



*The Newsletter for  
Indiana Early Intervention*



**Christina Commons**  
*First Steps director*

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- DEC Recommended Practice: Leadership
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## Funding will increase reimbursement rates

Dear First Steps stakeholders,

We would like to take a moment to thank you for all you do to ensure First Steps remains one of the best programs available to Hoosier children and their families. This includes expressing concerns and opportunities for improvement. We appreciate those who raised concerns around personnel retention and increased caseload sizes and assisted us in brainstorming ideas for how to not only retain current personnel, but also recruit qualified individuals looking for a rewarding career serving children and their families.

In the last six months, personnel have been surveyed to better understand their challenges, concerns and areas the program can improve to best support and grow its early intervention professionals. While certainly not the only barrier, provider rates were identified as a barrier to recruiting and retaining qualified personnel. The number of personnel leaving First Steps has been a contributing factor in the number of children and families waiting for early intervention services. These concerns were shared with the leadership of the Family and Social Services Administration, the Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services, the State Budget Agency and the Governor's Office. They were provided data around this critical issue and unanimously agreed that additional funding is necessary to ensure children and families receive First Steps services and personnel are compensated appropriately.

As a result, the State Budget Agency, in collaboration with the General Assembly, has agreed to provide First Steps with \$7.5 million from the Hoosier Family First Fund, established in SEA2 in July of 2022. This funding, combined with other early intervention funding sources, including Indiana's Part C grant, will be utilized to increase First Steps provider reimbursement rates and SPOE contract allocations. Please see the attached memo regarding this increase. We are pleased to announce the new rates went into effect on Jan. 1, 2023.

It is our hope that these changes in rates will profoundly reduce the number of individuals leaving the system and lead to the hiring of additional qualified personnel. We ask that you assist us in this recruitment and share why you continue to work in the First Steps program. We appreciate your continued partnership and all you do to support the infants, toddlers and families we serve.

Best,  
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 on **Wednesday, March 8, 2023, from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., ET**. We will also have an online option to attend virtually via Zoom. Please [click here for meeting details](#).



## EIHub updates

We would like to keep our stakeholders informed of the work we are doing behind the scenes to enhance the First Steps case management system.

If you encounter an issue, have concerns regarding system speed or have questions when navigating the IN EIHub, please reach out to the IN EIHub Help Desk by emailing [infirststeps@pcgus.com](mailto:infirststeps@pcgus.com) or calling 877-522-1065, weekdays, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. ET.

**Please note:** There will be no extended hours for the EIHub Help Desk.

# 2023 Indiana Early Intervention Conference

June 8–9, 2023, in Bloomington

*Indiana First Steps and Infancy Onward have partnered with the Early Childhood Center at Indiana University to bring together national and local experts to address research and best practices in Early Childhood Intervention.*

[Register today!](#) There is a virtual option for \$25.

## FGRBI professional development opportunity at conference

**Family Guided Routines Based Intervention** professional development is underway with First Steps providers across the state. These providers are learning how to utilize caregiver coaching to support parent and child interaction within a family's routines and daily activities. Are you looking for a way to get involved? Check out the FGRBI pre-conference opportunity on the [Indiana Early Intervention Conference website](#).

## DEC RECOMMENDED PRACTICE

# Leadership

### *Leadership is important at ALL levels*

As the First Steps office grows the state leadership team, we look to the Division of Early Childhood's recommended practices on leadership for guidance in securing a successful implementation of Indiana's Part C program. The DEC points out that it is up to state and local leaders to establish the environment for the service coordinators and direct service providers to make sure infants and toddlers receive the early intervention they are entitled to. Part C leaders are to ensure that program personnel know and follow professional standards and all applicable laws and regulations governing early intervention service provision.

Leaders collect and use data for program management, continuous improvement and to examine the effectiveness of services and supports in improving child and family outcomes. The program leadership has the responsibility to develop and implement policies and procedures that support best practices. However, leaders do not work alone and everyone can be a leader in early intervention. Leaders include federal and state program directors, local administrators, service coordinators, eligibility determination team members, direct service providers, family members, students and higher education faculty, among others.

The Division of Early Childhood has identified 14 recommended leadership practices, but points out that Part C services are complex. Although governed by federal laws, programs also vary from state to state according to their individual state administrative codes and laws. Part C services are also funded by multiple sources, which provide their own unique parameters as well. Therefore, it is important to note that there may be some challenges to implementing the DEC Recommended Practices regarding leadership. However, it is essential that leaders continue to be advocates to create the changes in policies and procedures that are needed.

Part C leaders need to create a space where all personnel feel they belong to the program and want to support the mission, vision and values.

The DEC recommends that administration leaders promote and advocate the DEC Code of Ethics, position statements and papers and the DEC Recommended Practices, which can be found on [the DEC website](#). Leaders are also encouraged to belong to professional association(s) and engage in evidence-based professional development. In that vein, state and local leaders are responsible for implementing an evidence-based system of personnel development, providing supports and creating an environment for early interventionists to have the knowledge and skills they need to implement the DEC Recommended Practices.

Efficient leaders should collaborate with higher education, state licensing agencies, professional associations and other stakeholders to develop or revise state competencies that align with the DEC and other national professional standards. It is crucial that leaders collaborate with partners across all levels of systems and agencies

to secure fiscal and human resources and to create coordinated and inclusive systems of services and supports for young children and their families. Early intervention program leaders should

collaborate with other agencies and programs to develop community-wide screening and referral procedures for children who may be in need of services.

A vital and important job of any Part C leadership team is to develop and implement policies and procedures that promote shared decision-making between early interventionists and families. Leaders do this by supporting efficient and coordinated early intervention service delivery by creating an environment by which providers from multiple disciplines and the family work together as a team.

As stated previously, leadership is the responsibility of many people at varying stages in early intervention. It is important to the Indiana State First Steps team to set the example by following the Division of Early Childhood's Recommended Practices for Leadership and to recognize and support the leaders in our field who are committed to providing quality intervention services to children and their families in our state.

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**“It is crucial that leaders collaborate with partners to secure resources and to create systems of services and supports for young children and their families.”**

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# Welcome to our new First Steps team members!

*Meet Katie, Barbara and Marie-Therese*

## Katherine Goodwell

*Program Services Manager*



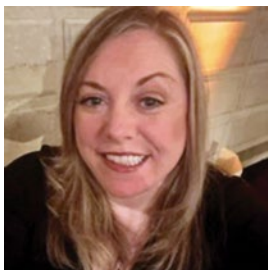
Katie is a graduate of Indiana University-Bloomington, where she received a Bachelor of Arts in speech and hearing sciences. She also received a Master of Science degree in speech-language pathology from Indiana State University. Katie was a practicing speech-language pathologist for eight years in a variety of settings, including skilled nursing facilities, outpatient clinics, the school system and First Steps.

Katie is excited to join the state team and to use her experience as a speech-language pathologist and a First Steps provider to continue to provide comprehensive and accessible early intervention services to families across Indiana.

Outside of First Steps, Katie enjoys spending time with her dog Paisley, reading and being active through fitness or hiking. She also enjoys both domestic and international travel. A few of her favorite trips have been to Argentina, Thailand, Sedona and the Pacific Northwest. She hopes to travel to Europe soon and welcomes any recommendations.

## Barbara Sanders

*Family Engagement Manager*



Barbara Sanders joined First Steps in December 2022. Barbara is a transplanted Hoosier and grew up in the Cornhusker State of Nebraska. She moved to Indiana by closing her eyes and pointing to a map in 2001 and has been here ever since. Currently, Barbara and her family reside in Fishers.

As a parent of a child who was born with several physical abnormalities, Barbara understands how overwhelming the process of navigating the

resources and therapies can be for parents/families and how important connection is to the success of the child.

Barbara holds doctorate and master's degrees in early literacy as well as a master's degree in educational leadership, and associate and bachelor degrees in elementary education. Barbara has worked in both the K-12 and higher education field. Outside of work and family, Barbara is an avid reader, assists with the Itty Bitty Library Committee and the Indianapolis Food Box Project nonprofits, works on dog training and agility with her pups and cares for her ever-expanding brood of houseplants.



## Marie-Therese Smith

*Data and Fiscal Manager*

Marie-Therese joined the First Steps state team having built an eclectic resume. She grew up in Flint, Mich., and worked as an engineer after graduating from Kettering University.

She was awarded a fellowship to Purdue University and was hired by Intel to design microprocessors. She loved the challenge but her heart ached for a job with more personal meaning, and missed the Midwest and her family.

She jumped at the chance to transition to teaching through IUPUI and taught high needs children math and computer science for 10 years.

The thread through all of these journeys has been data! Marie-Therese believes data can help create evidence for things you "feel in your gut" and shed light on things you didn't even know were there.

She has three grown children that are on their own eclectic life journeys. She now lives in Broad Ripple with her dog Hazel and cat Oliver and has recently become an official "Bird-Nerd"!



First Steps webinars and trainings, including those required for initial credentialing, are now located on the [IN EI Hub Learning Management System](#). [Watch this video](#) to learn more about the LMS! All registered IN EI Hub users are encouraged to visit the [Learning Management System](#) to check out the new trainings

that have been added. Look for some exciting changes to come to the LMS in 2023, including brand-new service coordination and direct service provider trainings.

The 2021 Early Intervention Conference recorded webinars are now posted on the LMS and are a great way to get those required First Steps credentialing hours!

As always, if you are looking for professional development hours, you may always take courses outside of the LMS. However, as documented in the First Steps Policy Manual, you must retain your certificate of attendance documentation for a period of seven years.

- **AccessAbility Parenting Disabilities Group meetings, third Wednesday of each month, 7–8 p.m. ET.** Contact Jessica Minor, Director of Programs and Assessment, at [jminor@abilityindiana.org](mailto:jminor@abilityindiana.org) or [info@abilityindiana.org](mailto:info@abilityindiana.org).
- **Indiana Alliance on Prenatal Substance Exposure Family Resource Lunch & Learn, Tuesday, March 7, 2023, 12–1 p.m.** “Myths and Misconceptions: A Look at Stigma Reduction in Our Community.” Training presented by Tasha Brown This lunch and learn will be provided via Zoom and is offered free of charge. [Registration is now open](#)
- **Bumps and Babies Family Resource Fair, Wednesday, March 15, 2023, 12–2 p.m.** Community partners can set up at 11 a.m. Learn from local experts about pregnancy and early childhood health. This event, presented by CareSource, is open to the public and FREE! It will be at the Anderson Impact Center (630 Nichol Ave., Anderson, IN 46016). Please contact [Christiane.Soultz@caresource.com](mailto:Christiane.Soultz@caresource.com). [Registration is open](#).
- **Spring Institute for Strengthening Families, April 11–12, 2023.** This in-person event will take place at the Embassy Suites Conference Center in Noblesville. Our keynote address will be “Goodbye Burnout, Hello Life” by Jill O’Boyle. [Registration will be \\$65 per person](#).
- **ISHA 2023 86th Annual Convention, April 13–15, 2023.** The Indiana Speech-Language-Hearing Association is a professional resource advocating for the basic right of communication in Indiana. This year’s conference will be held at the Embassy Suites in Plainfield. Email Gina Brooks at [gbrooks@robertcraven.com](mailto:gbrooks@robertcraven.com) or call 412-366-1177.
- **Bumps and Babies Family Resource Fair, Thursday, April 20, 2023, noon–2 p.m.** Community partners can set up at 11 a.m. Learn from local experts about pregnancy and early childhood health. This event, presented by CareSource, is open to the public and FREE! It will be held at The Donner Center (739 22nd St., Columbus, IN 47202). Questions? Please contact [Cathryn.Cleary@caresource.com](mailto:Cathryn.Cleary@caresource.com). [Registration is open](#).
- **Indiana Association for Education of Young Children Conference, May 5 & 6, 2023.** [Register today](#) for one of the nation’s largest professional conferences in early childhood development at the Indiana Convention Center in downtown Indianapolis.
- **Riley Children’s Health Pediatric Conference, May 10 & 11, 2023.** The theme for the 58th annual conference is “Filling the Gaps: Managing COVID’s Impact on Child Health.” It will be at the NCAA Hall of Champions, Indianapolis. [Registration is open](#).



**Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services**

## Get First Steps information directly via email

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

## *INvision* newsletter

The Division of Disability 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](#).

## 2023 Indiana Head Start State Collaboration Office Needs Assessment External Stakeholder Feedback



**Office of Early Childhood & Out-of-School Learning**  
Indiana Head Start State Collaboration Office



The Indiana Head Start State Collaboration relies on information gathered from partners and stakeholders to guide their programs, goals and plans. As part of Indiana's early intervention program, your input is valued and appreciated. It takes about 10 minutes to [complete the survey](#) and all responses will remain confidential. For any questions and for more information, please reach out to Tonia Carriger, Indiana Head Start State Collaboration Director, at [tonia.carriger@fssa.in.gov](mailto:tonia.carriger@fssa.in.gov).