

Improving the I in EHDI By Sarah Fitzgerald, Wendy Hewitt, and Kim Reimann



Q: What is your strategy that your FBO/family leader and EHDI system has successfully used together to improve early intervention supports?

Children in Wyoming who are Deaf or hard of hearing (D/HH) and their families have access to Part C (birth to three years of age) early intervention through 42 Child Development Centers throughout the state. While the centers allow for services to take place in families' home communities, many children in more rural areas of the state may not have access to providers who *specialize* in working with children who are D/HH. The Wyoming EHDI Program and WY Families for Hands & Voices have long recognized the need for quality early intervention services and have recently collaborated on a new initiative called "WEII ("we") Plus."

In January 2020, WY Families for Hands & Voices and the WY EHDI Program along with stakeholders from the WY Department of Health, Early Intervention and Education Program (EIEP) including the Part C Coordinator; the WY Department of Education, Outreach for the D/HH; the University of WY, Communication Disorders Division; and the Child Development Services of WY came together to form the *WY Early Intervention Initiative* (WEII) for families with children who are deaf/hard of hearing. This work has been facilitated by the Marion Downs Center in Colorado.

Through the collaboration of the WEII, the [WEII Plus Program](#) was developed and launched in July 2022. WEII Plus is a family-centered, statewide service delivery model provided through the 42 WY Child Development Centers that offer Part C EI services. The program uses training, coaching, and mentoring to guide and support families and professionals as they access critical information and services needed for children who are D/HH to develop to their fullest potential. The purpose of WEII Plus is to empower EI providers and families through strategies and resources specific early childhood hearing loss.

Some of the ways families are supported by WEII Plus include a focus on families' communication choices and literacy, family participation in [ODDACE](#) assessments, and family to family support and advocacy, including connections to Parent Guides and D/HH Role Models through Guide By Your Side (GBYS) and educational advocacy.

Q: What was the goal you were trying to achieve?

The goal of the WEII is to promote collaborative efforts to increase Wyoming's capacity to provide quality early intervention services for children who are deaf or hard of hearing from birth to kindergarten and their families. These efforts focus on the [Joint Committee on Infant Hearing's 12 principles for appropriate early intervention](#).

Q: How do you know you are making an impact on families? What measures or tests of chance did you use?

Prior to the development of WEII Plus, some direct support was provided to approximately 20-25% of families annually through a speech language pathologist (SLP) from WY Families for Hands & Voices as part of the Reading Early Accelerates Development (R.E.A.D. Plus) Program. WEII Plus has expanded this support to Part C EI providers so that additional families throughout the state are supported in making informed decisions to give children the opportunity to achieve their highest potential. (WEII Plus is modeled on the Colorado Home Intervention Program (CHIP).

The WEII Plus program is facilitated by the WEII Plus Coordinator, an SLP with a background in working with young children who are D/HH. The WEII Plus Coordinator works directly with Part C EI providers as they provide services to families. The WEII Plus Coordinator is supported by a Core Team that includes Parent Guides, an audiologist, Teachers of the Deaf, and administrators. When a child, birth to age three, is identified as D/HH, a referral is made to Part C EI and the WEII Plus Coordinator. The WEII Plus Coordinator connects with the Part C EI providers and the family as they begin their EI journey.

Beginning in September 2020, three of 14 Child Development Center regions along with R.E.A.D. Plus families (at that time) started to participate in uniform developmental assessment every six months through the Outcomes and Developmental Data Assistance Center for EHDI Programs (ODDACE). This is currently being expanded statewide to monitor developmental progress for all enrolled children over time.

Feedback is gathered from providers quarterly. Anecdotal feedback is provided consistently from families and a survey is being developed for families to share more formal feedback.

Q: How can other states/territories replicate this strategy?

This strategy may be replicated by pulling together stakeholders to create and maintain a cohesive working group. Personnel time for stakeholders has been covered by collaborating agencies and organizations so that no large fiscal note is attached to these efforts. It may also be helpful to utilize developed resources and processes from other jurisdictions. This could be replicated on a smaller scale such as a region within a state. Interested? See us at EHDI and the Western Regional Early Intervention Conference in June 2023.

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