



Florida Interagency Coordinating Council  
for **Infants and Toddlers—FICCIT**

[www.floridaicc.org](http://www.floridaicc.org)

## **Early Intervention Services**

# **Annual Report**

***Fiscal Year 2007-2008***

## **State of Florida**



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Dear Governor Crist and Fellow Floridians:

The Florida Interagency Coordinating Council for Infants and Toddlers (FICCIT), is pleased to submit this annual report for the Birth to Three System (Florida's Early Steps). The FICCIT is charged by Federal law to advise and assist the state lead agency in making decisions that affect Florida's system of early intervention. This report covers the period from July 1, 2007 through June 30, 2008 and includes information about the status of Florida's Early Steps.

Early Steps is a collaborative partnership between providers, families, local Early Steps, state agencies and the Council to provide services for infants and toddlers who have developmental delays or an established condition likely to result in a developmental delay that supports children's well-being and development where they live, learn and play. As the parent of two children who benefited from Florida's Early Steps, I am encouraged by the level of partnership that exists. Working together makes it possible to expand and improve the services available to Florida's infants and toddlers who have disabilities and their families.

During this past year, we have enjoyed successes and have encountered challenges. One challenge to Florida's Early Steps is a result of the extraordinary job the lead agency does with Child Find. The referral rate to Early Steps increased 7.9% over the previous year, bringing the total number served to 37,876. This consistent growth places greater demands on the program to deliver services to more and more families each year.

This past year, our successes include:

- The Family Leadership Committee has worked collaboratively with the local Early Steps to hold quarterly Conversations with Families. These have been very successful with families sharing successes and challenges of the program throughout the state. The Committee also compiled data on these events to assist with decision making of the statewide program, collaborating with local grass root family organizations/groups and developing outcomes and goals for the committee.
- The Public Affairs Committee revised an informational palm card to be distributed at conferences and public events for use in recruiting family members to the FICCIT. This committee also developed this annual report, which is designed to provide an overview of the status of early intervention services in the state.
- The Personnel Development and Training Committee members have worked diligently to develop and implement a strategic plan to address key areas of need related to training and professional development based on the most recent Annual Performance Report. One highlight of the year has been the implementation of a recommendation for the establishment of local training coordinators within each of the 15 local Early Steps. Conversations with Providers have continued with excellent feedback received.

On behalf of Florida's infants and toddlers and their families, we thank you for your continued support of Florida's Early Steps.

Sincerely,

Randee Gabriel  
Chair, 2007-2009

### Mission Statement

The mission of the Florida Interagency Coordinating Council for Infants and Toddlers is to enhance opportunities for Florida's infants and toddlers with special needs and their families. To accomplish this mission, the council will:

- Advise and assist the state lead agency and other entities in the development, implementation, and evaluation of policies and procedures;
- Educate decision-makers, service providers, families and all Floridians;
- Facilitate communication across local, state, and federal levels;
- Foster partnerships; and
- Explore new trends and research validated practices.

### The Florida Interagency Coordinating Council for Infants and Toddlers

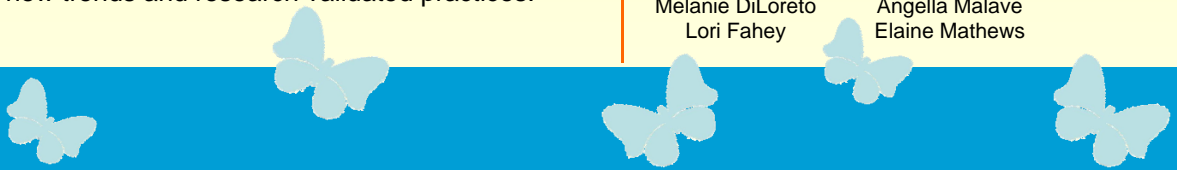
#### Officers

Randee Gabriel  
Chair 2007-2009

Paula Kendig                      Judy Corso  
Past-Chair 2004-2006      Chair-Elect 2007-2009

#### Members

Lorraine Allen	Dominique Fethiere	Becky Maguire
Roni Bader-Tables	Cynthia Fuller	Sue Ross
Laurie Blades	Martha Harbin	Jeanne Sisco
Patricia Corder	Bambi Lockman	Phyllis Sloyer
Samantha Delloso	Lou Ann Long	John Walker
Melanie DiLoreto	Angella Malave	
Lori Fahey	Elaine Mathews	





# early steps

*early growth... early help... early steps*

Florida's **Early Steps** offers early intervention services to families with infants and toddlers (birth to 36 months) who have developmental delays or an established condition likely to result in a developmental delay. Services are based on the concerns, priorities and resources identified by the child's family as part of their Individualized Family Support Plan team. Early Steps coordinates available resources and is the payer of last resort.

Many types of specialized services are available through Early Steps for eligible children and their families, such as:

- identification
- multidisciplinary evaluations
- service coordination
- individualized family support planning
- intervention services, therapies and supports
- hearing and vision services

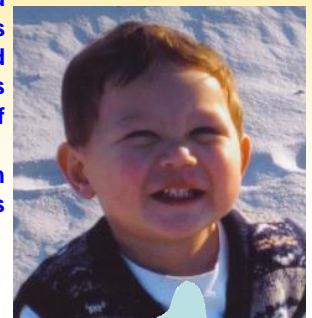
Early Steps services are provided by contracted local offices across the state that coordinate with community agencies and providers for the delivery of needed supports and services. The services are delivered within the everyday routines, activities, and places of the child and family. The Early Steps system is administered by The Florida Department of Health, Children's Medical Services Network in accordance with the Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Part C.

## 2007-2008 Accomplishments

- Designed and developed Early Steps (ES) Policy Handbook and Operations Guide system that became effective March 1, 2008. The new ES Policies are more concise, family-friendly, and web-enabled.
- Provided funding for the purchase of laptop computers for all Service Coordinators throughout the state. Additionally, the ES State Office (ESSO) arranged for the Local Early Steps to take advantage of low state contract rates for Verizon services to get wireless connectivity on the laptops.
- Developed and signed an interagency agreement between the Department of Health and the Department of Children and Families which focuses on the process for referral to Early Steps of infants and toddlers who are potentially eligible for early intervention services, and who are involved in substantiated cases of child abuse or neglect.
- Participated on the Governor's Task Force on Autism Spectrum Disorders. The task force is designed to advance public policy for addressing autism in Florida, and Early Steps provides information about early intervention to the group.
- Improved overall statewide performance on timely service delivery, developing an Individualized Family Support Plan within 45 days of the child's referral to Early Steps, and conducting a transition conference for children turning 3.
- Added the ability to post job opportunities for local Early Steps agencies on the ESSO website. This should enhance our recruitment activities.
- Improved our Professional Development efforts without additional costs by creating Training Coordinator responsibilities at each local Early Steps.

**Spencer was born in 2006 with a cleft lip and we knew there was a possibility for speech problems. In November 2007, he was evaluated for a speech delay and we were told that he needed speech therapy twice a week. Soon after that evaluation we began speech therapy at Pearl Nelson Center. Alita, his speech therapist, has a very loud and bubbly personality which is the exact opposite of Spencer. Spencer was very quiet and a serious child. He also would become very frustrated because he could not communicate his needs to us. Since then he has worked hard to improve his speech and he and Alita are best friends. We could not have picked a better therapist to help him. He is a very happy child now and can say many words clearly. Although he still talks with a nasal tone at times, his speech has improved and it is all because of the wonderful programs that Early Steps offers! Everyone that has helped my son has been fabulous and his speech really has improved with the help of his therapist and teacher, Emily. We are forever grateful for the help he has received!**

**-The Jocsons, family from  
Western Panhandle Early Steps**

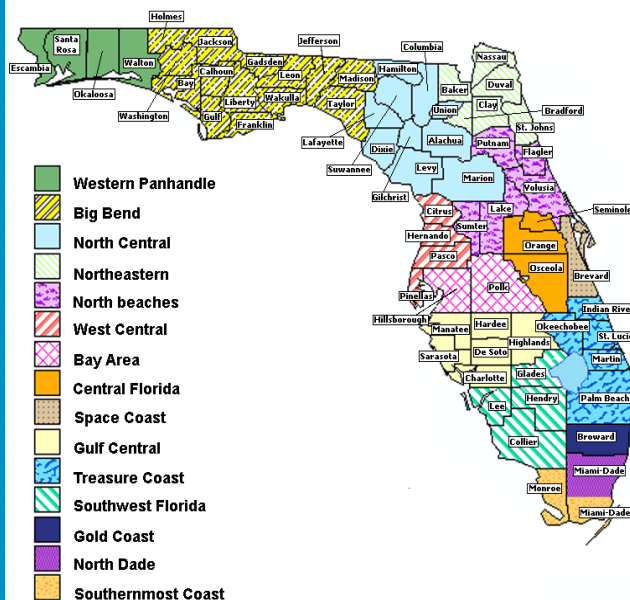




## Number of Children Receiving Early Steps Services by County

<b>Western Panhandle: 1355</b>	Madison: 28	Clay: 336	Polk: 1231	Martin: 242
Escambia: 668	Taylor: 33	Duval: 1925	<b>Central Florida: 3069</b>	St. Lucie: 568
Okaloosa: 304	Wakulla: 52	Nassau: 107	Orange: 2102	Okeechobee: 108
Santa Rosa: 320	<b>North Central: 1124</b>	St. Johns: 241	Osceola: 349	<b>Southwest Florida: 1525</b>
Walton: 63	Alachua: 312	<b>North Beaches: 1121</b>	Seminole: 618	Collier: 549
<b>Big Bend: 1479</b>	Columbia: 118	Flagler: 120	<b>Space Coast: 1259</b>	Lee: 897
Bay: 393	Dixie: 16	Lake: 313	Brevard: 1259	Hendry: 73
Calhoun: 20	Gilchrist: 17	Putnam: 153	<b>Gulf Central: 2575</b>	Glades: 6
Gulf: 31	Hamilton: 24	Volusia: 535	Charlotte: 278	<b>Gold Coast: 5097</b>
Holmes: 28	Lafayette: 11	<b>West Central: 2704</b>	Desoto: 108	Broward: 5097
Jackson: 100	Levy: 44	Citrus: 113	Hardee: 98	<b>North Dade &amp; Southernmost Coast: 5731</b>
Washington: 49	Marion: 497	Hernando: 220	Highlands: 262	Dade: 5543
Franklin: 32	Suwannee: 70	Pasco: 805	Manatee: 846	Monroe: 188
Gadsden: 122	Union: 15	Pinellas: 1511	Sarasota: 983	<b>No County ID: 57</b>
Jefferson: 23	<b>Northeastern: 2690</b>	Sumter: 55	<b>Treasure Coast: 3806</b>	<b>Other U.S. County: 31</b>
Leon: 550	Baker: 35	<b>Bay Area: 4068</b>	Palm Beach: 2723	
Liberty: 18	Bradford: 46	Hillsborough: 2837	Indian River: 165	

### Florida's Early Steps Service Areas



After having six healthy children, it never occurred to us things might go differently with our seventh child. So my husband and I were stunned when we were told our unborn baby girl had Spina Bifida.

In the weeks that followed her diagnosis, we learned what a serious condition this was. Unable to feel anything from the waist down due to an opening in her spine, walking and other normal functions many of us take for granted would be difficult or impossible for our daughter.

Following Jordan's birth, there were many anxious days. It was a difficult and scary time for our family. Although we wanted to do anything we could to help our daughter, we didn't even know where to begin. Thankfully, into this traumatic time stepped Early Steps.

The Early Steps program assessed not only Jordan's medical needs but our needs as a family. They quickly established us with an exceptional pediatric physical therapist who has taught us many exercises to build Jordan's physical strength. We now have access to educational programs, to advisors when we have questions or need guidance, and to physical therapy equipment. Through their guidance, I have also been empowered to become an advocate for Jordan's needs as they arise. Furthermore, I have been encouraged through books from their lending library to develop a new vision for Jordan's future. Greatest of all, because of our involvement with Early Steps, we can now look forward with hope and confidence to a bright future for our daughter.

-Elizabeth, mother from  
Gulf Central Early Steps



**37,691 children received Early Steps services in Florida during the past year.**

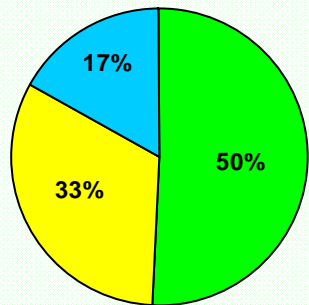


## Early Intervention Works

“Participation in Florida’s Early Intervention Program [Early Steps] reduced the need for placement in kindergarten exceptional student education for all infants regardless of birth weight. Even children who face the most serious challenges to developing school readiness, infants born less than 750 grams [1 lb. 10 oz.], benefited from participation in EIP [Early Intervention Programs]: 40 percent of them no longer required placement in Kindergarten ESE [Exceptional Student Education].”

Excerpt from the *Benefits at Kindergarten of Participation by Very Low Birth Weight Infants in a Birth-To-Three Early Intervention Program* by Dr. Jeffrey Roth, Maternal Child Health & Education Research & Data Center, University of Florida, College of Medicine, Department of Pediatrics, Division of Neonatology.

### Number of Children Receiving Services by Age of Referral (in months)



■ 0-12    ■ 13-24    ■ 25-36

#### *A Family-Centered Approach*

**Early Steps** recognizes parents are a child’s first teachers, and the involvement of family is essential to supporting a child’s development. Early intervention increases opportunities for infants and toddlers with disabilities to integrate into their communities and enhances the ability of families to meet their child’s developmental needs.

Early Steps partners with parents, focusing on the family as a unit. Families and caregivers are involved in all aspects of decision making, provided sufficient information to make informed decisions, and supported in developing the skills necessary to meet their child’s needs.

A Family Resource Specialist (FRS), knowledgeable in all of the services available to the family both within and outside of Early Steps, is assigned to each family. From arranging therapists for the child to identifying respite opportunities for parents and assisting with the transition out of Early Steps at age three, the Family Resource Specialist is key to the Early Steps approach, empowering families with training and support to increase the learning opportunities for their children.

I’m the mother of five beautiful children - four boys and a beautiful girl. Her name is Isabella and she was born with Down Syndrome. We were given a prenatal diagnosis two years ago so we had plenty of time to prepare emotionally and instructively for her arrival.

No sooner was our daughter born then we were on our way to Children’s Diagnostic and Treatment Center (CDTC) to enroll her in Early Steps. There we met with many people who have helped us tremendously along the road we now travel.

We were offered an evaluation and many diverse plans to help Isabella reach her maximum potential. We were given realistic ideas for what she would be able to accomplish if we followed the suggested plans for early intervention. Early Steps set up her therapies and continuously offered us support to help our family deal with the many different aspects of having a child with disabilities.

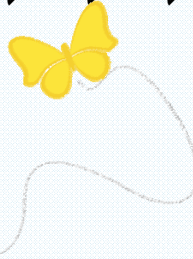
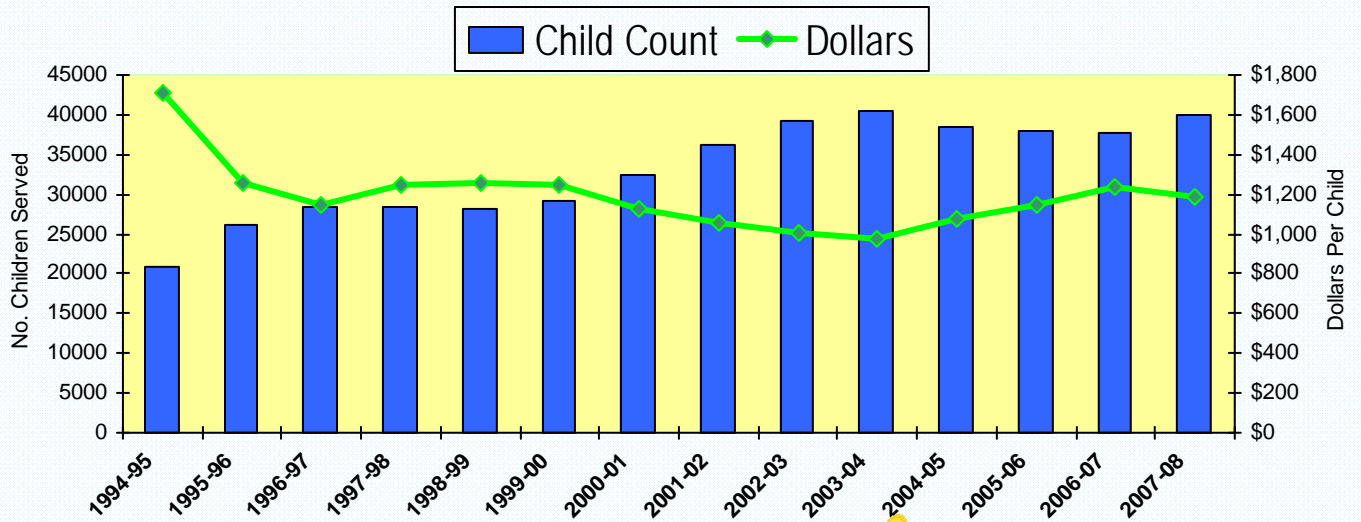
Our Early Steps service coordinator has been the cornerstone of Isabella’s treatments, and we could not have made it this far without her. She, as well as the entire Early Steps staff, has surpassed all our expectations. We are eternally grateful for all their hard work.

-Mariella, mother from Gold Coast LES

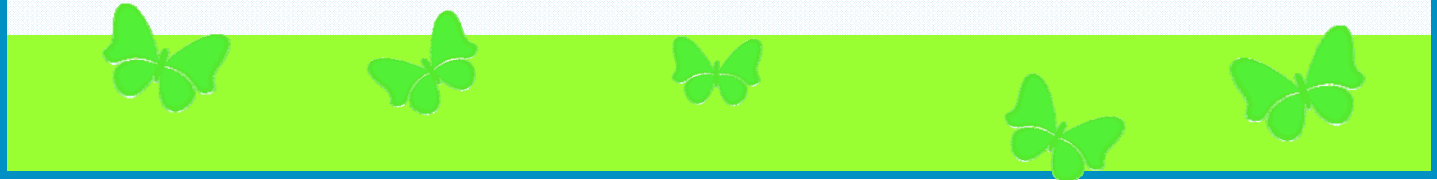
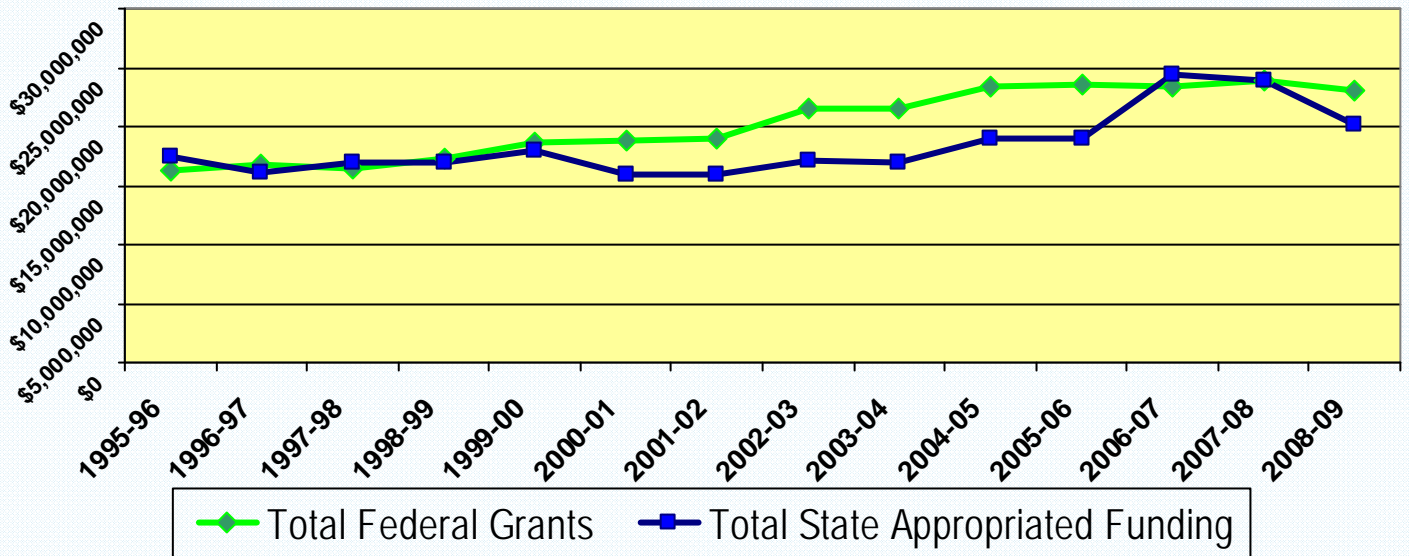




## History of Per Child Early Steps Funding



## Early Steps State Appropriations and Federal Funding





## Another Success Story

Kayla has faced physical challenges from the day she was born. On that day, all of her organs were failing except for her heart and lungs, she was having seizures, and had only 10% of the required blood so she needed 4 blood transfusions. After her organs repaired themselves and the seizures stopped, I finally took my baby home. The next several months were very hard for us. Besides being a mom to an infant with special needs and taking care of the rest of my family, I constantly wondered if she was going to be disabled. So the hardest part was dealing with all these new emotions.



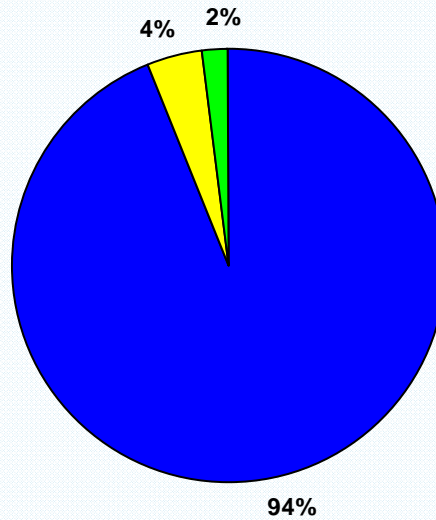
Over the next two years tremendous things happened. Kayla was diagnosed at 6 months with Spastic Quadriplegia Cerebral Palsy, which led to numerous tests to find out the extent of the brain damage. We enrolled with Early

Steps and received services at the Children's Rehab Center. Those most helpful throughout this time were the therapists at CRC and the caring staff at Early Steps. Not only for being there to answer all of my questions and help me with education material, but also for support, socialization through the playgroups, and much needed equipment for Kayla.

Although being a single parent to a special needs child can be emotionally and physically draining, the reward is far greater than I could ever imagine. I wake up everyday to a smiling face, so pure, innocent, happy and healthy. Kayla has given me strength and hope; she has taught me to be humble and not take things for granted. I am so thankful to have Kayla in my life, and I wouldn't change a thing.

-Charyse Hilliard, mother from Southwest FL LES

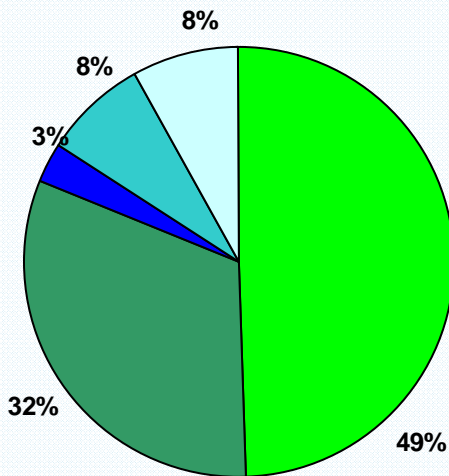
## Allocation of Early Steps Dollars 2007-2008



- Direct Services for Children with Special Needs
- Total Children's Medical Services Headquarters
- General Supervision Requirements per Federal Regulations

**Total: \$46,764,899**

## Early Steps Funding by Source 2008-2009



- Federal IDEA Part C
- State General Revenue
- State Medicaid Match
- State Tobacco Trust Fund
- Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)



## EARLY STEPS STATE/REGIONAL CONTACTS

### **Western Panhandle**

(Counties served: Escambia, Okaloosa, Santa Rosa & Walton)  
Joy McAfee, Developmental Program Manager  
Sacred Heart Hospital/DEI  
5150 Bayou Blvd., Suite 1-N  
Pensacola, FL 32503  
(850) 416-7656  
jmcafee@shhpens.org

### **Big Bend**

(Counties served: Bay, Calhoun, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Washington, Franklin, Gadsden, Jefferson, Leon, Liberty, Madison, Taylor & Wakulla)  
Cheryl Fitzgerald, Program Director  
Cheryl.fitzgerald@chsfl.org

Tallahassee CHS/Early Steps  
1801 Miccosukee Commons Drive  
Tallahassee, FL 32308  
(850) 921-0330

Children's Home Society  
914 Harrison Avenue  
Panama City, FL 32401  
(850) 747-5411, SC: 777-5411

### **North Central**

(Counties served: Alachua, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Lafayette, Levy, Marion, Suwannee & Union)  
Fonda Davis-Eyler, Director  
Department of Pediatrics  
1600 SW Archer Rd, Rm HD 119  
Gainesville, FL 32610  
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eylerfd@peds.ufl.edu

### **Northeastern**

(Counties served: Baker, Bradford, Clay, Duval, Nassau & St. Johns)  
April Smith, Program Director  
910 North Jefferson Street  
Jacksonville, FL 32209  
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April\_Smith@doh.state.fl.us

### **West Central**

(Counties served Citrus, Hernando, Pasco & Pinellas)  
Louise Boothby-Llorente, PHS, Director  
West Central Early Steps  
All Children's Hospital  
801 Sixth Street South, Dept. 7470  
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(727) 767-4403  
llorenteL@allkids.org

### **Bay Area**

(Counties served: Hillsborough & Polk)  
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(813) 974-0687  
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Pat Grosz, Director  
Direct Services Network  
Infants & Young Children of West Central Florida, Inc.  
1308 W. Sligh Avenue  
Tampa, FL 33604  
(813) 375-3980  
pgrosz@tampabayrr.com

### **Central Florida**

(Counties served: Orange, Osceola & Seminole)  
Lourdes Quintana, Director  
Orlando Central Florida Early Steps  
601 West Michigan Street  
Orlando, FL 32805  
(407) 317-7430  
Lourdes.Quintana@orhs.org

### **North Beaches**

(Counties served: Flagler, Lake, Putnam, Sumter & Volusia)  
Gayla Clark, ES Coordinator  
Children's Advocacy Center of Volusia and Flagler Counties, Inc.  
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Daytona Beach, FL 32114-4623  
(386) 258-7434, (800) 439-6417  
gayla\_clark@doh.state.fl.us

### **Space Coast**

(County served: Brevard)  
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1024 South Florida Avenue, Suite A  
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althea\_puzio@doh.state.fl.us

### **Gulf Central**

(Counties served: Charlotte, Desoto, Hardee, Highlands, Manatee & Sarasota)  
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Sarasota, FL 34239-3555  
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Eileen-Welch@smh.com

### **Southwest Florida**

(Counties served: Collier, Lee, Hendry & Glades)  
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Health Planning Council  
8961 Daniels Center Drive, Suite 401  
Ft. Myers, FL 33912  
(239) 433-6700  
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### **Treasure Coast**

(Counties Served: Palm Beach, Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee & St. Lucie)  
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Lori Shamroth-Carver, Coordinator, Jensen Beach  
Treasure Coast Campus  
10570 S Federal Highway, Suite 200  
Port St Lucie, FL 34952  
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lscarver@easterseals.com

### **Gold Coast**

(County served: Broward)  
Ellie Schrot, ES Coordinator  
Children's Diagnostic & Treatment Center  
1401 S Federal Highway  
Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33316  
(954) 728-1083  
eschrot@nbhd.org

### **North Dade**

(County served: North Dade)  
Ray Rodriguez, Interim ES Program Coordinator  
Mailman Center for Child Development  
University of Miami, Dept. of Pediatrics  
1120 NW 14th Street, 12th Flr., Locator C208  
Miami, FL 33136  
(305) 243-6660  
rrodriguez3@med.miami.edu

### **Southernmost Coast**

(Counties served: South Dade & Monroe)  
Marie Severe, Director  
Miami Children's Hospital  
17615 SW 97th Ave  
Palmetto Bay, FL 33157  
(786) 268-2611  
Email: marie.severe@mch.com

Rob Porcaro, Executive Director  
Easter Seals Florida Keys Region  
5220 College Road  
Key West, FL 33040  
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### **Early Steps State Office**

Janice Kane, Bureau Chief  
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Florida Department of Health  
4052 Bald Cypress Way, Bin A06  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1707  
(850) 245-4200  
Janice\_kane@doh.state.fl.us

For further information, please visit the Early Steps website:

[www.cms-kids.com/EarlyStepsHome.htm](http://www.cms-kids.com/EarlyStepsHome.htm)

**Statewide  
Family Referral Line:**

**1-800-654-4440**



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Sponsored by: The Florida Interagency Coordinating Council for Infants and Toddlers

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