

# FIRST STEPS TOGETHER

FAMILIES IN RECOVERY SUPPORT

## NEWSLETTER



### FORGING PARTNERSHIPS



I was recently reflecting on the ways in which we approach our work in order to heal the effects of trauma. There are two uses of the word “agency” that apply to our work. The first is the “agency” that is about how much people are able to act independently and freely make life choices. Many of the participants in FIRST Steps Together have had limited agency at some point in their lives. This might include limited agency as children or adults experiencing abuse, or limited agency due to financial, legal, or educational circumstances. In FIRST Steps Together, we work in partnership with our participants to help them regain agency. That is, some capacity to make informed choices for themselves. We help people to identify what they need to accomplish whatever their next goal is, and we offer referrals to help them do this. The referrals are usually to an “agency,” an organization created to provide a particular service. In the context of COVID-19, families will be needing to access other

services more than ever, and perhaps in more creative ways. Services provided by other agencies will be changing frequently in the coming months. Providing trauma-sensitive referrals means being able to help a participant anticipate what will happen after a referral is made. What services will the agency provide? How will they provide them while maintaining safety? This requires our staff to do some extra checking in advance, so that we can help our participants have agency in working with the agencies that they are referred to!

We can also be the hub for helping to foster communication between the many providers that a family might have. So in addition to making referrals, we might also be collecting and reviewing service/action plans to streamline tasks, convening meetings or conducting shared visits (even remotely!) with participants and providers. This issue of the newsletter highlights some valuable partner agencies, community resources and services that FIRST Steps Together can help a family connect to.

Debra Bercuvitz, Director, FIRST Steps Together  
MA Department of Public Health

### SUPPORTING FAMILY TIME WEBINAR

The majority of families in FIRST Steps Together have current DCF involvement, and many of those do not currently have custody of their children. The time that families spend together when they don't live together is of great importance to their well-being as well as to future reunification. It is more challenging to help support Family Time when families are not able to be together in person. **This [FIRST Steps Together Supporting Family Time Webinar](#) was developed to provide practical suggestions for Family Time if it has to be conducted virtually.** A [tip sheet](#) has been provided to accompany the webinar, as well as a brief [Resource Sheet](#).

# WOMEN, INFANTS AND CHILDREN (WIC)

Women, Infants and Children (WIC) provides healthy foods, nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and referrals to healthcare and other services, free of charge, to Massachusetts families who qualify.

## Who qualifies?

- Pregnant women
- 6 months postpartum non-breastfeeding women
- 1 year postpartum breastfeeding women
- Children under 5

Something important to note is that postpartum women still qualify for services, despite the custody status of their children. Families are required to be living in Massachusetts and must meet the family income guidelines. Automatic income eligibility can be obtained if families receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC), cash assistance or certain MassHealth/ Medicaid insurance plans.

## Services/ benefits offered

Supplemental nutrition packages are provided for each member of the family that is enrolled in WIC. All food groups are represented in each food package. This includes dairy, proteins, whole grains, fruits and vegetables. Benefits are downloaded on an electronic benefit card and can be viewed on a downloadable app. Nutrition counseling is provided every 3 months to families that participate in WIC. This is a required service in order to receive food benefits. Pregnant and postpartum women receive additional support from breastfeeding peer counselors through breastfeeding support groups and individual counseling. Supplemental formula may be obtained through WIC as well.



## Getting clients connected

The Making Opportunity Count (MOC) FIRST Steps Together program is conveniently located within the same building as the WIC program. During intakes, we have conversations around services families are already receiving. If WIC is not one of them, we encourage families to apply and support them through the process. We also encourage families to book their WIC appointments before or after FIRST Steps Together groups to help coordinate services.

## How has delivery of WIC benefits been modified due to COVID-19?

WIC programs are working remotely during this time and all appointments are being conducted by phone. Families are encouraged to call their local WIC program to set up a phone appointment.

[Online applications for families that are new to WIC can be accessed here.](#)

## What are some aspects of the program that people may not know?

Children in foster care custody automatically qualify for WIC because they are given MassHealth coverage. If a child is placed with a family member or a foster family that would normally be over the WIC income guidelines, they will still qualify based on their health insurance.

Our team has found it extremely helpful to work together with WIC to support breastfeeding mothers, specifically those on medication assisted treatment (MAT). This helps to provide families with comprehensive care and a collaborative support system working toward the same goal.

## Katie Reed

Director of Parent Development and Education  
Making Opportunity Count (MOC)



## MAKING CONNECTIONS

In addition to dropping off supplies to meet concrete needs, many sites are putting together activity baskets or kits to encourage wellness, recovery and parenting support during this challenging time. Below are just a few of the creative ideas that we saw from our sites this month.



### **Gardening Kit, Center for Human Development**

Center for Human Development recently gave out a gardening kit to their members. Staff left a beautiful planter filled with gardening supplies including a fun activity for the kids to join in with mom. Members enjoyed the kits and sent photos of their family enjoying it.

### **Mother's Day Brunch Basket and DCF Listening Session, Making Opportunities Count**

To help families celebrate Mother's Day, the staff from Making Opportunities Count (MOC) delivered brunch baskets to their families. They then hosted a virtual brunch to recognize all of the mothers in the program and read a poem, practiced mindfulness and ate pancakes together- while still maintaining social distancing.

**During our virtual Mother's Day Brunch, a handful of mothers shared their heartbreaking experiences during this pandemic around not having visits with their children, including virtual visits. As a result, we facilitated a listening session over Zoom for families to share these experiences with some of our local Department of Children and Families (DCF) office coordinators and managers.**



Five First Steps Together families attended the session and spoke eloquently and passionately about how difficult this time has been for them without being able to have virtual visits with their children. Shortly after our call, we received word that a virtual visit has been established for one of the families that participated in the group. Hopefully, other families have similar outcomes and we are pleased about how our program has increased collaboration with DCF during this pandemic.

### **Kindness Rocks, Cape Cod Children's Place**



Cape Cod Children's Place hand painted Kindness Rocks and left them as a surprise around their families' homes.

Christina Russell, the program supervisor, said the project began as an intentional and purposeful way for her family to incorporate working from home and pressures around home schooling three kids as a single mom. She didn't realize what a healing process it would be for her and her kids to pay it forward. The families were so excited to find

the rocks and feel the support from the CCCP team. They are currently putting together kits to give to families to create rocks to be placed around the Cape.

# PEER RECOVERY CENTERS AND RECOVERY CAPITAL GO HAND IN HAND

Peer recovery centers are a great resource for people in recovery and those helping them. They offer a place where individuals can build recovery capital and life capital. By design, peer recovery centers offer a safe place for fostering life in recovery. The best way I can describe this is from my first-hand account and the experiences I have seen and heard from many others.

In early recovery, my sponsor suggested that I visit A New Way Recovery Center in Quincy. I was new to the area, new to recovery, and had a lot of free time. I was not working, and struggling to fill my days. I was nervous and excited about this suggestion and took the step to walk in the door. I left the center that day intrigued about what this might hold for my recovery. I thought about what I saw: friendly faces and people who were honest about what they were learning. There were newly sober people like me and people who had been sober many decades and everything in between. There were pathways to recovery I knew nothing about and groups for having fun that didn't necessarily focus on recovery. It was also explained to me that this was a peer recovery community and that members were encouraged to get involved with the decision-making for the center and to participate in areas where they felt comfortable. Like many others have also experienced, I was able to run with that.

As a Family Recovery Support Specialist (FRSS), it is exciting to introduce the parents I work with to a Peer Recovery Center and encourage them to explore what is available whenever it is possible. I have seen some embrace this, building their recovery capital by meeting people and exploring different paths to recovery in the diverse styles of groups they find at different centers. People develop life and job skills, as well as confidence, by taking on responsibilities in areas they feel comfortable with (or not), and trying on skills on for size.

As part of FIRST Steps Together, it made perfect sense for our team to collaborate with the recovery centers in our area to offer groups and build our provider capital. Working with recovery centers has offered our program the chance to bring parenting groups to those locations, which helps the recovery centers expand offerings in such a needed area.

Here is a link to the [map of Peer Recovery Centers](#) across Massachusetts on the [Massachusetts Substance Use Helpline website](#). (Please note some are privately run or funded and some are BSAS-funded). And here are links to the Recovery Centers' Facebook pages:

- [A New Way Recovery Center, Quincy](#)
- [Living in Recovery, Pittsfield](#)
- [Plymouth Recovery Center, Plymouth](#)
- [Alyssa's Place, Gardner](#)
- [New Beginning Recovery Center, Lawrence](#)
- [Stairway to Recovery, Brockton](#)
- [Devine Recovery Center, South Boston](#)
- [No One Walks Alone, Whitinsville](#)
- [STEPRox, Roxbury](#)
- [Everyday Miracles, Worcester](#)
- [Northampton Recovery Center, Northampton](#)
- [The RECOVER Project, Greenfield](#)
- [Peer 2 Peer, Fall River](#)
- [PIER Recovery Center of Cape Cod, Hyannis](#)
- [The Recovery Connection, Marlborough](#)
- [Hope for Holyoke Recovery Center, Holyoke](#)
- [Turning Point, Walpole](#)



*Meridith Hallisey, Family Recovery Support Specialist from Bay State Community Services*

# CONFRONTING RACIAL INJUSTICE



**FIRST Steps Together is planning a working group to work on racial equity in our program. Please contact Clare Grace at [cgjones@jfcsboston.org](mailto:cgjones@jfcsboston.org) if you are interested in being part of this working group.**

## RECORDED WEBINAR

### [Substance Use Disorder in the African American Community](#)

From the Association for Addiction Professionals (NAADAC), this workshop will provide education on substance use in the African American community. By participating in this workshop, participants will become educated on substance use and the stigma associated with seeking treatment in the African American communities.

## HOW TO TALK TO KIDS ABOUT RACE AND RACISM

**Child Mind Institute:** [Racism and Violence: How to Help Kids Handle the News \(also in Spanish\)](#)

**USA Today:** [George Floyd. Ahmaud Arbery. Breonna Taylor. What do we tell our children?](#)

**Mother:** [10 Ways To Be An Anti-Racist Parent, Starting Right Now](#)

**Life Hacker:** [Keep Talking to Your Kids About Race and Racism](#)

**Center for Racial Justice in Education:** [Resources for talking about race, racism, and racialized violence with kids](#)

## ADDITIONAL READINGS

[Stop Hesitating: A Resource for Psychotherapists and Counselors.](#) From ACPE, a quick, highly directive guide to initiating conversation with your black clients about George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, other lives lost, Minnesota, Louisville, and racial trauma.

From Conferences for Women, find the [Resource Center for Confronting Racial Injustice](#), a collection of trainings, videos, audio, and [articles: Staying informed is critical as our nation confronts racial injustice.](#)

**EDUCATE.  
THINK.  
GROW.**

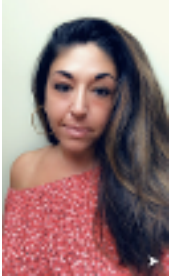
## TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Obtaining new skills or enrolling in school or a training program can be part of building recovery capital. Some suggestions from FRSSs about connecting clients to education and job training opportunities:



**Melanie**, Family Recovery Support Specialist

"I have used [MassRehab](#) to help out with some of my clients who have wanted to go back to school. They have a lot of programs that our clients are eligible for. Local community colleges are a great resource as well."



**Nicole**, Family Recovery Support Specialist

"I have referred members to [Mass Hire](#). They help with resume building, job searches, and hold a ton of workshops for all different trainings. They can also help with applying for grants to help further education as well. Some examples are the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) or Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) programs."



**Wanda**, Family Recovery Support Specialist

"[Future Works Career Center](#) has classes to assist clients in finding work."

[Here is a list of MassHire Career Centers across the state.](#)

## PARTNERING WITH EARLY INTERVENTION

According to the [CDC, Early Intervention...](#)

- *Is the term used to describe the services and supports that are available to babies and young children with developmental delays and disabilities and their families.*
- *May include speech therapy, physical therapy, and other types of services based on the needs of the child and family.*
- *Can have a significant impact on a child's ability to learn new skills and overcome challenges and can increase success in school and life.*

In Massachusetts, we are lucky that EI services exist to support a much broader group of children and families than those who already have delays and disabilities. This includes children whose development might be impacted by stressors that their families are experiencing, i.e. housing instability, substance use, mental health challenges, DCF involvement.

Available at the [Massachusetts Health Promotion Clearinghouse](#), the [Early Intervention Engagement for Families Impacted by NAS & SEN](#) was developed for providers by the Massachusetts Early Intervention NAS Stakeholders Group. This info sheet provides information about Early Intervention programs available for families with newborns who have been diagnosed with Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome or Substance Exposed Newborns.

# PARTNERING WITH EARLY INTERVENTION

*We asked Shalonda Nicholson-Mabry, the Mothering from the Inside Out (MIO) Family Service Clinician from FIRST Steps Together at Square One, how they partner with Early Intervention to support the families they work with.*

Shalonda, how do your sites and clients connect with Early Intervention?

We meet and discuss our program with our local EI office to share what we can offer to families and parents in recovery. We have attended EI staff meetings so that their staff can get to know us, everyone can ask questions and we are able to talk, as a group, about how to best support families.

How do you introduce a parent to Early Intervention? What does the referral look like?

**When talking about child development, we can help parents understand that every child learns and develops at their own pace. The Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) or ASQ-Social Emotional (ASQ-SE) tool is useful to support why the referral is being made. We can reassure the families we are working with that when Early Intervention comes to do their first assessment we can be there (with their permission) to support them. We explain what the initial visit with EI assessment looks like and this helps the parent be prepared about what to expect.**

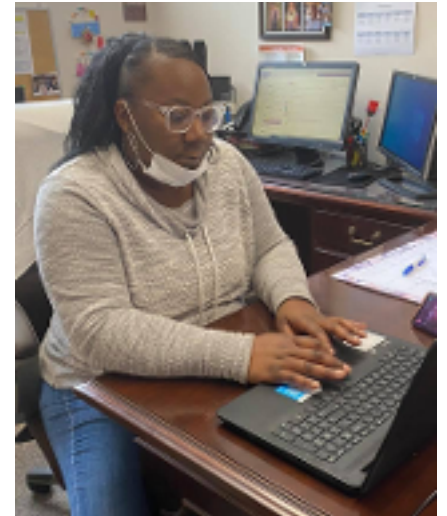
Also, some families may choose to decline services. We can suggest that if by the next ASQ screening, if their child is not showing any progress, they could then talk to the child's pediatrician and fill out the referral form together at that time.

How can FIRST Steps Together support the family while engaging with Early Intervention?

We like to ask for a copy of the initial assessment, with permission, so that the family's FRSS can partner to promote activities to encourage the child's development. For example, if the child is not crawling yet, suggesting tummy time as a way to get the child to relax on their belly and have the parent utilize a toy to encourage the child to crawl. The FRSS can also use the ASQ or ASQ-SE and screening tool to best support appropriate child development. During this pandemic, we have found Zoom calls have been the best way to support the family with child development and building a relationship with EI.

How can we support non-custodial parents around EI?

Early Intervention is able to work with non-custodial parents (barring any specific circumstances or restrictions on contact). Our program staff encourages the family to stay connected to EI and to see how the Early Intervention program supports child development. FRSS can further support this connection by participating in Family Time (supervised visits) and encouraging developmentally appropriate activities, and by participating in EI visits and team meetings.



## Where can I learn more about Early Intervention?

Call the Central Directory at 800-905-8437, or visit [www.massfamilyties.org](http://www.massfamilyties.org) for a listing of certified Early Intervention programs serving your city or town. Call and speak with a local EI program to make a referral or visit the Parent Leadership Project at [www.eiplp.org](http://www.eiplp.org) to learn more.

# RECOVERY CAPITAL



To have recovery capital means you possess the internal and external resources necessary to maintain sobriety and live a meaningful life. **Recovery capital is what those of us in recovery strive for; it's recovery resilience.** It's having all the tools you need to face life's obstacles without turning to a substance, but it is not something that is handed out at the door of the clinic or in a meeting. Recovery capital is something we create ourselves, a secret sauce if you will. Over time you collect ingredients for your sauce, try out new ones, add and take away until you've found the perfect recipe for you. The best part is over time you can begin to share your recipe with others. Talk about what ingredients you used, why this one worked and that one didn't, and help others find the best combination for their own sauce.






In FIRST Steps Together, one way we can help our participants grow their recovery capital is through referrals and care coordination. With every referral we make for a client we add an ingredient to their list. A new skill, resource or support person that can walk alongside them as they build their capital. Through continued contact with our referral partners we help ensure each participant is receiving the care they need. We develop relationships with these partners that build bridges for the families we work with. Through this process and partnership, we begin to see our participants gain those internal and external resources needed to maintain recovery, nurture their families and break the cycle of addiction for the next generation.

Erica Napolitan  
Program Specialist  
JF&CS Training & Technical Assistance

[Bringing Recovery Supports to Scale Technical Assistance Center Strategy \(BRSS TACS\)](#) advances effective recovery supports and services for people with mental or substance use disorders and their families. The excerpt below from [Value of Peer Support: Family, Parent, and Caregiver Peer Support in Behavioral Health](#) describes how peer supports advance recovery and add value to behavioral health systems.









## WHAT DO PARENT SUPPORT PROVIDERS DO?

### PARENT SUPPORT PROVIDERS OFFER:

-  emotional connection of people who have "been there";
-  informational and educational support on systems and strategies;
-  support for parents as they develop positive approaches and methods for addressing their family's day-to-day needs, including their own needs for self-care;
-  concrete support, such as help arranging child care or transportation; and
-  living proof of resilience and recovery.

Parent support providers are also known as *parent support professionals, navigators, mentors, family partners, parent partners, and parent support specialists*. Parent support providers offer a wide range of assistance and support, depending on the settings in which they work and the needs of the families they serve.

### COMMON SERVICES INCLUDE:

-  information and referral;
-  individualized supports to help parents understand their children's needs and access natural supports;
-  support groups;
-  parent training and education to increase knowledge and skills;
-  system navigation to assist a family in finding or accessing resources;
-  intensive family support during periods of crisis;
-  specialized supports for families experiencing challenges with systems such as child welfare, juvenile courts, or schools; and
-  social activities and events to bring families together, raise awareness, or offer educational opportunities.



# LIVE AND RECORDED WEBINARS AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

- June 23 **FIRST Steps Together:** Trauma, Resilience and Relationship in the Brains of Parents and Children, Part 3, [Trauma and substance use disorder](#)
- June 25 **Supporting Parents Recovery and Opioid Use Treatment:** [Dino Martone and Brenda Cassella](#) "What happens to the Substance Exposed Newborn after a 51A is filed"
- June 25 **The Center of Excellence for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation:** [Culture, Identity, History as Sources of Strength and Resilience for African American Children and Families](#)
- June 26 **Boston Association for Childbirth Education and Nursing Mothers' Council (BACE):** [Breastfeeding Foundations for Perinatal Health Workers](#)
- July 10 **Supporting Parents Recovery and Opioid Use Treatment:** [Jessica Gray](#) "Virtual Team Outreach and Support during the COVID Pandemic"
- July 23 **Supporting Parents Recovery and Opioid Use Treatment:** [Davida Schiff](#), "Ongoing Substance Use While Parenting"
- July 30 **The Center of Excellence for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation:** [Culture, Identity, History as Sources of Strength and Resilience for Latino Children and Families](#)
- August 7 **Supporting Parents Recovery and Opioid Use Treatment:** [Ronald Iverson](#), "Equity in Peripartum Care"
- November 18, **Perinatal-Neonatal Quality Improvement Network of Massachusetts (PNQIN) PNQIN Perinatal Opioid Project (POP) Fall 2020 Summit**

## Recorded webinars, courses and other learning opportunities:

The [Bureau of Substance Addiction Services](#) and [AdCare](#) have multiple trainings coming up that may be of interest. Please find their calendar [here](#)

The [Massachusetts Home Visiting Initiative Resource Digest](#) has many online resources for parents and providers

**National Association for the Education of Young Children:** [Virtual Institute](#), Beginning June 1. Free. Six weeks of newly recorded presentations to support your professional development.

**Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University:** [The Brain Architects Podcast](#): COVID-19 Special Series "Domestic Violence and Shelter-In-Place"

**The Institute for Family Support Professionals:** [Rapid Response Virtual Home Visiting](#), multiple recorded webinars, including: Virtual Visit Readiness, Engaging Families in Virtual Visits: A Protective Factors' Approach, Screening in Virtual Visits

**Perinatal-Neonatal Quality Improvement Network of Massachusetts (PNQIN) and the Betsy Lehman Center for Patient Safety:** [Past virtual town halls](#) for maternal health care professionals confronting the challenges of COVID-19

**Children's Trust:** [Online Resources For Family Support Professionals](#) and [free access to the digital, evidence-based parenting resource, All Babies Cry](#)

## WEBINAR SERIES: TRAUMA, RESILIENCE AND RELATIONSHIP IN THE BRAINS OF PARENTS AND CHILDREN



Presented by  
Amy Sommer, LICSW  
Director [Project NESST  
Jewish Family and  
Children's Service](#)

### Part 1: How Trauma and Resilience Live in our Brains

- Attending to trauma and resilience during COVID 19
- What happens to our brains when we experience trauma?
- What can we do to heal our brains from trauma and build resilience from trauma?

[Find recording here.](#)

### Tuesday, June 16, 9:30 AM - 11 AM Part 2: Thinking about Trauma & Resilience in Parent-Child Pairs

- What are the effects of untreated trauma on parenting skills?
- What is childhood trauma like for parents and children?
- What are the goals of helping parents & children impacted by trauma?
- How can relationships protect against the effects of trauma?

[Find recording here.](#)

### Tuesday, June 23, 9:30 AM - 11 AM Part 3: Trauma and substance use disorder

- What do we know about the overlap of trauma and Substance Use Disorder?
- Why do the effects of trauma and substance misuse look so similar?
- What happens in the brain when we heal from these challenges?

[Register here.](#)

## RESOURCES ON PARENTING DURING COVID-19

[Child Mind Institute](#) has a variety of resources for helping families and kids cope with COVID-19.

[National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#) has developed a [Parent/Caregiver Guide to Helping Families Cope With the Coronavirus Disease](#) and it is available in [Spanish](#).

[Sesame Street](#) has a [Caring for Each Other](#) page, with videos, activities, and online books to support young children and their parents during the COVID-19 crisis. Parents can also sign up for an online newsletter to get updates.



## FIRST STEPS TOGETHER

FAMILIES IN RECOVERY SUPPORT

**MAY/JUNE 2020**

[mass.gov/first-steps-together](https://mass.gov/first-steps-together)

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