

# first steps

Ohio's Infant and  
Toddler Initiative

“What happens during the first months and years of life matters a lot, not because this period of development provides an indelible blueprint for adult well-being, but because it sets either a sturdy or fragile stage for what follows.” Jack Shonkoff, M.D.

## High Quality Infant Toddler Child Care Matters

### Why? Because Early Experiences Last a Lifetime.

Approximately 150,000 babies are born in Ohio each year. With 56% of mothers of infants under age one in the labor force, many Ohio families are searching for care outside the home. Fifty percent of parents who call child care resource and referral agencies are looking for a safe place for their infants and toddlers. More than 51,000 infants and toddlers are in licensed early childhood programs each day with waiting lists for most programs.

### **All Babies Have a Right to Be Supported and Nurtured So They Can Reach Their Full Potential.**

All babies are born ready to learn. They are very competent learners right from the start. However, they are also very vulnerable and count on us to protect them. *Neurons to Neighborhoods* confirms that human relationships are the “active ingredient” in a child’s growth and development. Who babies share their days with – and the environments in which they spend their time – matter.

### **First Steps – Ohio’s Infant Toddler Initiative**

*First Steps* grew from a critical need to understand how infants and toddlers were cared for outside the home, and to promote high-quality care all day, every day in these settings for Ohio’s youngest citizens.



Ohio Child Care  
Resource & Referral  
Association

**Ohio** | Department of  
Job and Family Services



# The History of first steps



## Creating an Infant Toddler Specialist Network

In the beginning, Ohio solicited the advice of infant and toddler experts, including Joan Lombardi, Peter Mangione, Ron Lally, Thelma Harms, Debbie Cryer and Kay Albrecht. Their suggestions helped shape a logic model that led to a long-range plan with short-term goals and objectives. An important cornerstone of this logic model was to create an Infant Toddler Specialist Network.

### Focusing on Technical Assistance and Professional Development

The primary purpose of the Infant Toddler Specialist Network is to improve quality by focusing on technical assistance and professional development. Infant Toddler Specialists are located in child care resource and referral agencies. Their work is coordinated by a statewide director at the Ohio Child Care Resource and Referral Association (OCCRA).

### Launching The Program for Infant and Toddler Care

WestEd's *The Program for Infant Toddler Care* (PITC) is nationally recognized for improving quality and is the only one of its kind leading to national certification. It guides and serves as the philosophical foundation for infant and toddler work in Ohio. All Ohio Infant Toddler Specialists are required to become PITC certified in addition to having a bachelor's degree and previous experience with infants, toddlers and adult learners.



## Collecting the Data

Prior to *First Steps*, only anecdotal information existed on the overall quality of infant and toddler care in Ohio. Before any improvements could be made, reliable and valid data needed to be collected. To do this, Ohio's Infant Toddler Specialists were trained to reliability on the Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS) and the Family Day Care Environment Rating Scale (FDCERS). Over the next year, 108 family child care homes and 635 infant toddler classrooms were assessed.

### Call to Action for Ohio

The data, while not surprising, confirmed the need for quality supports of infant toddler settings. It showed that individuals caring for these children did not adequately understand or have the skills to foster their development. These findings led to the creation of the *Infant Toddler Guidelines*.

### Assessment Results



May 2004  
Project Begins

June 2005  
Initial Research Ends

Feb. 2005  
Infant Toddler Guidelines Development Begins

March 2006  
Infant Toddler Guidelines Released

Oct. 2006  
Infant Toddler Guidelines Training Begins

Nov. 2006  
SUTQ Goes Statewide

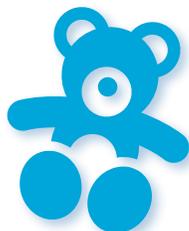
milestones



Language skills, self-confidence, and social and emotional well-being find their roots in infancy.

### An Unexpected Development

A randomized study evaluated three levels of intervention provided by the Infant Toddler Specialists. The working hypothesis was straightforward: the programs that received the most intensive intervention would demonstrate the greatest degree of improvement. Instead, the findings showed something different. The degree of change had more to do with the disposition and skills of Infant Toddler Specialists than the amount and intensity of intervention. As a result, Infant Toddler Specialists received specialized training and support to provide high quality technical assistance.



## Step Up To Quality

*Step Up To Quality* is Ohio's Quality Rating and Improvement System. Programs become Star Rated earning one, two or three stars, with three being the highest. *First Steps* was integrated into the statewide implementation of *Step Up To Quality*.

### Supporting Emerging Stars

During the first two years of implementation, *Step Up To Quality* awarded an Emerging Star designation to programs unable to become Star Rated due to licensing non-compliance. These programs received 12 months of technical assistance with the expectation that they would become Star Rated. Once rated, they received an additional year of technical assistance until their Star Rating was renewed. To date, 40 percent of the 568 Emerging Stars have achieved a Star Rating.

### A New Priority

After two years of dedicated effort to increase the number of *Step Up To Quality* programs, the focus has shifted to supporting those who want to increase their Star Rating. While the overall environment is still important, there is increased attention on curriculum planning and assessment to optimize infant and toddler development.



March 2008  
Program  
Standards  
Development  
Begins

June 2008  
Program  
Standards  
Released

Oct. 2008  
Best Practice  
Series Begins

## Early Learning Guidelines for Infants and Toddlers

One of the most important outcomes of *First Steps* was the unprecedented alliance of early childhood professionals from 71 Ohio agencies and organizations serving infants and toddlers who joined with faculty from WestEd to develop and publish *Ohio's Infant Toddler Guidelines*. The Guidelines document the six domains of infant toddler development in the voice of the child. Other states have adopted Ohio's Guidelines – a testament to the quality and professionalism of the work.

## Regulations and Program Standards

While licensing regulations are essential, they are not sufficient to support the optimal development of infants and toddlers. To promote higher quality programs, Ohio developed the *Standards for Care and Teaching*. WestEd facilitated the effort and Jerlean Daniel, NAEYC; Jim Elicker, Purdue University; and Louis Torelli, Spaces for Children; were part of the review team. The Standards align to *Early Learning Program Guidelines* for preschool programs, assuring continuity of care for all children ages birth to five. Although programs are not required to implement the Standards, they are used in continuous improvement efforts.

## Next Steps

Much has been accomplished toward the initial goal of improving care for Ohio's infants and toddlers. However, there's still more we need to do:

- Increase the supply of high quality infant toddler settings
- Reduce ratios and group sizes
- Increase a diverse and culturally competent workforce
- Continue to provide job-embedded professional development



## Professional Development

Once the Guidelines were published, 20.5 hours of Infant Toddler Guidelines training were developed. Professionals in the field lost no time enrolling. Demand escalated after this training became a prerequisite for *Step Up To Quality*. Many early care and education teachers voluntarily exceeded the training requirement and completed the entire series. The drive on the part of these teachers for additional training is one of the greatest success stories of this initiative. This demand led to development of the *Best Practice* series, which is linked to *Ohio's Core Knowledge and Competencies*.

### Infant Toddler Guidelines Trainings

	Trainings	Participants
10/06-6/07	382	6,850
7/07-6/08	945	14,720
7/08-6/09	966	14,188
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,293</b>	<b>35,758</b>

### Infant Toddler Teachers in T.E.A.C.H.

7/04-6/05	63
7/05-6/07	255
7/07-6/09	371

## Putting Federal Resources to Work

Ohio's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding for infants and toddlers is \$3,262,219. This funding is being used to support the network of Infant Toddler Specialists, provide T.E.A.C.H. scholarships to infant toddler teachers, develop parent education materials and bring new professional development venues to the state such as *Mind in the Making*.