



***The Newsletter for
Indiana Early Intervention***

September 2026

FirstSteps.IN.gov

In this issue:

Interagency
Coordinating Council
EI Hub update
Procedural safeguards
Family-Guided Routines-
Based Intervention
IOTA CYSIS monthly
virtual event
Training info
Much more!

Dear Colleagues,

As we enter a new season, I want to take a moment to recognize the everyday work happening across Indiana's First Steps program. Families come to us at different points in their journey, looking for clarity and support as they learn more about their child's development. What makes this program strong is the way you meet families in the places where life already happens, like mealtime, playtime, routines and transitions.



Christina Commons
First Steps director

Our model continues to center on what matters most: helping families build skills they can use throughout their day. Through caregiver coaching and practical strategies, families are discovering that ordinary moments can become opportunities for growth. They gain tools that make a difference not just now, but well beyond their time in First Steps.

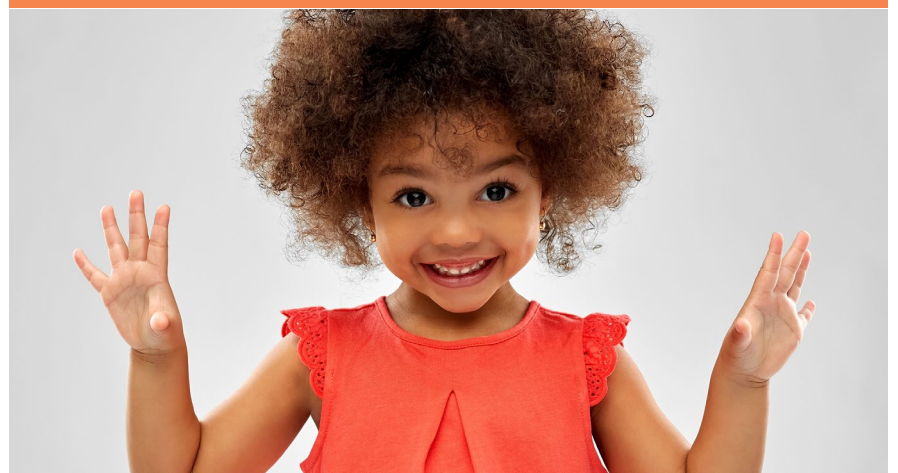
This steady, thoughtful work is reflected in the progress we see statewide. But more importantly, it shows up in the confidence families build, the clarity they gain and the ways they feel equipped to support their children long after services end.

Thank you for bringing consistency, steadiness and purpose to this work. The impact you make is meaningful, lasting and felt in homes and communities across Indiana.

Best,

Christina Commons

Join us in congratulating Christina Commons as she celebrates 10 years as the director of the Indiana First Steps early intervention program!



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 **Nov. 4, 2026, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.** There will also be an online option to attend [virtually via Zoom](#). Please [click here for meeting details](#).



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

Our next EI Hub release is scheduled for Jan. 7, 2027, which will add functionality to both the Case Management and Service Logging modules. Staff from the System Point of Entry offices across the state have been graciously participating in an Individual Family Service Plan working group to assist in design and implementation of the upcoming release.

Here are some of the upcoming improvements to look forward to specifically in regard to case management:

Next EI Hub release adds functionality

- An intake tab
- A Universal ICD-10 tab
- Updates to the phases of referral, intake, eligibility and IFSPs to ensure accuracy
- Enhancements to the service coordinator assignment panel that will allow for the future launch of the service coordinator role
- Data entry points that will support federal monitoring practices

The first tier of IFSP enhancements include the following:

- Enhancements to the services panel
- Finalization of the parent agreement panel
- A validation that all information from earlier panels has been completed.

The upcoming release in January will also include improvements to the Service Logging Module, including:

- The ability to batch print service logs and progress notes
- A file upload will be made available after Save & Review of a service log
- A display of comments associated with the reason for delay
- Previous progress note information will not change when outcomes are updated.
- An update of the session count on progress notes
- Audiology billing updates to align with accurate billing practices

Thank you for your partnership and willingness to test aspects of EI Hub 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.

Procedural safeguards and dispute resolution training

Ensure that families understand and can confidently exercise their rights

We're thrilled to share that in just two months, more than 2,200 First Steps personnel serving children and their families completed the Procedural Safeguards and Dispute Resolution Training! Thank you for your commitment, your time, and your dedication to ensuring families understand and can confidently exercise their rights.

This training is now included as a chapter within the Introduction to Early Intervention Under IDEA Part C training, making it a required part of onboarding and a valuable resource whenever you need a refresher.

To make family rights even more accessible, we've

launched the [Family Rights and Resolution Options web-page](#). There you'll find:

- The Indiana First Steps Guide to Family Rights and Procedural Safeguards
- Information on families' dispute resolution options and how to request them
- The First Steps Families Have Rights handout, available in English, Spanish, Burmese, Haitian Creole and Arabic

Thank you again for everything you do to support families!

Congratulations to the 2026 First Steps Excellence in Service Award winners

The following individuals represent the very best of our early intervention community. Their commitment strengthens the entire system and inspires all of us. They consistently go above and beyond; modeling collaboration across teams, coaching families to be strong advocates for their children, mentoring new providers and service coordinators entering the field and keeping optimism alive, even when the work is challenging! We recognize the 2026 Excellence in Service Award winners... congratulations!



Susie Luyster	Ashley Alexander	Kara Laukhuf	Patty Kovacs	Tara Hopf
Mariela Wheeler	Amanda Perkins	Angela Rusk	Kristen Wilson	Dean DeKemper
Kat Noe	Cindy Chatman	Laura Guistolisi	Katelyn Dickson	Kelli Lynch
Jenny Bailey	Christy Cornwell	Megan Smith	Sara Parker	Amy Peterson
Eileen Anguiano	Jessica Sullivan	Amber Eckert	Nancy Moore	Erin Graves
Carla Stornetta	Abigail Girod	Joanne Poole	Stacy Williams	Trisha Conklin
Carrie Poag	Anne Dolan	Katie Wolfer	Tracey Sarris	Ashley Haug

20 years of service coordination

We would like to recognize and honor the following individuals for 20 years of service as First Steps service coordinators, a milestone which coincides with the anniversary of the establishment of our regional Service Point of Entry offices throughout the state. Thank you for your service and dedication!

Janet Burgess	Michelle Dominiack	Lisa Haag	Melissa Killiam	Kathy McLaughlin
Kim Braun	Celeste Ellis	Becky Haymond	Krista Knowles	Rietha Redmond
Alicia Cardoza	Ginger Ferguson	Sandra Hnatusko	Megan Kochvar	Goldie Reynolds
Farrah Darks	Cera Goodpaster	Angela Jarboe	Kacey Matthews	April Riggins
Dean DeKemper				





Teamwork in early intervention

Caregiver coaching strengthens collaboration

In early intervention, strong teaming and collaboration are essential to achieving meaningful outcomes for children and their families. Both the DEC Recommended Practices and the Indiana First Steps policy manual emphasize the importance of respectful, ongoing partnerships among families and multidisciplinary Individualized Family Service Plan team members. Together, these frameworks highlight collaborative planning, shared responsibility and coordinated service delivery that reflect family priorities and support individualized, high-quality services aligned with each child's unique needs.

Caregiver coaching directly supports this emphasis on collaboration by positioning families as active partners in intervention. Through coaching, providers share evidence-based strategies, problem-solve with caregivers and reflect on what works within everyday routines. This approach strengthens communication across team members and helps ensure that strategies are understood, meaningful and used consistently between visits.

When authorized by the IFSP, co-treatment offers an additional opportunity to support collaboration across disciplines. During co-treatment, providers model teamwork, share perspectives and align strategies in real time while engaging caregivers in the process. This coordinated approach supports clear communication, reinforces shared goals, and respects the caregiver's role in decision-making as part of the intervention team.

The Family-Guided Routines-Based Intervention framework reinforces these teaming and collaboration practices by guiding providers to work with caregivers rather than for them. Coaching through FGRBI emphasizes joint planning, purposeful information sharing and reflection within everyday routines, ensuring caregivers are central members of the team and confident in supporting their child's learning and identifying opportunities for practice outside of the home visit.

Caregiver coaching is more than a strategy. It is a way of working that brings together families, service coordinators and providers across disciplines to build strong partnerships and create meaningful learning opportunities for every child.

IOTA CYSIS monthly virtual event

Each month, the Indiana Occupational Therapy Association Children and Youth Special Interest Section Networking and Mentoring Session provides an opportunity for pediatric occupational therapists to network,



collaborate and engage in professional mentoring with colleagues across Indiana. Each session begins with a brief presentation on a relevant topic, followed by (potential)

breakout sessions based on attendance numbers to practice settings. Breakout rooms may be offered for school-based, early intervention and hospital/clinic-based practice allowing practitioners to connect with those who share a similar practice context.

The learning objectives for the IOTA CYSIS Networking and Mentoring Session include:

- Describe the current strengths and areas for growth in OT services for children and youth across Indiana.
- Identify at least one strategy to improve or enhance OT practice for children and youth in Indiana.
- Develop professional connections with OT practitioners to support collaboration, problem-solving and mentoring.

A Zoom link will be shared with those that register. If you have questions about this event, contact cysis@inota.com.

CYSIS monthly virtual event: 7:30 to 8:30 p.m. EST. Free to IOTA Members, \$10 for non-members. IOTA CEUs = 1

www.inota.com/events

Attention all early interventionists

A reminder to update your HUB/LMS profile. A big thank you and congratulations for completing Family Rights and Procedural Safeguards training. The Exit Skills Checklist training has been updated! We have created one module specifically for direct service providers and one focused on for service coordinators and are posted on the Learning Management System. As a reminder, please note: The Exit Skills Checklist module is a required onboarding training for all NEW providers to complete within the first 90 days of employment and within the first year for all NEW service coordinators. This training is recommended for a current providers and service coordinators and you may submit it as professional development for your annual credentialing if you wish.

For LMS 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.

- **First Steps Fall 2026 National Webinar Series: Individualizing IFSPs in Meaningful Ways Sept. 30, 12 to 1 p.m. EST.** Dr. Jennifer James will share practical strategies for partnering with families to create Individualized Family Service Plans that are truly individualized and meaningful. Dr. James is a board-certified pediatric physical therapist and a national leader in early intervention. FREE. To register, visit <https://go.iu.edu/7byul4>.
- **Indiana DeafBlind Services Tactile Symbol Systems Workshop Series, virtual webinar Oct. 23; all-day training Nov. 6 in Indianapolis.** This training is for anyone working with children who are deafblind and/or have significant communication needs. To register or for more information, go to <https://www.indbservices.org/index.php/tactile-symbol-systems-2026>.
- **Indiana Occupational Therapy Association Fall Conference and Business Meeting, Indianapolis, Oct. 24, 8 a.m. to 5:15 p.m.** Celebrate 100 years of IOTA by joining us at the Crowne Plaza Indianapolis Airport Hotel. Earn 7.5 contact hours. [Registration is open.](#)
- **2026 APTA Indiana Fall Conference, Oct. 24, Indiana University Indianapolis.** Join the Indiana Physical Therapy Association as we dive into AI, innovation and the power of student leadership in our field. [Registration ends Oct. 14.](#) For more information, visit <https://inapta.org/events/>.
- **Division for Early Childhood's 42nd Annual International Conference on Young Children with Disabilities and Their Families, Oct. 26–29, Omaha, Neb.** Join DEC for four days of learning, connection and shared commitment to advancing equity, inclusion and positive outcomes for young children with disabilities and their families. [Register today.](#)
- **ZERO TO THREE LEARN Conference 2026, Oct. 27–29, Portland, Ore.** Our speakers and sessions are unique and reflective of the recent early childhood landscape and multi-disciplinary trends. Visit the [LEARN Conference site](#) for more information.
- **VIPS Vision Impairment in Infants and Toddlers monthly training, December 2026 through April 2027.** Virtual sessions will take place on Tuesdays from 3 to 6 p.m., EST. Next training is Tuesday, Dec. 1. \$300 registration fee. Participants gain an understanding of the unique needs of infants, toddlers and preschoolers who are blind or have low vision. There will be two eight-hour, two-day in-person sessions on the VIPS campuses in Indianapolis and Louisville. Direct questions to Kathy Mullen at kmullen@vips.org or 502-636-3207. [Register today!](#)
- **NAEYC Centennial Conference in Washington, DC, Dec. 5–8.** Join early childhood educators, leaders and advocates from across the country at the National Association for the Education of Young Children conference to connect, learn and grow together. [Registration is now open.](#)
- **Division for Early Childhood's Early Intervention Service Coordination Virtual Institute, Apr. 22, 2027, 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. DEC SC Institute.** [Save the date!](#) Service Coordination in Action: Strengthening Families, Supporting Dreams. Questions? Contact dec@dec-sped.org.



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.

Get First Steps information directly via email

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



Division of Disability, Aging and Rehabilitative Services

Use your computer to read webpages out loud

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

Indiana Early Intervention Conference July 15 and 16, 2027, Bloomington



Celebrate a decade of learning, collaboration and innovation at the newly renovated Monroe County Convention Center. Visit <https://earlyintervention.iu.edu/> to register, submit a proposal or become a sponsor or exhibitor.

