

CDC Act Early Ambassadors Lead State Teams to Support Recovery and Strengthen Resilience Skills, Behaviors, and Resources of Children, Families, and Communities during the COVID-19 Pandemic: *Act Early Ambassador examples from 4 state teams*

Toni M. Whitaker, MD, FAAP, *University of Tennessee Health Science Center, Division of Developmental Pediatrics, Center on Developmental Disabilities, Memphis, TN*

Stephan Viehweg, LCSW, ACSW, IECMH-E, CYC-P, *Indiana LEND, Indiana University School of Medicine, Department of Pediatrics, Indianapolis, IN*

Jeffrey Okamoto, MD, FAAP, *John A. Burns School of Medicine at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, Department of Pediatrics, Honolulu, HI*

Bonnie J. McBride, PhD, BCBA-D, *University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, Department of Pediatrics, Oklahoma City, OK*

The Program

The **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) *Learn the Signs. Act Early. (LTSAE)*** program aims to improve early identification of children with autism and other developmental disabilities so children and families can get the services and support they need. LTSAE encourages parents and providers to

learn the signs of healthy development, monitor every child's early development, and act when there is a concern.

LTSAE and the Association of University Centers on Disabilities are in the second year of a collaborative project to provide support to a wide range of stakeholders who serve children and families during **COVID-19 response and mitigation efforts**. *Act Early* Ambassadors across the nation lead state teams in 42 states and territories to address significant challenges experienced by individuals, families, community programs, and state/territorial service systems.

Program Goals

To bolster the **4 steps of early identification of developmental delays and disabilities**:

- parent-engaged developmental monitoring,
- developmental and autism screening,
- referral, and
- receipt of early intervention for children 0-5, across systems.

Partners (** added 2nd year*)

Include state/territorial stakeholders in:

- Maternal and Child Health Title V programs,
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C early intervention systems,
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B Section 619 preschool programs,*
- Help Me Grow (if applicable)

- Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) funded, Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Grants (if applicable),
- American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) state chapter,
- a disability advocacy organization,
- leadership of at least one state/territory-wide program serving families with young children (WIC, Child Welfare, Home Visiting, Early Head Start/Head Start, early care/education programs), and
- others, such as Maternal and Child Health professional training programs like the Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and related Disabilities (LEND) programs, as selected by teams.

Strategies

- Use **inter-professional collaboration** in support of parent-engaged developmental monitoring to optimize early identification of developmental delays and disabilities.
- Exchange practical ideas about **embedding free LTSAE resources** into professional and community systems.
- Promote **collaboration** to work more closely together and to support our respective work to build resiliency into infrastructure and ultimately supporting resiliency in families.
- Assist partners in pivoting to **new strategies** needed during the pandemic for direct service to families.
- Work towards **sustainability** of new relationships and strategies that improve maternal and child health outcomes.

OKLAHOMA

Early identification of developmental delays or disabilities ensures that children receive the support they need.

SUCSESSES:

- 7 Head Start/Early Head Start (HS/EHS) sites at Crossroads Youth and Family Services integrate LTSAE materials engaging 600 families.
- All staff at HS/EHS sites were trained using LTSAE "Watch Me!" training.
- All caregivers completed milestone checklist with teacher at scheduled home visits.
- 100% of parents reported milestone checklist helped with understanding child development.
- Promoted family resilience by sharing local resources.

CHALLENGES: Staff turnover at HS/EHS can be a barrier to sustained integration of LTSAE materials.

INDIANA

- Training (in-person or access materials online)
- Technical Assistance to integrate LTSAE into programs
- LTSAE materials
- Crosswalk of LTSAE and EHS/HS Performance Standards

SUCSESSES: A “crosswalk” highlighting LTSAE and Head Start Performance Standards with training materials, implementation guide are available on Indiana Head Start Association website. Training and Technical Assistance available to all Indiana programs.

CHALLENGES: Pandemic challenged programs to remain open. We offered weekly Group Chats to provide a space to discuss a wide variety of topics such as resilience, self-care, community resources, behavior management, staff recruitment and retention, and more.

HAWAII

SUCSESSES:

- Convened a state-wide stakeholder team with multiple early childhood agencies and organizations meeting monthly. This included representation from our neighbor islands.
- Devised multiple prioritized action plans including a new strategy for Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program to use milestone checklists with families with potential to reach thousands of families per year.
- Recruited three media influencers living in Hawaii (from an Ohio model shared by LTSAE network) who then made 18,754 connections through posts about LTSAE materials and activities.

CHALLENGES:

- LTSAE materials couldn't be translated for all underserved populations. Languages translated: Samoan, Chuukese, and Marshallese. Planned translations: Hawaiian, Ilokano, and Tagalog.
- The challenge of reaching the underserved not only applies to ethnic populations but also for fathers and parents who have an intellectual or other disability.

TENNESSEE

Expanded existing relationships and collaborated with new partners

- Tennessee Early Intervention System (TEIS, IDEA Part C)
- TN Chapter AAP - health care providers, pre-professional trainees
- Title V programs including Evidence-based Home Visiting

SUCSESSES: Increased assistance to agencies and health care providers to address their own goals for developmental surveillance & screening. Included content to promote resiliency in trainings.

CHALLENGES: Tailor for partner's unique program & timing needs.

The *Act Early* Ambassador program is a collaborative effort of CDC's National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, HRSA's Maternal and Child Health Bureau, and the Association of University Centers on Disability. The findings and opinions presented are those of the authors and are not intended to represent the listed agencies.