

Roger Holt of PLUK writes:

Under the US Department of Education grant, our primary role is to educate families of children age 0-26 about their rights under IDEA, to make informed decisions about their children, and to provide feedback to policymakers on the needs of families statewide in order to improve systems. We as a state are doing a poor job in educating families, developing family leaders, and providing an accessible mechanism for constructive feedback to improve the systems that are serving children with disabilities. Institutional bias, a focus on compliance instead of results, and limited resources are the major barriers to change. As the Parent Center, our limited resources are easily swallowed up by assisting families in crisis with up to 5,000 calls a month. A focus on systematically working on determining needs of families and of the systems serving them, and working on solutions together as equal partners is our best chance to more efficiently use the resources available to us. Systems really need input from families in order to make improvements and we need to get better at doing that.

Montana Milestones/Part C Early Intervention Program response:

The Department of Public Health and Human Services, Montana Milestones/Part C Early Intervention Program's mission is to build upon and provide supports and resources to assist family members and caregivers to enhance children's learning and development through every day learning opportunities. Each early intervention program providing Part C services and supports promotes the family's needs, priorities, and interests identifying the family as the child's first and best teachers. Montana's identified interventions with young children and family members are based on explicit principles, validated practices, best available research, and relevant laws and regulations.

Parent members of Montana's interagency coordinating council, the FSSAC, are supported as leaders by the Part C Coordinator, the FSSAC, and the regional early intervention programs. During FFY 2015, parent members of the FSSAC attended Family Leadership conferences offered by the technical assistance centers of the Office of Special Education as well as the Division for Early Childhood Conference. Family leaders also are key members of the stakeholder's work groups identifying and implementing changes to Montana's Part C structure as we enter into Phase II of the state-wide systemic improvement plan. They participate in the Comprehensive System of Professional Development annually as part of a larger group of interested stakeholders for the Office of Public Instruction.

Limited resources affect the Part C program which requires the state office to be an excellent steward of the federal and state funds received. Stakeholders around the state including early intervention programs, early childhood partners, and the FSSAC have identified six improvement strategies to improve the quality and results of early intervention for infants and toddlers and their families. The state-wide systemic improvement plans, Phase I and Phase II, are available at <http://dphhs.mt.gov/dsd/developmentaldisabilities/PartC-EarlyInt/Part-C-Early-Intervention-Guidance-and-Forms>. The improvement plans include a designated strategy (#3) brought forward by the parent leaders of the FSSAC.

Roger Holt of PLUK writes:

A first step is to participate in this process of providing public comments. This system is not conducive to participation of the public to provide input. We are ignorant of what information is important and useful. There are probably needs to address in every area of the application, but we do not have information to provide input. We would like to get to a point where we can leverage our network of families statewide to provide the input needed in Part C and other state systems. It will take education within our organization and throughout our network.

Montana Milestones/Part C Early Intervention Program response:

Montana's FSSAC membership includes a representative from PLUK. The advisory input from the members of the FSSAC was valuable in the identification of the state measurable improvement result, improving social-emotional competence for infants and toddlers and their families, as well as the identified strategies to improve social-emotional competence over the next five years. The FSSAC will continue to provide advisory support to the Part C Coordinator as the Part C state-wide systemic plan is implemented at identified early intervention programs, scaled-up across the state, and evaluated for its effectiveness.

Roger Holt of PLUK writes:

We do not feel competent to comment on specific parts of the application. Historically, the Parent Center has been excluded from participating with the Part C stakeholders until recent years. There has been great improvement in including parents as meaningful stakeholders. This change is resulting in parent leaders becoming more educated about and participating in decision-making within the Part C system. This momentum is helping us to become more competent as a group to provide meaningful input.

Family peer-support within Part C does not exist. It is one of the top needs expressed by families in every system and promoted within every system at the federal level. It is, however, little understood or valued at the state level. The family voice is seen as the change agent, but it takes training, work, and desire to develop leaders who have equal knowledge of systems and can speak with the collective voice of families statewide.

Montana Milestones/Part C Early Intervention Program response:

Montana's Part C Program fiscally supports Montana's Central Directory, operated under a purchase of service contract with PLUK to include a central directory of information which includes:

- Public and private early intervention services, resources and experts available in the state;
- Professional and other groups (including parent support and training; and information centers such as those funded under the Act) to provide assistance to infants and toddlers with disabilities eligible under Part C and their families;
- Research and demonstration projects being conducted in Montana relating to infants and toddlers with disabilities;
- Description of the availability of Part C early intervention services in Montana; and
- Description of how to refer a child under age of three for an evaluation or early intervention service under Part C.

Service coordination supports and services provided by early intervention programs include coordinating other services identified in the IFSP needed by or provided to the infant or toddler with a disability and the child's family which may include information and referral to family support groups.

Roger Holt of PLUK writes:

We apologize for not being able to provide competent feedback on specific items within the Part C application, but hope that our general comments about our needs to build capacity to be able to do that in the future will be helpful.

Montana Milestones/Part C Early Intervention Program response:

We thank you for your thoughtful comments.