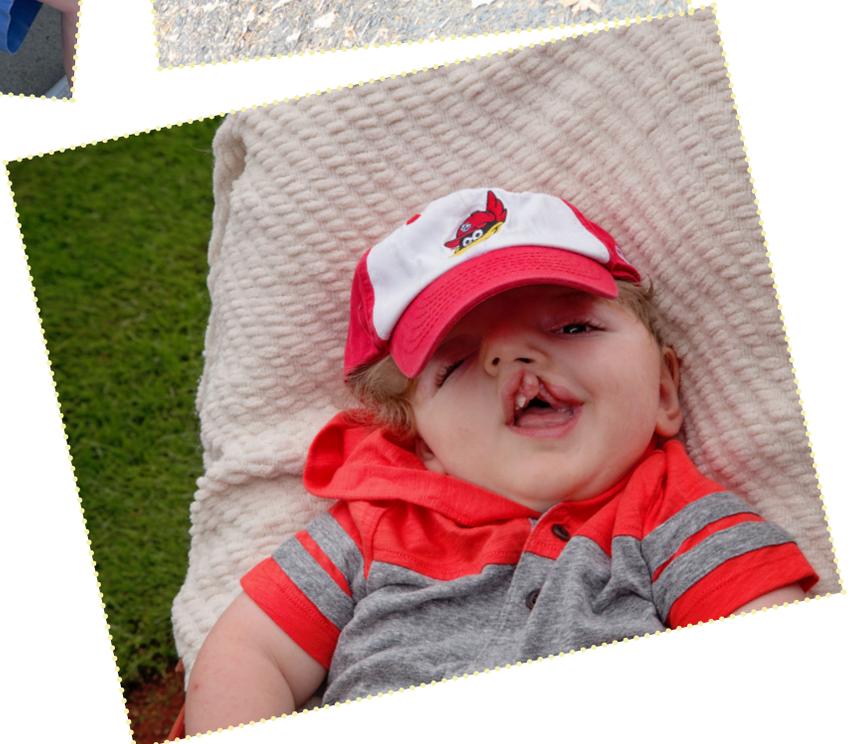




Year at a Glance 2019-20



What is First Steps?

First Steps is Missouri's Early Intervention system for infants and toddlers, birth to age three, who have delayed development or diagnosed conditions that are associated with developmental disabilities. The federal law governing First Steps is Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is the lead state agency responsible for implementing the First Steps program.

First Steps is a voluntary program which provides families the tools they need to help their child be successful. Families play an integral role in their child's development.

What is a SPOE?

First Steps is operated through contractual agreements in ten regions across the state. The regional office is known as a System Point of Entry (SPOE). The SPOE employs approximately 140 Service Coordinators who provide service coordination, intake and eligibility determination, as well as all local administrative activities for the program. Building a strong network among the SPOE and primary referral sources in a community assists in the early identification and referral of children who are potentially eligible for First Steps. Missouri is a geographically diverse state, yet regardless of location within the state, all Missouri children and families receive support from a SPOE in their area.

Who is Eligible for First Steps?

Infants and toddlers who have one of the following criteria may be eligible for First Steps:

Newborn Condition	Diagnosed Conditions	Developmental Delay
Referred prior to 12 months of age with a birth weight less than 1,500 grams, with one or more of the following conditions diagnosed at birth or within 30 days post birth: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• APGAR of 6 or less at 5 minutes• Intraventricular hemorrhage (IVH) (Grade II, III, or IV)• Any Positive Pressure Ventilation greater than 48 hours, including ventilator or oscillator• Resuscitation/code-event requiring chest compressions	Referred prior to 36 months of age with a diagnosed condition including, but not limited to, the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Autism Spectrum Disorders• Chromosomal Trisomy• Craniofacial Anomalies• Disorders of the Nervous System• Disorders Related to Exposure to Toxic Substances• Infections/Viruses/Bacteria• Other Chromosomal Abnormalities• Other Genetic/Congenital/Metabolic Conditions• Sensory Impairments• Severe Attachment Disorders	Referred prior to 36 months of age, with a half-age developmental delay, as measured by appropriate diagnostic measures, in one or more of the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cognitive development• Communication development• Adaptive development• Social or emotional development• Physical development, including vision and hearing

Eligibility is determined through an evaluation of the child, during which the Service Coordinator reviews information about the child's birth, medical history and developmental history. An evaluator may administer a test to determine the child's abilities. With the parent's consent, the Service Coordinator may gather information from caregivers, child care providers, educators or other family members. Eligibility criteria for First Steps, including examples of diagnosed conditions, are available at: <https://dese.mo.gov/special-education/first-steps/eligibility>

To Make a Referral to First Steps:

call toll-free (866) 583-2392 or refer online at:

www.mofirststeps.com

What is an IFSP?

Children found eligible for First Steps have an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) that reflects the family's concerns, priorities and resources regarding the development of their infant or toddler. Families participate as partners in the planning, development, implementation and review of the IFSP. The IFSP process is unique to each family. Service coordinators and service providers collaborate with family members to ensure the development of meaningful goals and related services that assist the family in improving their child's functioning in everyday routines and activities.

Who Provides Services?

Early intervention services are designed to meet the developmental needs of the child and assist the family with the child's development. First Steps offers 18 types of early intervention services to eligible children and families. All 18 services are available to every child and family in First Steps; however, the type and level of service appropriate for each child and family is decided by the child's IFSP team.

Early intervention services are delivered by providers who meet DESE's qualifications. All providers enroll in First Steps as individuals who are either independent vendors or affiliated with an agency. There are approximately 1,800 providers enrolled in First Steps and roughly 1,000 of these providers participate on Early Intervention Teams (EIT) across the state. EIT is Missouri's model for service delivery.

Number of Children Served in First Steps in Each County



Total: 7,592
This number reflects children with an IFSP on July 1 in each SPOE region. The number may include children over age three who are still receiving services.

The data in this report are from the First Steps SPOE Data Report – July 2020, unless cited otherwise. A complete report is available at: <https://dese.mo.gov/sites/default/files/se-fs-first-steps-spo-e-data-report-july-2020.pdf>

Who Referred Families to First Steps?

First Steps receives referrals from parents as well as many community programs such as hospitals, physicians, child care centers, preschools and other public agencies.

Referral Sources in 2019-20:	% of Referrals
Medical Providers (Hospitals, Physicians, Other health care, Public health)	46.3%
Parents	34.2%
Social Service Agencies (Mental Health, Health & Senior Services, Children's Division, Domestic Violence and Homeless Shelters)	9.7%
Early Childhood Programs (Parents as Teachers, Early Head Start, School districts, Child care programs)	9.8%
TOTAL	100%

When Parents Made the Referral, How Did They Learn About First Steps?

In 2019-20, Parents Learned About First Steps From:	% of Parent Referrals
Medical Providers (Hospitals, Physicians, Other health care, Public health)	49%
Other (Friend, Family member, Neighbor)	34%
Early Childhood Programs (Parents as Teachers, Early Head Start, School districts, Child care programs)	14%
Social Service Agencies (Mental Health, Health & Senior Services, Children's Division, Domestic Violence and Homeless Shelters)	3%
TOTAL	100%

Jackson's Story:

By of Joni of Jefferson City, MO

Our life changed when we got Jackson's diagnosis when I was about 20 weeks pregnant. We were told Jackson had spina bifida along with many other medical issues that come along with it. Morgen Bestgen had mentioned First Steps and the Special Learning Center to us, as well as telling us about an amazing therapist, Mary Owens, who works for those programs.



"Family time" - Joni

Jackson and I had inutero surgery at 25 weeks gestation to try to improve Jackson's future quality of life. At 35 weeks, Jackson was born and stayed in the NICU for a little bit where a coordinator there got us all set up with First Steps back home.

From the moment Jackson came home, First Steps has played a HUGE part in our lives! We luckily did get Mary Owens as his physical therapist and she started with him at one month old in our home. Around 7 months, Jackson started going to the special learning center where First Steps tied right into that with therapies. We were blessed that Jackson's daycare teachers were able to integrate his needs in the classroom as well. Not only have we been

blessed with an amazing physical therapist, but an amazing speech therapist, Linda, and all the First Steps and Special Learning Center family.

The services First Steps provides goes beyond measure from physical therapy and speech therapy to equipment, bracing, and providing us with answers to any questions we may have. First Steps services have given us the opportunity to provide Jackson with the things and people he needs without having to stress everyday about it. We have been taught how to work with Jackson at home and accommodate his special needs. Through the help of therapy it has given us hope that Jackson will walk one day, even if it is for a little bit at a time.

Jackson would not be where he is today without the help of First Steps and the amazing people involved in it! Jackson is kicking spina bifida's butt one day at a time and we want to tell you, First Steps, Thank You!!

Owen's Story:

By Jessica of Springfield, MO

Owen was born with a rare diagnosis of Acalvaria (congenital anomaly of skull and facial bones). His skull did not fully develop. He also has a cleft lip and only two digits on his right hand. Owen was not expected to survive birth, but he is now 2 years old!

Our journey with First Steps started when Owen was about 3 months old. At that time, Owen was introduced to a specialized bottle that helped him eat much more efficiently. He still uses this specialized bottle system today.

Our therapists have been wonderful and the services provided have met Owen's needs. Around 1 year of age, Owen required more support to be independent. First Steps has helped us receive a Tomato Seat and tray, a Hi Low chair, stander, car seat, and adaptive stroller to meet Owen's current needs as he continues to grow. All of these items help Owen to be more independent in his home environment.

Owen's therapists also coordinate with physicians as needed to provide the best possible care. Owen has recently started communicating using a switch. Right now, he is working on using a switch to activate his favorite toys as well as using a switch to say 'hi.' He loves his Hi Low chair and adaptive stroller. His stander is also very helpful even though he just tolerates it! When Owen coos, smiles, or laughs we light up with joy right along with his therapists. He is an amazing little guy!

First Steps has been such a blessing to our family. They do so much more than could possibly be written in this story. While they may be small, Owen continues to make gains each day, and First Steps has been a big part of his journey. We are excited to see Owen continue to exceed expectations and all the new skills he will learn this last year of First Steps.



Owen's photos were taken by Michelle Renfro from the organization On Angels' Wings

When It's Time to Leave First Steps

Most families leave First Steps when the child turns three years old; but, there are times when families leave First Steps before the child is three. Most children go to Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) through the local school district or another community program after First Steps. However, some children leave for other reasons such as completing IFSP outcomes before age three or the parent chooses to leave the program.

Reasons for Leaving First Steps in 2019-20	# of Children	% of Exiting Children
Completed First Steps Program:		
Parent requested referral to ECSE - Eligible	2,836	49.7%
Parent requested referral to ECSE - Not Eligible	629	11%
Parent did not request referral to ECSE	338	5.9%
Eligibility for ECSE in process	204	3.6%
Other Reasons:		
Family withdrew from First Steps	856	15%
Unable to contact the family	393	6.9%
Moved out of state	232	4.1%
Child completed IFSP outcomes	191	3.3%
Child passed away	27	0.5%
TOTAL	5,706	100%

Jonah's Story:

By Debbie of Ballwin, MO

When Jonah was nearing his 2nd birthday, my husband and I were concerned that he wasn't talking, or even showing much interest in talking. He had little interest in engaging with family members, let alone the random neighbor or passerby. He was spending increasing amounts of time lost in his own little world, staring at lights. At his two-year check-up we were referred to a neurologist, and told "in the meantime, why don't you call First Steps and you can at least start some speech therapy".

Within a month of reaching out to First Steps, Jonah started in the ESDM therapy program and his life and ours would be forever altered. Jonah saw his therapists, Bridget and Amanda, several days a week, both in our home, where I participated in parent training, and at his part-time day care. I was blown away at what they could get out of him, and it was all so fun! They gave me several very practical strategies to increase Jonah's engagement, and I remember at one point, Amanda told me, "we're teaching him that good things come from people", and it really worked. Not only was his language exploding, but he was frequently requesting that I play with him.

We considered doing an intensive center-based program, however we felt strongly that the key to Jonah's success was that his therapy was in the home. It was so empowering for me to feel like I was able to help my son overcome his challenges, and I believe he was so much more at ease and therefore able to learn because to him he was just playing at home with mom and his "friends", Bridget and Amanda.



"Sibling love" - Debbie

I really don't have words to describe how grateful I am for First Steps. I truly believe the therapy Jonah received gave us our little boy back. The autism was trying to make him retreat into a world closed off from others, and the therapy brought him out into this world where he can enjoy others and they can enjoy him. By age 3, Jonah was talking in sentences and playing games with his siblings. His neurologist was thrilled with his progress and heralded him as a success story of early intervention. I pray that one day all the children like Jonah will have the opportunity for such amazing early intervention services. A huge thank you from the Page family to all of you at First Steps for the beautiful work you do.

Parents: Are You Interested in Sharing Your Experiences?

Parent participation and feedback are important in helping the First Steps program make a difference for children and families in Missouri. If you currently have a child in the First Steps program or your child previously participated in the First Steps program, here are two ways you can share your experiences:

- First Steps regional council meetings are held throughout the state to provide an opportunity for parents to share their experiences and participate in discussions with local members.
- First Steps state council meetings are held in Jefferson City to provide an opportunity for parents to share their experiences and participate in discussions with state members.

A brochure about state and regional councils is available at: <https://dese.mo.gov/sites/default/files/se-fs-sicc-first-steps-icc-brochure.pdf>

For more information, contact your Service Coordinator or local SPOE office at: (866) 583-2392

Annual Performance Report

Each year DESE sends a report to the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs about the performance of the First Steps program. The report contains information on the following Annual Performance Report (APR) indicators:

2020 APR Submission	Statewide Performance	
#1 - Timely Services	96.04%	
#2 - Services in Natural Environments	99.46%	
#3 - Early Childhood Outcomes	Made Progress	Reached Age Expectation
3A - Social Emotional Skills	90.42%	18.27%
3B - Acquiring and Using Knowledge and Skills	91.50%	13.89%
3C - Use of Appropriate Behaviors	91.21%	17.21%
#4 - Family Involvement: First Steps helped the family...		
4A - Know Their Rights	99.05%	
4B - Effectively Communicate Their Children's Needs	97.03%	
4C - Help Their Children Develop and Learn	98.34%	
#5 - Child Find: Birth to Age One of MO Population	1.35%	
#6 - Child Find: Birth to Age Three of MO Population	3.16%	
#7 - 45-Day Timeline	100%	
#8A - Timely Transition Plan with Steps and Services	90%	
#8B - Timely Notification to the School District	98.53%	
#8C - Timely Transition Conference	100%	
#9 - Resolution Sessions	NA	
#10 - Mediation	NA	

A complete report on the performance of the First Steps program is available at: <https://dese.mo.gov/special-education/state-performance-plan> under Part C - ages Birth to 3 (First Steps).

Judah's Story:

By Amber of Grandview, MO

We first want to say thank you! Thank you for supporting our family and our journey. My son was born with a vision disorder called ptosis or blepharoptosis, known as lazy eyelid syndrome.

He did not show any of his eyes for seven days after birth. A little nerve racking on a "older" mother and he is my first child. (I had Judah at 43). So, within six months of his life we were connected with The Center for The Visually Impaired (CCVI) and First Steps. First Steps has been a great educational support for Judah. They have made sure that we are getting the support he needs for his future school days.

Our case manager has been so supportive checking in, asking us questions and being a voice for us. She has made sure that we have set goals for Judah that have been obtainable according to his age month by month, and year by year. She has recently assisted me while we are beginning our journey to preschool. She has been our advocate to make sure that if Judah needs any educational support, he is going to receive it.

We appreciate all the check-ins and meetings to make sure that Judah will have a supported educational career. When you have a child with a disability, it's reassuring to know that as a parent you're not out here alone. Thank you.



"Outside time" - Amber

Creating Functional Outcomes through Family Assessment

In Early Intervention, collaboration with family members ensures the development of meaningful outcomes and related services to support the family in improving their child’s functioning in everyday routines and activities. Therefore, family assessment is a critical piece to the creation of functional outcomes.

This year, the First Steps program updated the family assessment process by creating a new Interview Worksheet to help Service Coordinators gather this important information. Through a voluntary, informal interview, each family is given an opportunity to share their “story” and information about their child’s development; including what is working well and what is challenging within their everyday routines. Through the interview, the strengths and needs of the family related to enhancing their child’s development, are identified. Ultimately, the family assessment interview results in a list of priority areas, identified by the family, that become outcomes in the IFSP.

Functional outcomes are the goals the IFSP team create for the child and family. These outcomes reflect what’s important to the family, based on naturally occurring routines and enhancing natural learning opportunities. They are meaningful to the family in their day-to-day activities, and create the basis to identify services to help the family meet their goals.

Service Coordinator Testimony:

Jannette – Region 8 Service Coordinator - The family assessment naturally brings to light child and family outcomes, that when achieved can make a real difference in their daily lives. Since outcomes are developed directly from what the family has identified as their priorities, it makes early intervention more meaningful to families. When we can demonstrate a family driven strategy for improvement and make the family part of the team, they are more engaged and energized about working together to achieve the goals that have been set.

First Steps Child Count and Cost by Fiscal Year (FY)

	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20***
Total Children Served*	14,472	15,333	15,991	15,564
Increase in Children Served	3.7%	5.6%	4.3%	-2.7%
Total Cost per Child**	\$3,133	\$3,079	\$3,137	\$2,862
Total Program Expenditures	\$45,903,614	\$47,205,270	\$50,158,786	\$44,549,786
*Total number of children who had at least one First Steps service (e.g., evaluation, IFSP meeting, direct service)				
**Total cost per child includes administrative, training, testing and direct service costs				
***FY20 data impacted by COVID-19 pandemic				

A complete report on the First Steps budget is available at: <https://dese.mo.gov/special-education/first-steps/data-budgets-reports> under Financial Reports.



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