

# ECI STORIES, SUCCESSSES, ADVENTURES & MORE

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Dana McGrath  
ECI Director

## A Message from the Director

This edition of the *ECI Connection* features stories from the field, and I can't think of a better way to close out the fiscal year than sharing your insights.

At times, we can get so entrenched in our daily work, we forget to celebrate the successes being realized across the state.

It was very rewarding reading your stories and solidifies that we have much we can learn from each other. Each of you should be acknowledged for the tremendous work

and steadfast dedication you put forth every day to ensure that Texas children and families receive the much-needed services they deserve.

I'm very proud to work alongside each of you as we continue strengthening the ECI system. Enjoy this special edition of the *ECI Connection*, dedicated to each of you. Thanks for sharing your moments with all of us!

Kudos! Dana

## Making the Case for Electronic BDI

Leanne, PT and Team Manager  
Easter Seals of Greater Houston

Me in 2016



Three years ago, I was dragged kicking and screaming into the world of the electronic Batelle Developmental Inventory (BDI). As a physical therapist with Easter Seals of Greater Houston ECI for more than 20 years, I pride myself in working for an agency that puts personal care and rapport with our families above all else.

My nervous hesitations towards going to electronic BDI were many! How do you keep the rapport with your family and keep your head behind a laptop? What happens if we lose connection? What happens if I make a mistake uploading too quickly? My questions and concerns were numerous.

Fast forward three years and there is no way you could drag me back into doing a paper BDI!!

It did not take long to get used to reading from the laptop, finding a flow with asking the questions, and the best part?? (Drumroll)... never having to do a calculation! The reminder to "Work smarter and not harder" comes to mind. I do keep a paper BDI in my laptop case just for emergencies, but, I have yet to need it.

Change is hard but changing to the electronic BDI will make your job easier. The electronic BDI report is uploaded quickly into the child's chart and on the super-plus side, we feel great saving so many trees. In the interest of full disclosure, my computer skills are not my forte — I still keep my schedule on a written calendar. So, if I can do it, trust me, ANYONE can!

Me in 2019



## Web-Based Program Yields Increased Effectiveness

Linda Tapia, Program Director  
Easter Seals Rehabilitation Center—San Antonio

Easter Seals ECI of San Antonio has teamed up with a software developer to create a web-based ECI program. This program was built specifically for ECI to target all Texas Administrative Code (TAC) rules and be user-friendly. It also allows management to have access to all files and provide oversight more efficiently.

Each ECI service provider at Easter Seals is given login credentials (a user ID and password) to ensure the data is secure. The service provider is able to access this web-based program at any time, as long as they have access to the Internet. Once logged in, the program displays the user's personal dashboard. It shows the current caseload, unsubmitted documents, Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs), transition plans in progress, the schedule for the week, and returned items. There are also tabs across the top that serve as links to other features of the program.

The program allows providers to have access at their fingertips to the files of children on their caseload. This helps to ensure that state-mandated timelines are not missed. It also allows for the service coordinator to manage the child's team more efficiently. One of the features that the providers really appreciate is the ability to email progress notes to the family with just the click of a button.

Additionally, the program makes oversight more effective for management. IFSPs, transition plans, and case management notes are all submitted to management for review prior to being finalized. This ensures all required elements are present. It also ensures all child-specific information is consistent throughout the chart.

From a billing and TKIDS perspective, the ability to submit notes and IFSPs electronically from the field has made the processing of billable events more timely and accurate as the child's identifiable information is auto-filled.

This web-based program has helped streamline our processes from the provider level all the way up to the management level. More importantly, it has increased the quality and timeliness of our work to enable us to work smarter not harder.



# Kayla's Story: Overcoming Hurdles Through Nurturing Care

**Isabel Cobo, EIS**  
**Bilingual Early Intervention Specialist**  
**Any Baby Can**

As many parents know, life as a parent is a joy and deeply rewarding, but it can also be significantly stressful and unpredictable. Oftentimes, along the journey of life, we realize that challenges are inevitable.

Rachel and John Calvery know this. In November 2017, they were newly adoptive parents of two boys who were dealing with emotional trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Their hands were full, but their hearts were soon to be "fuller." They received a call from their foster agency that would soon bring even more changes.

For unknown reasons, a baby girl named Kayla and her older brother Casper had been removed from their prior foster home. The agency reached out to them in desperation asking them to provide the support that Kayla needed to grow and thrive. At only eight months old, Kayla's special needs included the medical diagnoses of hip dysplasia, plagiocephaly, and developmental delays. She had to wear a special harness 23 hours a day to help with the repositioning of her hip bones. She had two holes in her heart that needed surgical repairs. Unable to crawl, she transitioned between sitting and lying down by flopping from side to side. Moreover, concerns with her height and weight were apparent. She was soon diagnosed with Failure to Thrive, only weighing 15 pounds at 9 months old. She also bore the emotional scars of living in three different foster homes in three months, all while in her first year of life.

Any Baby Can ECI worked in conjunction with Rachel and John to provide Kayla with the right services and the necessary nurturing to reach her potential. Physical Therapy, Specialized Skills Training, and Occupational Therapy were all provided to help with walking, communication, play-skills, cognition, sensory needs, and fine motor delays. Soon, Kayla started to blossom!

Today, Kayla walks, runs, and climbs alongside her brothers. Although still shy by nature, at home she has earned the title, "Head Tattle Taler," and makes sure her voice is now heard. All of Kayla's progress is the fruit of Rachel and John's unrelenting love and persistent teamwork with their ECI team. Recently, Kayla received heart surgery to repair the holes in her heart, and Rachel and John continue to work hard to help the emotional wounds heal. They recently adopted Kayla, Casper, and their baby brother Edward. Kayla and her siblings overcame many hurdles thanks to Rachel and John providing the opportunity needed for them to grow.



## Wired for Service

Espi Garcia, Program Director  
Community Action Corporation of South Texas



ECI Project Niños started serving families in two counties when the program began contracting with Community Action Corporation of South Texas (CACOST) in 1988. We are now serving a total of 11 counties in South Texas from Nueces County across to Webb County. Our contract number of children for FY 2019 is 1,170 and our current enrollment is 1,317.

Our main office is in Alice and we have satellite offices in Laredo, Corpus Christi, and Sinton. We have more than 140 employees and find it difficult to have staff meetings in person due to the distance between us. Our agency utilizes Google applications, such as Hangouts, Drive, and Calendar to communicate more efficiently with each other during ECI daily business operations. When we find it necessary to meet with all staff, we do so via Google Meet.

ECI service providers are issued Microsoft Surface Pro tablets to utilize our electronic health record (EHR) system, ProMedDa. Daily documentation of services that are completed in the child's home are entered offline. Staff is also issued iPhone Plus cell phones to utilize its hotspot (Internet) to upload their documentation into the child's record after the visit is complete. Records in ProMedDa are accessible to all team members involved in the children's planned services.



Our ECI data entry and billing departments are centralized in one office and the daily uploads have made a drastic difference in our efficiency. Each office has support staff that reviews providers' notes for compliance and ensures notes get uploaded by cross-checking daily schedules via providers' Google calendars. Oversight has been essential as it has improved our claims and collections.

Managing our satellite offices has become easier over the years as we now utilize Polycom VoIP phones, which have become resourceful in communication amongst the offices. As we began utilizing the Internet more to communicate, we added Logitech mounted cameras, EPSON Powerlite 365W, and interactive whiteboards to each site. These whiteboards, with integrated wireless display technology, are not only used for meetings, but also to provide hands-on training to new staff.

There have been occasional challenges in using these devices, programs and applications due to power outages and interruption of Internet services in rural areas. However, our ECI program is more organized and can easily access files from any device, online, or offline. These tools have allowed for more transparency and efficient workflows, which has enabled our program's success in communicating with our staff throughout our satellite offices.

## It's All About Trust

Jackie Gregory, ECI Child Find and Outreach Coordinator  
Any Baby Can



As we all know, healthcare professionals play a vital role in our life. Primary care providers are the first line of defense if we fall ill, need medical treatment, or if we simply need reassurance that the headache we have had for days is likely the result of Texas allergies. Just as we do, the families we work with place trust in doctors to care for their personal medical needs and the needs of their children as well. Based on that trust, the moments after a developmental delay is identified during a routine well-child checkup can determine how a family will navigate through accessing resources to help their child.

Trust is significant. Just as families are trusting medical providers, medical providers are trusting ECI when they submit the referral, as well as for the duration the child is enrolled. This cycle

of trust begins with outreach, the introduction of

ECI services, and all the magic our program entails. I often meet with medical residents and provide the opportunity to observe our team in the field. In doing this, we are able to cultivate this relationship early on. Furthermore, when medical providers understand the impact of our educational model, they can better understand and envision how we can serve patients on an individualized basis.

Trust must also be nurtured. We do this by maintaining open lines of communication regarding the child's needs, starting with the outcome of the referral. If we encounter issues connecting with families, we collaborate with our providers to ensure our program is accessible. Personally, I often drop by clinics to provide educational materials to be shared with families. I assure providers I am always available to offer ECI-related resources and information. Trust is nurtured when I attend clinic meetings to provide programmatic updates or educate new providers about ECI services. Furthermore, I nurture trust by attending the neonatal intensive care (NICU) reunions, community baby showers, and resource fairs to continue to engage our community and healthcare professionals. I offer information with a welcoming smile to reflect the nature of our program.

Our ECI team and I continue to nurture trust by having a reciprocal relationship with our medical providers, where we value one another and understand that we have one shared goal in mind: to help families and children succeed. As an Outreach Coordinator, I take pride in nurturing these relationships and sharing the profound impact early intervention plays in the daily lives of the families we serve.

## The Spindletop Recipe for Success

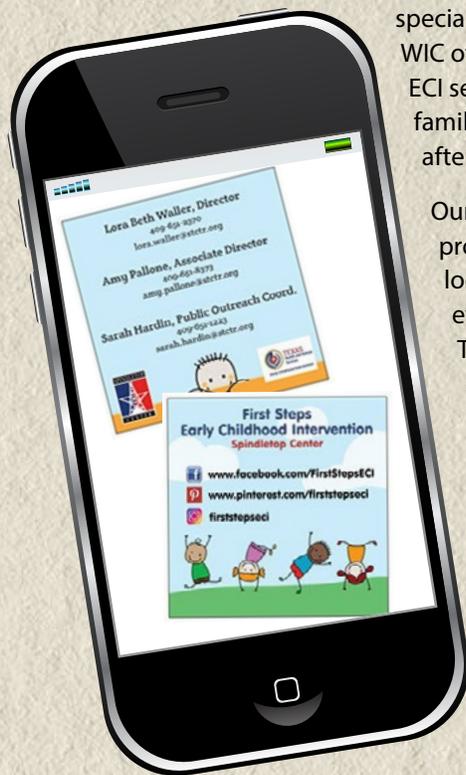
Lora Beth Waller, Program Director  
Spindletop Center

Spindletop Center's First Steps ECI program has developed a comprehensive outreach plan to improve the developmental outcomes for infants and toddlers in our community. Through targeted outreach efforts and social media, we are able to provide wide-reaching education and resources to healthcare providers, educators, parents, and community partners.



Our program has seen a significant increase in children served resulting from the Public Outreach Coordinator educating the community at local health fairs and events, and by regularly providing

ECI materials and resources to referral sources such as pediatric and specialty clinics, hospitals, churches, adoption agencies, CPS, and WIC offices. Our Coordinator, Sarah Hardin, is passionate about ECI services and our commitment to enhancing the lives of our families because of the impact our program had on her family after her daughter was born with Down Syndrome.



Our associate director, Amy Pallone, developed our social media sites to provide educational and developmental information and resources to our local community and beyond. Our Instagram posts are comprised of local events, job postings, and “warm fuzzies” to engage and uplift caregivers. The Pinterest boards are filled with resources, activities, and research so families and staff can quickly find information on specific topics, from autism to assistive technology to fall activities to do at home. We have several Facebook pages as well. Our public page is currently followed by more than 17,000 users and has a weekly engagement of more than 200,000 viewers. Weekly posts such as “Mama Made That Monday”, “Tech Tot Tuesday”, “Wordless Wednesday”, and “Signing Saturdays” keep users engaged daily. Other Facebook pages include: a private staff page to share information on ECI-related topics and training events, a closed family page where ECI-enrolled families can interact with each other for support and guidance, and a closed Pathways page, where families receiving Pathways early autism support can discuss their child’s development and share information with other parents.

See more on the next page

## The Spindletop Recipe for Success continued

Our outreach team continually strives to improve the lives of the children in our area by participating in community events and supporting local organizations such as the ARC, the Beaumont Children's Museum, the Chamber of Commerce's Leadership Development program, the Nurse-Family Partnership, and many more. We meet regularly with our state representatives to ensure that they are up-to-date on issues that impact early intervention services and to encourage them to support the work we do.

Through our innovative outreach efforts, we maintain positive relationships with our community partners to ensure that all children with special needs are identified and that families have ready access to resources and supports necessary to ensure their success.



road trip to Austin



road trip to Austin



## Paisley's Story: An Inspiring Account

Noreen White, Program Director  
Betty Hardwick Center

Paisley Riggan was born in June 2016 with an extra chromosome and was enrolled in Betty Hardwick's ECI program in July of the same year. ECI assembled a care team for Paisley to provide her with occupational, physical, and speech therapy, as well as specialized skills training. That October, Paisley underwent heart surgery, a common scenario for children with Down Syndrome. After her successful procedure, Paisley was ready for the intensive program developed for her, involving a variety of therapies carefully designed by her care team encompassing everything she would need to overcome the challenges that come with Down Syndrome.



### Best turtle rider in Texas!



The ECI team, along with the inspiring dedication and positivity of her parents and babysitters, was ready to provide Paisley with all the tools she needed. The process began with the basic exercises all infants go through: tummy time, tracking, and cooing. Soon enough, she was accomplishing a whole lot more than that. After extensive practice with a LiteGait therapy system and treadmill, Paisley isn't just walking, she's running, jumping, and climbing stairs!

With persistent repetition and encouragement, not to mention a lot of hard work on Paisley's part, she is speaking, fine-tuning her basic motor skills, and reaching other milestones, which are so crucial in early childhood development. As her skills and confidence have grown, her personality has really shone. Thriving, sassy, and always ready to greet or blow kisses to new acquaintances, Paisley has had no trouble winning the hearts of her care team and everyone else she meets. Now approaching her third birthday, Paisley is on track to begin pre-kindergarten with her peers in her age group.

# Feeling "Empowered and Confident" in West Texas

Christie Shaw, Program Director  
West Texas Centers



The Pathways Parent Training Program (PTP) treatment model is an autism-specific, parent-mediated naturalistic developmental behavioral intervention (NDBI). NDBI models are now considered state of the art for treating toddlers with autism. The Pathways PTP was developed to fit the service delivery model and guiding principles of our ECI programs.

West Texas Centers/Little Lives ECI began implementing the Pathways Early Autism Intervention PTP in 2017 with great success. Quickly, we noticed word of our successes was spreading to doctors and families outside of our catchment area, so we decided to pursue training for the other ECI programs in West Texas. In May 2019, the Moody Foundation provided a generous grant to get Pathways PTP training for several providers in seven ECI programs in West Texas. These include: Little Lives (West Texas Centers) ECI, Texas Panhandle Centers ECI, Helen Farabee Center ECI, Center for Life Resources ECI, and PermianCare ECI.

Best practice for toddler-aged children with autism involves parents being coached to incorporate specific behavioral and developmental strategies into daily routines and family activities. With Pathways PTP, parents are able to embed intervention strategies throughout much of the child's day to promote participation and learning in an authentic setting and, thus, provide the recommended intensity of services necessary for significant change.

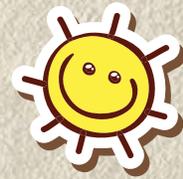
After training, implementation of Pathways PTP has resulted in excellent results and reception from both providers and parents alike. Testimonials include:

- "I truly believe without this program my son would not be where he is today." (ECI Mom)
- Pathways helps to "bridge the gap to establish the essential pre-linguistic skills necessary for communication." (CCC-SLP)
- "Pathways will change not only your life but most importantly it'll change your child's life and make it even more enjoyable than it already is." (ECI Mom)
- Because of the Pathways training, "I feel empowered and confident as a provider to take this information into the homes." (EIS)
- "Even in my practice with children who are not on the ASD, I have still found the Pathways training beneficial." (EIS/SC)



# It's About Partnerships at The Children's Shelter and Casa Mia

**Ernest Mendoza, Public Outreach Coordinator  
Center for Health Care Services**



## Emergency Shelters

The Children's Shelter, located in San Antonio, is a private nonprofit agency that has been in operation since 1901. The Children's Shelter provides a safe placement for children who are abused, neglected, and abandoned. Children's Shelter staff work closely with the Department of Family and Protective Services. The successful partnership between CHCS-ECI program and the Children's Shelter, which goes back many years, is due to early collaborative meetings with the Children's Shelter's administrators, which helped them understand ECI services as well as helped us co-develop procedures such as how to make referrals, where ECI staff should check in for visits, and how to schedule the best times for ECI staff to work with the children at the Shelter. Ongoing efforts have included events to meet Shelter staff to put a face with those we communicate with on a regular basis. Several ECI staff and the Public Outreach Coordinator have accepted invitations to tour the Children's Shelter campus, which has grown over the years to include new facilities and renovations of older facilities.



## Residential Treatment Program

Casa Mia, a home for pregnant women and mothers recovering from opioid addiction, is a new program in the San Antonio area. It is only the second of its kind in Texas. In July 2019, the Center for Health Care Services (CHCS)-ECI received a referral from the Department of Family and Protective Services for a mom who would be temporarily residing at Casa Mia. I created a packet of ECI materials and brochures that included a 2019 Parenting Tips Calendar and made a visit to Casa Mia. As the Outreach Coordinator I met with Casa Mia staff, who said they knew about the Center for Health Care Services but didn't know much about ECI. I spoke about how ECI works with the parent and child, the benefit of ECI services and how, if enrolled in ECI, services would include case management, transition to other services, and referral assistance. The staff at Casa Mia were glad to have the packet of ECI information for future moms placed at their residential program. Part of our CHCS-ECI outreach efforts are to identify any first-time referral sources and make an outreach contact or visit. Getting out to a new referral source to begin collaborating and working out procedures is important to a successful partnership.



# You Gotta Have Teamwork!

Catherine Carlton, Chief of Staff  
MHMR Tarrant County

Early Childhood Services supervisor, Amy Anderson, shared not one, but two stories of how her team (North 3) came together to help each other out of a tough situation. She shared what amazing teamwork they have and how they really stick together and help each other.

## A Stuck Situation

One team member got stuck in the mud at a home visit and called another team member with a jeep to help pull her out.



What a conundrum!



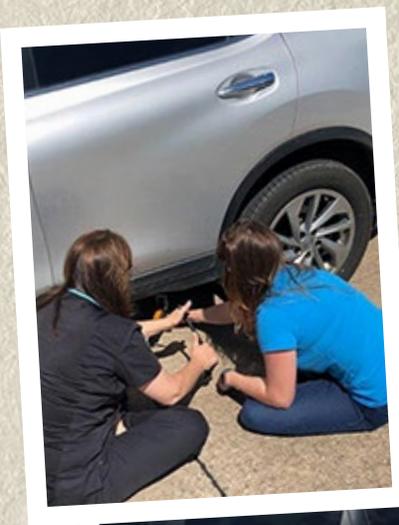
Amazing co-worker to the rescue!



Nasty mud pit

## Going Nowhere, Flat

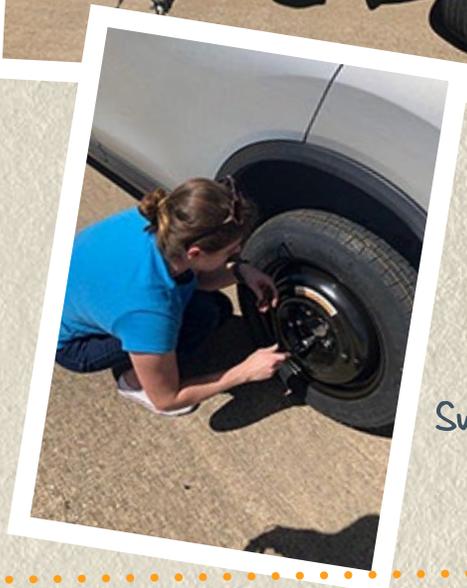
A staff member realized she had a flat tire upon leaving a team meeting. The other team members stopped and pulled together to help her change the tire.



Figuring out the jack



Got it off!



Success!

## A Mother's Words

**Catherine Carlton, Chief of Staff  
MHMR Tarrant County**

Recently, MHMR received kind words from a mother, praising her daughter's speech therapist, MacKenzi of Early Childhood Services.

"My 2-year-old twin daughter, Audrey, is currently receiving weekly speech therapy from MacKenzi," Beth said in an email. "I just wanted to send you a quick note to tell you how proud I am of MacKenzi and Audrey. Truly, they have become buddies, and I'm really pleased with how well Audrey reacts and responds to therapy. Audrey is the more reserved of the twins, and generally takes a while to 'warm up' to people. That was not the case with MacKenzi."

"MacKenzi is fun, patient and has been extremely helpful in teaching me, as well as Audrey, how to practice and improve speech. I appreciate the handouts she shares with me and the quick responses to questions over text message. I am really grateful and wanted you to know how professional and fantastic she is. Audrey has made great progress and I expect she will continue to do so."

When asked if we could highlight Audrey's success with Early Childhood Intervention, Audrey's mother turned the kudos to Mackenzi.

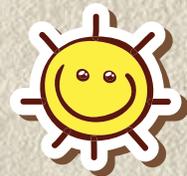
"MacKenzi deserves all the praise," Beth said "She is truly amazing and VERY gifted. My little Audrey loves when we have therapy and just sits down in front of MacKenzi as if to say 'hi, friend...what are we going to do today?'. It's incredible."



## Smile! Sensory Fun

**Pattie Roselund, Executive Director  
EasterSeals Rio Grande Valley**

These are the quads who will be turning three in October — having fun with a sensory activity!



## All About ECI

**Tamara Fore, Communications Specialist  
Bluebonnet Trails Community Service**

Check out our ECI video designed to give a real visual for the work we do!

<https://youtu.be/pXhgOfZkOXg>



**We welcome your input!**

Email your feedback, suggestions or questions related to the newsletter to [eci.connection@hsc.state.tx.us](mailto:eci.connection@hsc.state.tx.us).

Thanks so much for sharing  
your wonderful stories!



**TEXAS**  
Health and Human  
Services

*Early Childhood  
Intervention*