



By: Chasey Reed-Boston

# Body, Mind & Spirit

## What Happens After ECI?

The Texas Early Childhood Program serves qualifying children aged zero through 35 months. On the day the child turns 3, they are no longer eligible for ECI in Texas. Sometimes, the issues for which the child was enrolled have resolved, but other times, it is necessary to refer the child for other services that pick up where ECI leaves off. There are several good options available that are easy to access, whether it be a school evaluation, private therapy, or simply a Mother's Day Out program.

For the medically involved child, a combination of therapy and school services may be needed. A diagnosis does not automatically qualify a child for school services, since they have to also demonstrate an educational need for early services. With parent/guardian consent in place, the ECI service coordinator forwards the child's IFSP information to the school district to inform the district of a need to evaluate. The school district reviews the records and schedules a screener or a full evaluation. If the child is found to qualify for school services, the school calls an ARD meeting to develop a service plan that will last for three years, but is reviewed at least every year. Different school districts offer different services for their youngest students, including homebound services for the very medically involved, drop-in speech or occupational therapy services, half-day special education classroom programming, to name a few. Each school district has their own criteria for determining eligibility for the different programs.

For the child with a hearing or vision impairment, services are typically available

to them after the age of three through enrollment in the local school district and input from the auditory or visual impairment provider during the school evaluation process. Parents of visually impaired students also have the opportunity to connect with the state's Division of Blind Services where additional resources are available.

Private therapy services are often recommended for children who have not yet met their ECI goals at the time of discharge due to aging out. The child's insurance coverage often dictates whether additional therapy services can be afforded. The ECI service coordinator works with the parent/guardian to determine available options, obtain consents, and make appropriate referrals. The service coordinator does the leg work to coordinate services to the extent possible. For children in the Baytown/Highlands area, service coordinators work with the Bay Area Rehabilitation Center Outpatient Pediatric Program when the parent/guardian chooses this as a possible option. For those with restrictive or limited health insurance, Bay Area's sliding scale option can mean the difference between the child receiving therapy or not.

Mother's Day Out programs and day cares are something that are sometimes recommended by the ECI provider team. It is very important for children to be exposed to other children. This helps them better understand how to function as a peer, and it teaches them valuable socialization skills. Also, it is important for children, as they approach pre-Kindergarten or Kindergarten age, to know how to be able to sit at a table with other children and participate in activi-

ties. A classroom setting, even in small doses, can go a long way to help children develop more robust speech and stronger fundamental, developmental skills that they need for the next steps. If funding for such a setting is a barrier, the ECI service coordinator can also work to assist the family in obtaining NCI vouchers or researching and visiting facilities that are realistic for that family.

Head Start is another good classroom-based option for children aging out of ECI. While there may be a waiting list for spots, if a child is enrolled in ECI and has been evaluated and enrolled in school services of any kind, they are often placed on a different list where there may not be as long of a wait. Head Start programs are designed to enroll a certain percentage of developmentally delayed children as part of their funding requirements.

Sometimes, a child simply ages out of the ECI program and does not need additional services. This child has met their goals or the family is equipped with strategies that they can implement at home or in their natural environment to continue the work of ECI, even after ECI is done. ECI service coordinators are always glad to help identify potential resources, support systems, and suggest activities that could be beneficial moving forward.

Regardless of the situation, our ECI service coordinators are dedicated to being there at every step to make sure parents/guardians have all of the necessary information to make the best decision for their family. To be evaluated for ECI eligibility, contact Bay Area Rehabilitation Center ECI at 281-838-4477.

*Chasey Reed-Boston has served as Program Director for Bay Area Rehabilitation's ECI program for the past six years. She earned her Bachelor and Master degrees from Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia and is currently completing her doctoral dissertation focusing on productivity requirements in Texas healthcare settings and their impact on service quality. Chasey is married with two adult children, a host of "adopted" young adults, and an aging and opinionated German Shepherd named Oscar. ♦*