team will begin on the addition of the IFSP in EI Hub. Staff from SPOE offices across the state have graciously volunteered to participate in an IFSP working group to assist in design and implementation.

Thank you for your partnership and willingness to test aspects of EIHub when needed. We are working diligently to ensure the system improves one release at a time.



Do you or a member of your team need assistance logging into our First Steps EI Hub Learning Management System? Whether you require individualized support or guidance for a group, our state training team is here to provide the assistance you need. Email the First Steps web at firststepsweb@fssa.in.gov to be connected to technical assistance support. We encourage you to log into the EI Hub Learning Management System and explore the new training modules that have recently been added as well as keynotes and break-out sessions from previous Indiana Early Intervention Conferences.

Why FGRBI matters to you as a provider

Join the 2025 Family Guided Routines-Based Intervention Professional Development Sequence

Family Guided Routines Based Intervention is an essential opportunity to grow your skills and deepen your impact on the families and children you serve.

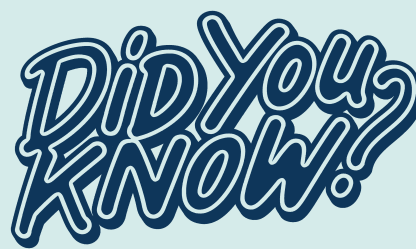
This professional development sequence is more than just training—it's a commitment to best practices grounded in the Division for Early Childhood Recommended Practices and fully aligned with Indiana First Steps' mission to provide family-centered, evidence-based early intervention.

Why this matters to you as a provider

FGRBI equips you with strategies to deliver early intervention services within the context of everyday routines and activities, empowering families to support their child's learning during real-life moments. This approach not only supports stronger developmental outcomes but also reinforces the critical role of families as active partners. Here's how FGRBI supports your professional practice:

- Promotes functional, meaningful outcomes that are embedded in daily life, not just therapy sessions
- Builds caregiver capacity through coaching and collaboration
- Enhances child engagement and participation in natural environments
- Aligns with the DEC principles of family-centered practices, inclusion and effective teaming
- Supporting Indiana First Steps Priorities
- By participating in this PD sequence, you are directly contributing to statewide goals of:
- Improving the quality and consistency of early intervention services
- Promoting equitable and culturally responsive practices
- Strengthening family-professional partnerships to support sustainable developmental progress

Let's continue working together to provide high-quality intervention that meets families where they are. We strongly encourage all providers—new and seasoned—to engage in this critical professional development journey. Together, we can ensure every child can thrive in the routines that matter most.



ECE technical assistance

Did you know the Early Childhood Center provides strengths-based, stakeholder-informed [technical assistance](#) to support Indiana's First Steps system? Aligned with IDEA and research-informed national guidance, the ECC team is available to SPOE and agency leaders across the state to locate and share resources, clarify policies and procedures, address specific challenges in the field, and problem-solve systemic needs collaboratively.

Requests for technical assistance should come from SPOE or agency leadership. However, all First Steps providers are encouraged to raise questions with their local leaders, who can then submit a request to our team as needed.

Since technical assistance has been initiated, we have received a wide variety of requests from across the state and have been able to clarify questions around EI Hub documentation, family engagement, confidentiality and service delivery models. Additionally, we have supported teams with compliance and procedure revisions to ensure alignment with federal and state regulations.

We're here to work alongside your SPOE or agency. Whether the need is simple or complex, we're here to help—just email eccenter@iu.edu with your name, agency or SPOE name, phone and preferred contact method. Or [complete our online form](#). You'll receive a response within two business days.

Let's problem-solve together!

Professional Development Needs Survey

What EI professionals told us

The 2025 Professional Development Needs Survey highlighted the trainings and continuing education Indiana’s early intervention professionals are most interested in. With input from over 600 Indiana First Steps personnel—including service coordinators, direct service providers, eligibility determination team providers and program leaders—this data will help shape professional learning that is relevant, accessible and family-focused. The four highest-ranked areas for professional development across all roles and years of experience were:

- Family engagement and support
- State and federal law
- Service coordination

- Assessment, IFSP development and intervention
- When asked about family engagement focus areas for future training, EI professionals showed a strong interest in:
- Strategies for engaging families
- Helping families cope with diagnosis/delays
- Coaching families

First Steps personnel also rated the most common barriers to attending professional development, the top three being limited time availability, financial considerations and lack of awareness of available training. To that end, survey respondents requested asynchronous webinars/

modules, virtual live events and consistent training updates via email.

What comes next...

These findings will directly inform how training is delivered in 2025 and beyond. Whether through short, self-paced courses or live virtual workshops, the goal is to ensure that every provider can access high-quality learning on their schedule, in their format and in alignment with what families truly need.

We truly appreciate those of you who took the time to take the Needs Assessment Survey. Your valuable input will help guide the decisions on what and how professional development is delivered to the field. We thank you.

National Webinar Series Highlights

During the Spring 2025 National Webinar, Sarah Nichols from the University of Illinois and Ted Burke of the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center shared an insightful overview of the many resources available to Early Intervention practitioners.

Sarah highlighted tools from the Division for Early Childhood, including the new ethical position statement, recommended practices with practical examples, and the benefits of participating in communities of practice for ongoing learning and networking. Ted introduced resources from ECTA, such as performance checklists, practice guides for families and professionals, and support for understanding legislative frameworks and system development. Sarah and Ted also discussed strategies to stay current with evi-

dence-based practices, including:

- Attending webinars and conferences
- Using self-assessment tools to identify areas for growth
- Exploring online resources like practice guides and toolkits
- Engaging with current research
- Leveraging new technologies like Artificial Intelligence
- Building strong relationships with peers, mentors and system partners to share knowledge and collaborate effectively

We invite all First Steps professionals to connect with the wider EI community, enhancing the support and outcomes we deliver to children and families.



Sarah Nichols, Professional Development Specialist



Ted Burke, President of the Executive Board of Directors for the DEC

Early Intervention Training Program at the University of Illinois	DEC Recommended Practices with Examples	ECTA Center Practice Guides for Practitioners	IFSP Self-assessment Practices
The ECTA Center	DEC Communities of Practice	ECTA Center Systems	Using the DEC Recommended Practices
DEC Recommended Practices	ECTA Center Performance Checklists	DEC’s eLearning Library	NIEER New Research
DEC Position Statement on Ethical Practice	ECTA Center Practice Guides for Families	DEC’s 41st Annual International Conference	Microsoft Copilot

Indiana Head Start Association

Celebrating and honoring 60 years of Head Start

Rhett Cecil, Executive Director

In 1965, Project Head Start began as an eight-week summer program from the Office of Economic Opportunity. Over the past 60 years, Head Start has evolved to provide low-income children and families with comprehensive preschool and child care services that include addressing health, dental and nutritional needs, with a focus on parent engagement and involvement for close to 13,000 Hoosier children and families annually. In addition to offering high-quality early education through home visiting, child care and classroom settings, Head Start and Early Head Start programs in Indiana ensure children have access to comprehensive health care services.

Head Start supports parents so they can provide for their families and contribute to the workforce: By offering affordable early education and childcare options in communities across Indiana, many of which are in a child care desert, Head Start

in Indiana enables parents to work, pursue higher education or participate in job training.

Head Start focuses on strengthening families: Head Start's family-centered approach actively engages parents as their children's first and most important teachers, reinforcing the role of family in child development. It promotes parent and family autonomy and empowers parents to strengthen their parenting skills through resources, training and opportunities for decision-making and leadership.

As we all know, the Head Start and Early Head Start model emphasizes community partnerships across the mixed delivery system in order to more effectively serve children and families and to connect our families with crucial services, resources and partners during these critical early years. [Head Start and Early Head Start programs here in our state](#) are extraordinarily grateful for our community and state-wide partner-

ships, such as the one we share with First Steps, that provide crucial early intervention services for our children and families. We look to continue to grow our collaborative partnerships to provide the best options and services for the children and families we all serve here in Indiana.

As we celebrate and honor 60 years of Head Start, we also took time to recognize the individuals and partners who walk alongside us in this mission—those who work behind the scenes and in the spotlight to strengthen our programs and advocate for our children. IHSA and the Head Start and Early Head Start family recently celebrated Head Start's 60th birthday at an Indianapolis Indians game.

But our outing was more than a celebration; it was a reflection of our values, passion and the deep roots we've planted throughout the state of Indiana. Thank you to everyone who made this milestone possible—we are only just beginning!



IHSA and the Head Start and Early Head Start family recently celebrated Head Start's 60th birthday at an Indianapolis Indians game.



Reach Services sparks student interest in Early Intervention careers

Dynamic student-centered strategy inspires the next generation of EI providers

Since joining the First Steps network in 2023, Reach Services in Terre Haute, Ind., has wasted no time finding creative ways to meet the growing demand for pediatric therapy professionals. Carley Lee, Director of Children's Services, recognized the urgent need to recruit not only physical therapists for First Steps early intervention services, but also for Reach's outpatient pediatric clinic.

Rather than relying solely on traditional recruitment, Carley launched a dynamic student-centered strategy to inspire the next generation of early intervention providers. Her approach includes attending regional job fairs, posting positions on job boards and cultivating



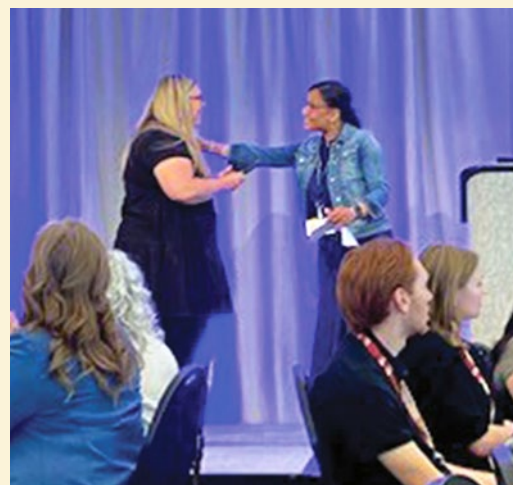
strong connections with local training programs—especially [Indiana State University](#). Located in Terre Haute, the university offers degrees in physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech-language pathology, and early childhood education.

Carley and her team have also built a partnership with [Indiana State's physical therapy program](#). As part of their pediatric coursework, students visit Reach's clinic in small groups to conduct Peabody Developmental Motor Scales evaluations with real children referred for therapy. To seek family volunteers to participate, Reach starts with the clinic's wait list or asks First Steps providers if they have families they work with who may be interested in a screening. The event provides students with an authentic experience while helping Reach hire qualified therapists and ensures children and families get the services they need.

"We have a fun partnership with the Indiana State University physical therapy program," Carley shares. "Students get valuable hands-on experience with real kids, and they engage with our staff—opening doors to future employment after graduation. I've heard nothing but positive feedback from the students."

Congratulations to Carley and the Reach Services team for thinking outside the box and building a model that benefits students, families, and the future of pediatric therapy in Indiana.

If you have a colleague, agency, SPOE, family, early intervention practice you would like to "Spotlight" in the First Steps newsletter, please send your suggestions to constance.young@fssa.in.gov.



Amber Jackson earns DEC Children's Champion Award

The Indiana Division of Early Childhood was proud to present the Inaugural Children's Champion Award to Amber Jackson at the 2025 Indiana Early Intervention Conference.

Amber has served as a Special Education Preschool Teacher in Washington Township since 2010, where she works at the intersection of compassion and expertise. Her focus is on supporting preschool students with diverse learning needs by using a whole-child team approach. Collaborating with speech therapists, occupational and physical therapists, school psychologists, social workers and mental health professionals, Amber ensures that every child's developmental and emotional needs are supported from day one.

Amber's commitment to inclusion extends far beyond the classroom. From 2013 to 2020, she served as the Special Needs Ministry Coordinator at St. Luke's United Methodist Church, where she helped launch a ministry designed to support families of children with special needs. Through this role, she made church activities more inclusive and accessible, organizing sensory-friendly events and providing child care that allowed parents to connect with their community.

Attention all early interventionists

Registered IN EI Hub users: The Learning Management System is at your fingertips! Dive into First Steps webinars and training, including those required for initial credentialing, all available on the IN EI Hub LMS. Curious to learn more? [Watch the video](#) to see the LMS in action.

New training modules now available! We have recently added exciting new modules to support your professional growth. You are encouraged to visit the Learning Management System and check out the new additions, including Foundations of Early Intervention, Developing High-Quality Outcomes, Benchmarks and Short-Term Goals.

Professional development opportunities: Remember, you can also take courses outside of the LMS for professional development hours. Just be sure to keep your certificate of attendance for seven years, as per the First Steps Policy Manual.

For assistance, contact First Steps training manager Amy Torres at amy.torres@fssa.in.gov. Stay engaged, continue growing and leverage all the resources available to you on the IN EI Hub.

- **2025 HANDS in Autism® LCC Let's Talk Series, noon to 1:30 p.m., second Thursday of the month.** Are you interested in having a clearer understanding about Autism? There is no better way than to hear it from individuals with lived experiences who are going to share their journey and invite us into their world. [Register for the Let's Talk Series](#), hosted by [Hands in Autism](#), on the second Thursday of the month from noon to 1:30 p.m. Eastern time.
- **Indiana Interagency Autism Coordinating Council quarterly meeting, Sept. 4, 9 to 11:30 a.m., virtual meeting on Zoom.** [The Council](#) serves as a forum to increase public understanding and awareness of the state's collective priorities, activities, programs, policies and research. IIACC meets quarterly. [This session](#) will address Goals 5 and 6, Transition to Adulthood and Equitable Access and Quality of Life.
- **Heart to Heart Conference, Sept. 25.** [Secure your spot](#) for the 2025 Heart to Heart Virtual Conference, a premier event featuring inspiring keynote speakers and engaging interactive workshops.
- **Division for Early Childhood Conference, Oct. 7–10, Portland, Ore.** The Division for Early Childhood's 41st Annual International Conference on Young Children with Disabilities and Their Families brings together individuals from around the world to share insights, innovative practices and the latest research. [Registration is open.](#)
- **Zero to Three LEARN 2025 Conference, Oct. 8–9, Baltimore, Md.** LEARN 2025 is for everyone supporting infants, toddlers and families—educators, health care providers, mental health professionals, researchers, advocates and policymakers. [Registration is now open.](#)
- **Indiana Head Start Association Conference, Oct. 9 and 10, Embassy Suites, Noblesville, Ind.** [Register here to join](#) the annual gathering of [Indiana Head Start and Early Head Start](#) staff and team members.
- **2025 APTA Indiana Fall Conference, Nov. 14–15, Indiana State University, Terre Haute.** At the [Fall Conference](#), you have the opportunity to network with PTs, PTAs and students of Physical Therapy. [Online registration is open.](#)
- **National Association for the Education of Young Children Annual Conference, Nov. 19–22, Orlando, Fla.** The [annual conference](#) gathers early childhood educators from around the globe to connect, collaborate and learn together. [Early Bird registration](#) ends Sept. 12.
- **Indiana Occupational Therapy Association Fall Conference, Nov. 22, University of Indianapolis.** Mark your calendar for the [2025 IOTA Fall Conference](#)! Registration will open in August.



**Division of Disability, Aging and
and Rehabilitative Services**

Get First Steps information directly via email

Sign up for DDARS updates, First Steps newsletter and *INvision* parent newsletter. To register, [click FSSA Subscriber](#).

INvision newsletter

The Division of Disability, Aging and Rehabilitative Services *INvision* newsletter shares news, information, tips and events from each of our bureaus to help families and individuals with disabilities stay connected and learn more about our services. Families can [view past editions and sign up here](#). Please feel free to sign up and share with the families you support.

Our mission, vision and values

Mission: To partner with Hoosier families whose young children are experiencing developmental delays and connect them with services that help them promote their child's development.

Vision: All Indiana families have a strong foundation to advocate for their infants and toddlers to grow and flourish to their highest potential.

Values:

- **Family-centered:** To support and enhance each family's capacity to promote their child's development.
- **Strengths-based:** To acknowledge families and children as fundamentally resourceful and resilient.
- **Relationship-based:** To embrace and promote the fact that children grow and learn in the context of positive relationships with caring adults.
- **Holistic:** To promote "whole child" development by recognizing the interconnectedness of physical, cognitive, social emotional and adaptive development.
- **Culturally competent:** To respect and be responsive to the cultures, beliefs, practices, strengths and needs of all families, children and individuals.
- **Routines-based:** To embed services and supports into a child and family's daily activities in their home or other community-based environments.
- **Individualized:** To adapt services and supports in response to the unique strengths and needs of each child and family.

Use your computer to read webpages out loud

BrowseAloud is a suite of products that provides online reading support. BrowseAloud reads website content out loud, highlighting each word as it is spoken in a high-quality, human-sounding voice. Click on the BrowseAloud link that appears beside "Accessibility Tools" on the footer of the IN.gov website. This will launch the BrowseAloud Plus toolbar. This toolbar provides speech at the touch of a button. For more information, visit [BrowseAloud](#).



September 2025 is National Child Awareness Month

[NCAM](#) is celebrated each September to raise awareness and focus America's attention on our greatest asset – our children.