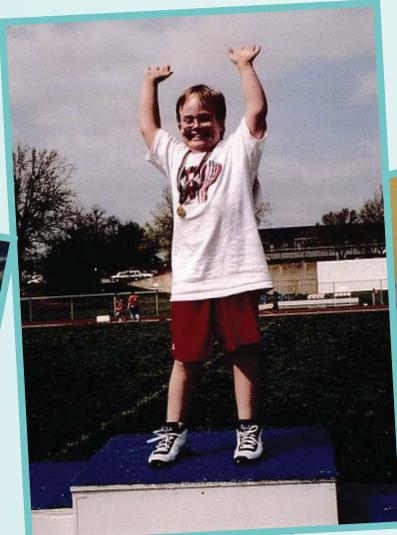


20th Anniversary Edition



Missouri
First steps
EARLY INTERVENTION



Year at a Glance

2013-14

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. 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 offices are known as a System Point of Entry (SPOE) and they 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.

What is an IFSP?

Children found eligible for First Steps have an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) which reflects a family's concerns, priorities and resources with regard to the development of their infant or toddler. Families participate as partners in the planning, development, implementation and review of their IFSP. The IFSP process is unique to each family. Service coordinators and service providers recognize that families are diverse, and 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 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• Physical development, including vision and hearing• Social or emotional development

Eligibility* is determined through an evaluation of the child, during which the service coordinator reviews information about the child's birth and medical history, collects the child's developmental history in multiple areas, or an evaluator administers a test to determine the child's current abilities. The service coordinator also gathers information from other sources with the parent's consent, including caregivers, child care providers, educators or other family members.

*Eligibility criteria for First Steps, including examples of diagnosed conditions, is available at:

<http://dese.mo.gov/special-education/first-steps/eligibility>

Cassidy-Rae's Story: Thank You From the Bottom of Our Hearts

By Renee of Saint Thomas, MO

My daughter, Cassidy-Rae, was born on December 9, 2006 and she was 10 weeks early, weighed 3.9 pounds, was 15 ½ inches long and spent 51 days in the NICU at Children's Hospital in Columbia, Missouri. During her stay in the NICU she encountered several medical issues such as: PDA; Blood transfusions; 7-8 times on ventilator; CPAP; Flo-pap; Oxygen; Seizures; Bi-lateral Grade I brain bleeds; G-Tube; Nissen Fundelplication; Tachycardias; Bradycardias; Apnea; Renal Failure; Reflux; Jaundice; Down for 4 minutes; and Torticollis. She has been hospitalized 7 times since she has been born.

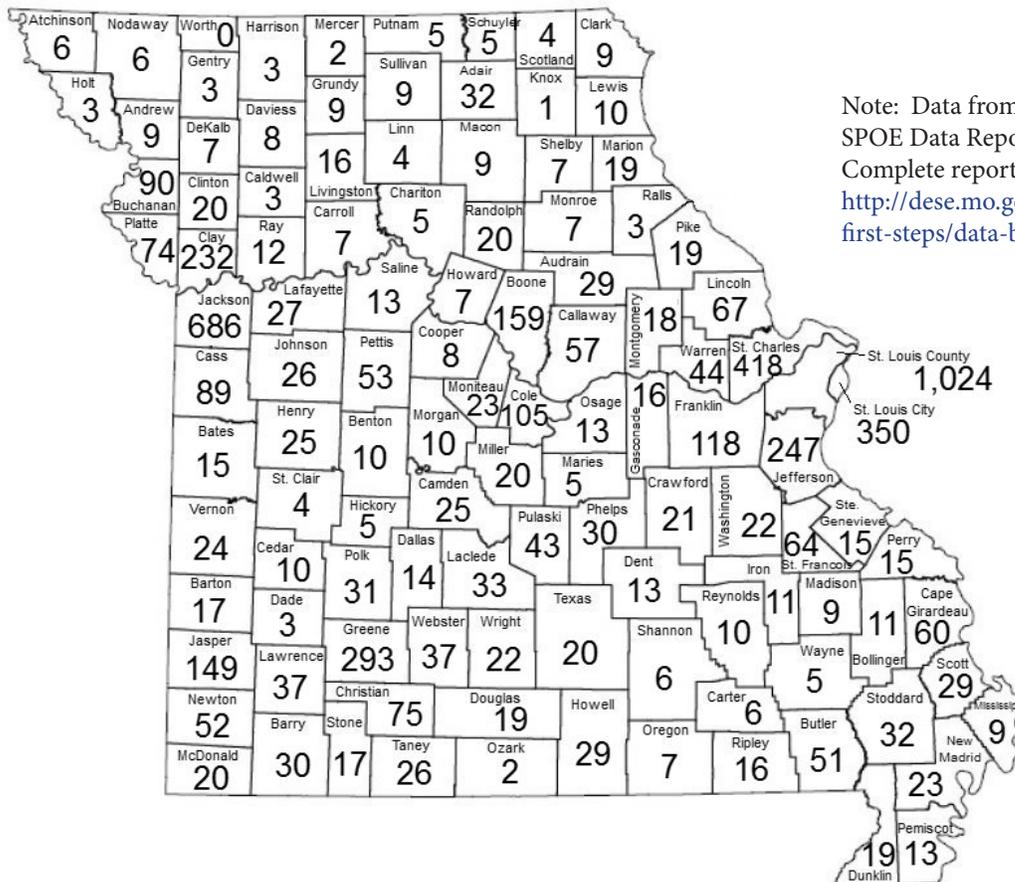
Cassidy-Rae has been diagnosed with high blood pressure, developmental delay, cerebral palsy quadriplegia, and a severe hearing impairment. I never thought I would have a child with special needs. Cassidy-Rae began attending The Special Learning Center on April 30, 2007 and was diagnosed with cerebral palsy quadriplegia on 8/13/2007. She began Occupational and Physical Therapy services through First Steps, then when she was 2 ½ she received services for special instruction as well, and later Speech Therapy services. The First Steps program is an amazing program and my daughter wouldn't be doing the things she is today without it.

In addition to all of the therapies and services from our First Steps providers, the First Steps program provided our daughter with a stander, her first pair of hand splints, and worked with our family and the School for the Deaf to help us obtain her first pair of hearing aids, which was such a financial relief for our family. If it were not for First Steps, our daughter would not have been able to have her hearing aids.

First Steps has a wonderful staff that go above and beyond, they are just amazing. Our daughter wouldn't be doing the things she is without them or their support while Cassidy-Rae was in the First Steps Program. We are very grateful to First Steps. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts for being supportive of our family. First Steps is an amazing state program.



Number of Children Served by First Steps in Each County



Note: Data from First Steps SPOE Data Report – July 2014. Complete report available at: <http://dese.mo.gov/special-education/first-steps/data-budgets-reports>

To Make a Referral to First Steps, call toll-free (866) 583-2392 or online at: www.mofirststeps.com

Austin & Adam: Our Story

By Vonda of Liberty, MO

Our story begins like so many others... get married, buy a home, start your family. Our sons were born in 2001 and 2002. My pregnancies were uneventful and they were large and healthy babies.

After our oldest son, Austin, turned 12 months old things began to change for us. He showed some oddities that I simply could not explain. By 13 months, he had stopped walking, stopped talking and began to scream up to 10 hours a day. That is when our second son, Adam, was born. With Austin's behavior changing so drastically and having a brand new baby, my concern grew to the level of exhaustive research.

I was still teaching school at that time. I went crying to my friend (and best special education teacher I have met to date), Karen. Through tears, I explained to her what I was seeing and all of my concerns. She told me that it sounded very much like Autism. She then immediately said it would be okay. How could anything ever be okay again? This life I had planned for our family seemed to be falling apart. I gathered my strength, dove into every resource I could find and wholeheartedly committed to our journey.

Grief is an interesting process when you have children on the spectrum. It's not like when you lose a loved one. You can't grieve a loss and move on. The loss is an ever-present- "in your face" kind of loss. Each day, you wake up to find that there is a new mountain to climb. We were in Parents as Teachers, but quickly knew that we needed more. We were recommended to Missouri's First Steps early intervention program. This is when the growth, support and healing really started. This is how we also discovered that Adam was also going to have Autism and would be affected even more severely than Austin. Grief kicked into overdrive.

First Steps had numerous professionals assigned to our home. We had Physical, Occupational, and Speech Therapists coming into our home. Looking back, I refer to myself in those years as a "life manager" for both boys. Some days, we had therapists in our home from 8 am to 8 pm, with a break for lunch, naps or dinner. Each boy received an hour of therapy from each professional. Everything was times two and intense. I often just tied a knot in the end of my rope and held on. I honestly don't remember much of the pain I went through, and I believe that your mind protects you from fully experiencing or recalling those events.

I don't think our sons would have come so far if it were not for the excellence of the professionals we accessed for early intervention. I still remember all of those people and the skilled devotion they brought to our family. Our sons are now 12 and 13 years old. They attend middle school in Liberty, Missouri, where they not only learn academics but also the soft skills and life skills for their future. I can see my children working, contributing, learning and loving like everyone else.

Their father and I divorced, as 85% of those raising a child with Autism do, and have grown through our pain to raise amazing children. Austin has regained much of the language that he lost. His behaviors have greatly lessened and he is now referred to as a "classroom leader." He is our resident comedian. Adam talks through assistive technology and sends us daily emails about his adventures. He is our gentle giant and everyone loves him. I am so very proud of them and forever indebted to those who helped and continue to facilitate growth in our sons.



First Steps Belief Statements

- Belief #1: Families are Decision Makers and the Child's First Teacher
- Belief #2: Effective Services are Designed Around and Promote Family Strengths
- Belief #3: Effective Services are Culturally Competent
- Belief #4: Effective Services are Provided in the Context of the Child's and Family's Natural Routines
- Belief #5: Effective Services are Provided in Natural Environments
- Belief #6: Services and Supports are Individualized
- Belief #7: Competent Providers Focus on Family Competence
- Belief #8: Early Identification and Family Engagement are Critical to Early Intervention

The Role of the First Steps Provider

The role of the First Steps provider is to serve families in a manner consistent with the First Steps Belief Statements. Providers support families through collaboration in an Early Intervention Team (EIT) approach to services. This approach emphasizes the role of families and the integral part they play in the life of their child. Each family's Primary Provider works closely with the family to learn about the child and family's unique strengths and challenges. The Primary Provider informs other team members of the family's area of need and gathers strategies. The Primary Provider then communicates the EIT's guidance to the family to support the child in daily routines, activities, and interactions.

The Power of Early Intervention

By Cari, Speech Language Pathologist

Child development is truly an amazing and awesome process and I feel extremely privileged to work in the field of early intervention. I have been involved with the First Steps program since 2002 and I have seen it evolve over the past twelve years. No longer do we focus on direct therapy where parents turn their kids over to us professionals for an hour each week while we work our magic. Today we use a teaming approach that embraces a coaching model of service delivery in which we strive to enhance the parent's competence and confidence to help their child develop. Early intervention is now using a model that I truly understand and appreciate. There are three reasons the coaching model works so effectively with the birth to three population:

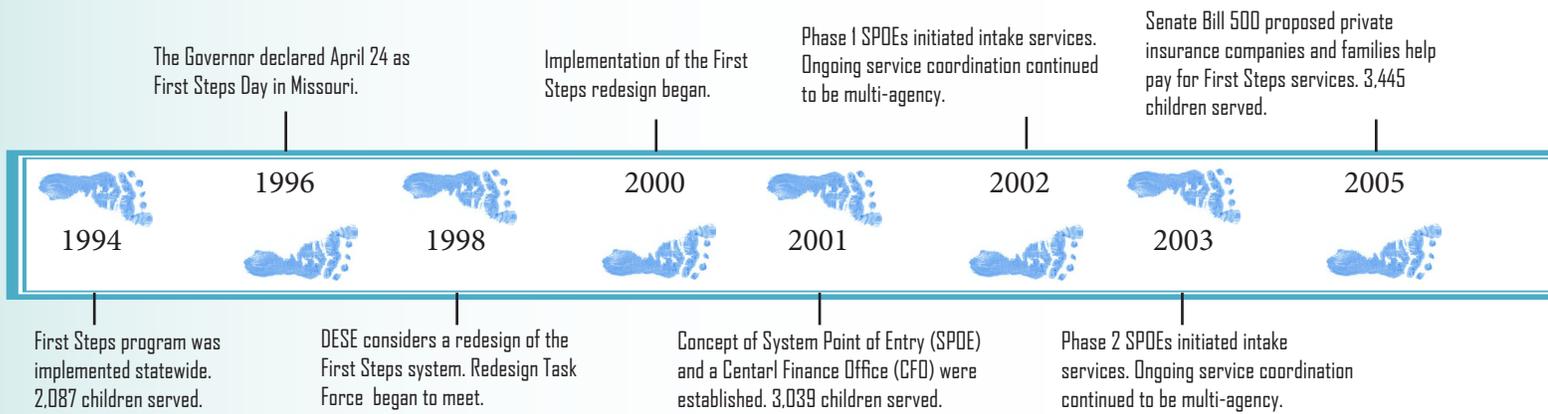
1. Very young children don't wake up in the morning and make decisions that will benefit their development. However, their parents do and that is why we focus our efforts on empowering parents during our therapy time together. Quality therapy with infants and toddlers is not about how the child performs with the therapist. What truly matters most is what occurs between the child and the caregiver(s) between therapy sessions.
2. Direct therapy teaches isolated skills out of context in 30 or 45 minute "lessons" and while this is an effective therapy model for older children, infants and toddlers do not learn the same way as older children learn. Very young children learn best when strategies are embedded into their daily routines in their natural environment. There is a reason we drive to the child's home or daycare and it's not to help the family save on gas money! Young children learn best in the environment in which they are expected to use the skills and so the natural environment just makes sense.
3. It takes two to tango. In early intervention I strive to build a collaborative partnership with parents. While professionals are the experts in child development, parents are the expert on their child. I try to help parents understand that they are the most important member of the early intervention team.

My amazing early intervention team here in Jackson County is molding me into a well-rounded therapist and this allows me to truly assess and treat the whole child. As an early intervention provider I understand that it is impossible to treat isolated body parts because all of the systems work together in development. Using a holistic approach is critical for young children to maximize their developmental potential and this is best achieved by utilizing a teaming approach.

The other driving force in early intervention is that relationships matter. In fact there are three relationships that we must focus on: the relationship between the professional and the child, the relationship between the professional and the parent, and the relationship between the parent and the child (this is the most important relationship of all). This triadic model of service delivery is unique to early intervention and it is precisely why early intervention works.

Every day I go to work to help young children with special needs and their families overcome obstacles by identifying strategies they can embed into their daily routines to enhance development. It is truly a rewarding experience and I am grateful for the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of children in my own community.





How Did First Steps Begin?

In 1986, the Governor of Missouri appointed the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) as the lead agency for Part H of the Education of the Handicapped Act. First Steps began as an interagency approach to early intervention between four state agencies: DESE; Department of Health (DOH); Department of Mental Health (DMH); and the Department of Social Services (DSS). First Steps began as a pilot program in Missouri. In August 1994, First Steps achieved statewide implementation.

In the past 20 years the First Steps program has made great progress. From a Governor's declaration of April 24 as First Steps Day in Missouri (1996), to a system redesign (2000), to new revenue sources (2005), to the introduction and implementation of Early Intervention Teams (2007-2013), First Steps has continued to move forward in its endeavor to effectively serve and positively impact children and families in Missouri.

Emily & Luke's Story: Taking the Next Steps

By Elizabeth of Barnhart, MO

May 4th started out like so many other days; only on this special morning we were going to meet our twins. The time was set for the c-section. Multiple ultrasounds had confirmed we would be welcoming a baby boy, Luke, and a baby girl, Emily.

At 6:30 Emily was born without complications. She was beautiful! Two minutes later Luke was born. He presented with cyanosis, and was very quiet. What the ultrasounds had not revealed was that Luke had Down syndrome, complicated with an atrial septal defect. The atmosphere of excitement and anticipation dissipated as the room filled with medical personnel. I saw Luke briefly before he was rushed to the NICU.

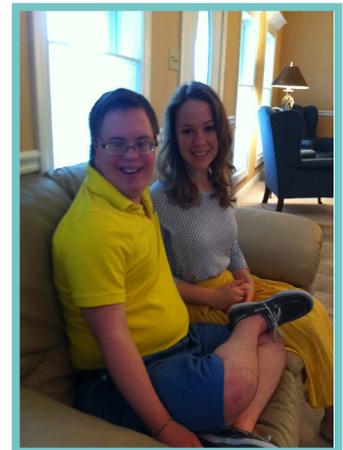
The next few hours were a blur as information concerning Luke filled our ears. The best news was that we were at a hospital that had ample resources to meet both Luke's needs and ours. Before Emily and I left the hospital we were introduced to a wonderful intake coordinator for First Steps.

Three weeks later Luke came home and First Steps was there soon after. The dedication and commitment of the First Steps team was exemplary! Luke had several surgeries over the next few months and First Steps worked around the surgery schedule to maximize their time with him.

The main goal was to provide services to Luke. This was done with expertise and consistency. The program was slow and steady in some areas, and moved rapidly in others. It was a holistic approach, and benefited Luke greatly. A secondary goal was to prepare the family for the time First Steps would leave us for the last time. When they did, we were armed with the tools we needed to help Luke take the next steps.

Today, Luke is doing well. He is working towards his High School diploma, and wants to attend college to study science. Presently he is a self-advocate in the Down Syndrome Community, serving on a leadership team at the Greater St. Louis DSA. Emily is studying at Indiana University as a clarinet performance major.

Thank you, First Steps, for making a difference in the lives of families across our state, and for equipping children for a lifetime!



Dr. Robin McWilliam came to MO and introduced a transdisciplinary team approach, a primary service provider model, and the Routines Based Interview™ (RBI). A few regions piloted teams.

Under new contract, SPDEs developed plans for an Early Intervention Team (EIT) approach to be implemented over the next 5 years.

EIT model reached full implementation statewide. DESE began preparations for the upcoming rebid of SPDE contracts. 11,194 children served.



2007



2008



2009



2012



2013

2014

The state was reconfigured to 10 SPDE regions for efficiency. Various service delivery models were explored. SPDEs provided all intake and 60% of ongoing service coordination.

Approximately 18 teams piloted the transdisciplinary approach. The Developmental Assessment of Young Children (DAYC) became the statewide tool to assist in eligibility determination. SPDEs provided all intake and ongoing service coordination. 7,890 children served.

Part C federal regulations were in effect with new requirements for a system of payments policy, transition, child/family assessments and parental consent. EITs continue to be established statewide. The Year at a Glance annual report began publication.

Jared's Story: Becoming An Advocate

By Brenda of Edina, MO

Twenty years ago Jared was in First Steps as an infant. Due to multiple health issues common with Down syndrome, he required physical and occupational therapy. He received speech therapy with Truman State University, Speech and Hearing Clinic. His hearing impairment required bilateral hearing aids as a young student.

Jared has been a Special Olympic athlete since the age of nine, which led to his participation in high school athletics as football and baseball manager. His friendships on the field encouraged confidence, leadership and self-esteem. In Jared's sophomore year, the high school baseball team arrived at a Special Olympic event to cheer on Jared and his teammates, "Just as Jared did for them every day."

While in high school Jared became involved with Missouri Special Olympics Youth Activation Committee (YAC); a state program that promotes youth development and inclusion through education and unified sports. This led to involvement in National YAC, a youth leadership team that develops and implements programs for youth engagement and motivation. This work challenged Jared, frequently shifting him out of his comfort level but he learned to use a lot of technology and developed remarkable friendships during those four years.

In June 2014, Jared represented those with intellectual disabilities at the United Nations Conference of State Parties on Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in New York. He was a representative for Special Olympics, as a panelist for Sports for Inclusive Development and Empowerment of persons with disabilities. Jared's message was a challenge for world leaders to create an inclusive world for every individual, that those with intellectual disabilities must not be excluded as countries strive toward developing programs with citizens who have been too frequently ignored. In July, Jared continued his path of advocacy as a guest at the White House. We have no idea what the future holds, but we are relishing every moment with our delightful son!!

Today Jared is a twenty-two year old who is competitively employed part-time in his community. His development was positively impacted by early intervention, which also equipped us with the knowledge and skill to advocate for an inclusive education for him. This inclusive lifestyle has led Jared to become an empowered self-advocate. His hope is that every individual has the opportunity to achieve their potential.



Mission Statement

First Steps is a support and service system designed to improve a family's capacity to enhance their child's development and learning, and to increase the child's participation in family and community life.

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 2013-14	% of Active Children
Parents	40.2%
Medical Providers (Hospitals, Physicians, Other health care, Public health)	37.4%
Early Childhood Programs (Parents as Teachers, Early Head Start, school districts, child care programs, etc.)	11.8%
Social Service Agencies (Mental Health and Health & Senior Services)	8.5%
Other Sources	2.1%
TOTAL	100%

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

In 2013-14, Parents Learned About First Steps From:	% of Parent Referrals
Medical Providers (Hospitals, Physicians, Other health care, Public health)	46.5%
Other Sources	33.4%
Early Childhood Programs (Parents as Teachers, Early Head Start, school districts, child care programs, etc.)	17.8%
Social Service Agencies (Mental Health and Health & Senior Services)	2.3%
TOTAL	100%

Parents: Are You Interested in Sharing Your First Steps Story?

Parent participation, feedback, and sharing ideas is important to making sure the First Steps program is making a difference for children and families in Missouri. Here are some ways to share your experience:

First Steps SPOE

The SPOE office is the first point of contact when families have questions, need help finding community resources, or want to share their story. The SPOE holds regional meetings that include family members, service providers, and community partners. Regional meetings provide an opportunity for parents to share their First Steps story.

MPACT

The Missouri Parents Act (MPACT) is a statewide parent training and information center for parents of children with disabilities. MPACT provides parent resources such as First Steps fact sheets and information about training sessions throughout the state. MPACT also collects stories from parents about their experiences in First Steps.

Newsletters

Families participating in First Steps receive a regular newsletter filled with program information, fun activities, helpful ideas, and parent stories.

State Meetings

State Interagency Coordinating Council (SICC) is a group which meets quarterly. The role of the SICC is to advise and assist the First Steps program with state and federal requirements. Each SICC meeting includes a Mission Moment which allows a First Steps family to share their experience.

To share your story or learn more about getting involved, please:

- * Contact your local SPOE office at: (866) 583-2392
- * Email the First Steps program at: sefirststeps@dese.mo.gov
- * Visit the MPACT website at: <http://www.ptimpact.org/>

First Steps Services

“Service and intervention are not the same thing. Service is what professionals provide whereas the majority of the intervention the child receives is from his or her caregiver. . .”

-Robin McWilliam, Ph.D.

The ABC's of First Steps

By Libby, Special Instructor



I have been a special instructor since 1997, and I have been asked “What is First Steps to me?” It’s as easy as ABC...

Active and hopping, sometimes literally, when a child dashes in and out of the room!

Babies, enough said. First Steps is about babies and toddlers.

Caring about people. Not just the children, but about all of the people involved in supporting the families.

Development of milestones, understanding, and skills.

Empowering families, through the sharing of information, to advocate for themselves and for their children.

Family, no matter the configuration, family consists of the people who are important in the lives of the children.

Goals that are important to the family. The family knows best what they need for their child.

Humbling, as the professional learns from the family. After all, they are with the children 24/7, and we only see them for an hour here or there!

Information about activities, services, and opportunities the family may need.

Joy, pure joy, as a child signs “more” for the first time or takes that first step to his or her caregiver.

Knees, laps, hips, noses, and ears (not to mention the glasses, earrings, and necklaces) because home visits are active and engaging.

Learning from one another...not just the children, but parents, grandparents, siblings, and providers too.

Modeling for caregivers (or other providers) how to implement some of the activities or processes to assist the children.

Next skills, transitions, family goals. First Steps is always looking ahead to what is next.

Opportunities for everyone! The providers have opportunities to learn from each other and the family.

Play, of course. Quality providers demonstrate to families appropriate play activities that encourage the acquisition of certain skills.

Quick intervention (in the life of a child under the age of three, one hour is quick!) that can be used by the family throughout the week.

Respectful relationships with whoever is part of the lives of the families. Respect for families, culture, life-styles, and beliefs is critical to strong, relationships.

Staff in the First Steps program are filled with knowledge and experience, which can make a huge difference in the lives of families and children.

Teaming in all things. We are in this together, and no one should be the expert in ALL areas.

Undeniably the most fun job I have ever had! Different people, places, cultures, disciplines, disabilities...all have enriched my life.

Varies, to accommodate changes due to new research about best practices, as well as changes in child and family circumstances. No cookie-cutter service here!

Works! Plain and simple, First Steps works! Together providers and families work to help the children get a jump start on development that can change their futures.

(e)Xcellent approach. First Steps uses research-based knowledge in conjunction with family insight and common sense to bring the best of both worlds together for the child.

Years, and sometimes just a few short months, but the impact is so great while the window of opportunity is open. We get to see the families and their children blossom!

Zzzz... Providers, get your rest so you can see each child with the ZEAL he or she deserves.

Jaxson's Story: We Are More Than Conquerors

By Kayla of Buffalo, MD

After losing a baby in pregnancy God promised us a son very soon. A month after our loss, we found out we were expecting baby number three. I imagined looking out my back door watching him play with our other two kids; I imagined school, sports, graduation and one day a wedding and grandbabies. On March 25, 2012 that dream died when I delivered Jaxson.

Jaxson was born with a 4q35.1-q35.2 deletion and 10q25.1-q26.3 duplication. He is currently the only person in the world with this specific diagnosis. So far he has hearing loss in both ears, a coloboma, nystagmus, Blepharophimosis, a complete midline cleft palate, Tracheomalacia, a Factor II Deficiency (type C hemophiliac), hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, Preaxial Polydactyly, and is developmentally delayed about a year and one-half his age. When we left the hospital a social worker gave us a pamphlet for First Steps. I threw it in the trash because I thought it was just another government program.



One month later, I found myself overwhelmed at my kitchen table not knowing how I was going to take care of my child. I threw my hands in the air and said "Lord, he's yours; please open the doors that need to be opened, because I can't do this." At a doctor's appointment later that day I was handed again a First Steps pamphlet so I went for it. A week later Shane, our service coordinator, called to tell us Jaxson was eligible for the program.

A weight was lifted off our shoulders. Jaxson was getting exactly the care he needed, speech, physical, occupational, and vision services. First Steps has provided hearing aids, a stroller, a stander and a car seat and have also brought in equipment for Jaxson to use. They have not only blessed our son, but they have been there when we had no hope, cheering us on and carrying us through our darkest days.

Life is beautiful again and we owe it to our First Steps team. Without them, Jaxson would be further behind and not getting what he needed because we just couldn't afford it. We are more than conquerors in this messy life and Jaxson is hitting some amazing milestones. He's touching more lives than most "normal" people do in a lifetime and we are so grateful.

When It's Time to Leave First Steps

Before First Steps ends at age three, service coordinators and service providers help families identify community resources so that parents can continue to meet the needs of their children. This process is referred to as Transition from First Steps.

Children leave First Steps every day, moving into Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) through the local school district or other community programs. Children left First Steps for the following reasons:

Reasons for Leaving First Steps in 2013-2014	# of Children	% of Exiting Children
Child turned three years old:		
Parent requested referral to ECSE - Eligible	2,259	58.8%
Parent requested referral to ECSE - Not Eligible	375	9.8%
Parent did not request referral to ECSE	210	5.5%
Family withdrew from First Steps	458	11.9%
Moved out of state	220	5.7%
Child completed IFSP outcomes	149	3.9%
Unable to contact the family	144	3.7%
Child passed away	22	0.6%
Other	4	0.1%
TOTAL	3,841	100%

Luke & Jake's Story: Long After You Are Gone...

By Kim of Joplin, MO

A few months ago, I heard a song on the radio that made me cry. But then again, I was already emotional because in December, my youngest son would age out of First Steps. There had been a Missouri First Step's therapist in my home almost every week for the last six years. How is that possible since the program only goes to age three? Well, I am a repeat offender. My 7 year old son was also a First Stepper. Luke, my oldest son has Autism and Jake, my youngest, has Cerebral Palsy and Dystonia. After all the struggles we have faced, our First Steps team is like family. They have been with us every step of the way with our two boys and now they would be leaving us. Cue the song...

The very first line of the song made me flash back to the Joplin tornado:

"When life leaves you high and dry, I'll be at your door tonight if you need help..."

The first person who knocked on our door following the tornado was our Physical Therapy Assistant Adam. He was checking on us and making sure Jake was okay. We had extensive damage to our home, but we were okay. He told me to call him if we needed anything and headed out to check on his other clients and their families. He was pulling a trailer full of equipment he might need to help.

That was an extreme situation, but every day the therapists and coordinators from First Steps arrive at the doors of families who are in desperate need of help. Often overwhelmed by a diagnosis, or the lack of one, families are looking for someone to help their child. For 6 years the best First Steps team ever assembled has been knocking on my door and given me the tools I needed to help my sons do everything from walk to eat.

"Your hope dangling by a string, I'll share in your suffering to make you well, to make you well..."

There were many times as a mom I felt helpless and hopeless; I didn't know what to do to help my sons. Countless tests, doctor appointments and traveling to specialists can wear a family out even before they get to the day-to-day business of things; like learning how to get your child to eat without choking, or just to eat period. Our providers stood right beside us through all those struggles.

First Steps changed our lives and helped our boys get the help they needed. Our Speech Pathologists have been amazing. Without Martha, I may have never heard Luke say, "I love you, mom mom." Jada, celebrated just as loud as I did when she finally got Jake to eat a green bean! Jada's diligence in helping us learn to feed Jake without his choking prevented him from receiving a G-tube. Emily helped Jake find the words to tell his story. Our Occupational Therapists, Lisa and Heather, gave my boys the daily living skills they needed to get a head start.

"When you fall like a statue, I will be there to catch you, Put you on Your Feet... You're my backbone, my cornerstone, you're my crutch when my legs stop moving..."

And our Physical Therapists, where to begin? I was not prepared for the physical toll Cerebral Palsy would have on our lives when Jake was born. Cerebral Palsy is a whole different creature than dealing with sensory issues. Luke never cried during Physical Therapy, Jake screamed. Luke's physical therapy was more "fun". He did have to wear orthotics, but we played games to learn balance and how to skip. Our physical therapist Debbie told me from the beginning Jake's therapy would be different. She emphasized I would have to be diligent with his stretching and showed me the things I could do to help Jake.

Our Physical Therapy Assistant Adam came every week to do stretching and work on Jake's motor skills and coordination. Without Debbie and Adam, Jake may have never crawled or walked when he did. The stretches they taught me help me keep Jake out of spasm and contractures as much as possible, which means he is in less pain.

"You're my headstart you're my rugged heart, You're the pulse that I've always needed...don't stop beating"

At the heart of all these providers was our First Steps Service Coordinator, Connie. Without her I cannot fathom what our lives would be like. When the doctor told us Jake may have a terminal form of Muscular Dystrophy, Connie was my first call. When I asked her what we were going to do, she calmly replied, "We keep doing what we are doing, helping Jake reach his goals." Connie, Martha, Debbie and Lisa have been a part of our family for the last 6 years, Adam for 3 years and Heather, Emily, and Jada all became a part of our First Steps family in the last year. And they are FAMILY. Many people compliment us on our children; they ask us what it took to get them where they are. I always have two answers for them; lots of prayer and First Steps.

First Steps impacted the lives of our boys so much; I have decided to try and become one of them! I am currently enrolled in the Occupational Therapy Assistant program at Crowder College and hope to someday work as a First Step Provider. I have personally seen how important those "first steps" of intervention are and want to be a part of that. While we are no longer a client of First Steps, our providers will always be family to us. The difference First Steps has made for our sons will be seen for the rest of their lives. All I can say is "thank you". Which brings me to the final words of the song. Our providers will be in our hearts **"long after you are gone gone gone."**

Song: Gone Gone Gone Performed By: Phillip Phillips Album: The World from the Side of the Moon



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 regarding compliance with certain activities, including:

- First Steps services began within 30 days after parent consent
- First Steps services were provided within the family's home or other natural environment
- The Service Coordinator completed referral and IFSP activities within 45 days after referral
- For children transitioning to Early Childhood Special Education, a transition conference was held at least three months before the child's third birthday

Annual Performance Report Results for 2013-14	% of Compliance
#1 - Timely Services	87.1%
#2 - Natural Environments	99.0%
#7 - 45-Day Timelines	94.0%
#8C - Timely Transition Conference	92.9%

To view the full report on the performance of the First Steps program, go to <http://dese.mo.gov/special-education/state-performance-plan> and under Annual Performance Report (APR), click on *Part C APR 2012/2013*.

First Steps Child Count and Cost

	FY10	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14
December 1 Child Count *	4,200	4,539	5,024	4,999	4,988
December 1 Child Count Percent of Change	11%	8%	11%	-0.5%	0%
Total Children Served in FY **	9,183	9,864	10,659	11,194	11,613
Total Cost per Child ***	\$4,008	\$4,057	\$3,770	\$3,374	\$3,243
Direct Service Cost per Child ****	\$2,809	\$2,886	\$2,670	\$2,380	\$2,294

* Total number of children with an active IFSP on December 1

** Total number of children who had some type of First Steps service (evaluation, IFSP meeting, or direct service)

*** Total cost per child including administrative, training, testing and direct service costs

**** Direct service cost per child including evaluation, IFSP meeting, direct service and mileage



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