



The PLAY Project in Ohio **A Year in Review**

July 1, 2016 – June 30, 2017

Introduction and Brief History

Six years ago marked the first official PLAY Project certification training held in Ohio by the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD). DODD Director John Martin had encountered a group of early intervention providers in Ohio who were implementing a form of intervention for young children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) called The PLAY Project. Taking his cues from these early adopters, Director Martin cast a vision for what would become a system-wide approach to early intervention and autism. Starting in May 2011, through a collaborative effort between DODD, The PLAY Project and the Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence (OCALI), certification trainings were offered once-a-year for interested Ohio Early Intervention (EI) service providers from the County Boards of Developmental Disabilities, which are agencies offering services to children and adults with developmental disabilities. The first training in May 2011 launched what would become PLAY Project's first venture into implementing the model into a statewide system of early intervention. Certification trainings were held annually thereafter, and through funding provided by DODD, 200 early intervention providers in Ohio have been trained in The PLAY Project model to date. The decision to implement this model was based on the need to provide timely, fiscally-responsible, and developmentally-appropriate interventions to children under the age of three with ASD in Ohio's Part C system.



This report features key highlights, trainings, and achievements for this past fiscal year, July 1, 2016 – June 30, 2017.

What is PLAY Project?

The PLAY Project is a parent-mediated autism intervention model designed to help improve outcomes for a child with autism spectrum disorder, particularly a child's ability to engage socially and emotionally. The model includes three separate components:

1. An evidenced-based autism early intervention program.
2. A set of principles, methods, and techniques used to improve autism symptoms.
3. An organization that provides professional training and development.¹

Dr. Richard Solomon, a developmental-behavioral pediatrician, developed the program to meet the need for intensive early intervention services for young children with ASD, particularly services that were practical and affordable. Dr. Solomon and his staff provide training to child development professionals who then help parents and caregivers build an engaged relationship with their child. In Ohio, Dr. Solomon and his team have trained Ohio Early Intervention (EI) service providers through the County Boards of Developmental Disabilities. These EI providers are typically developmental specialists, social workers, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, or physical therapists.

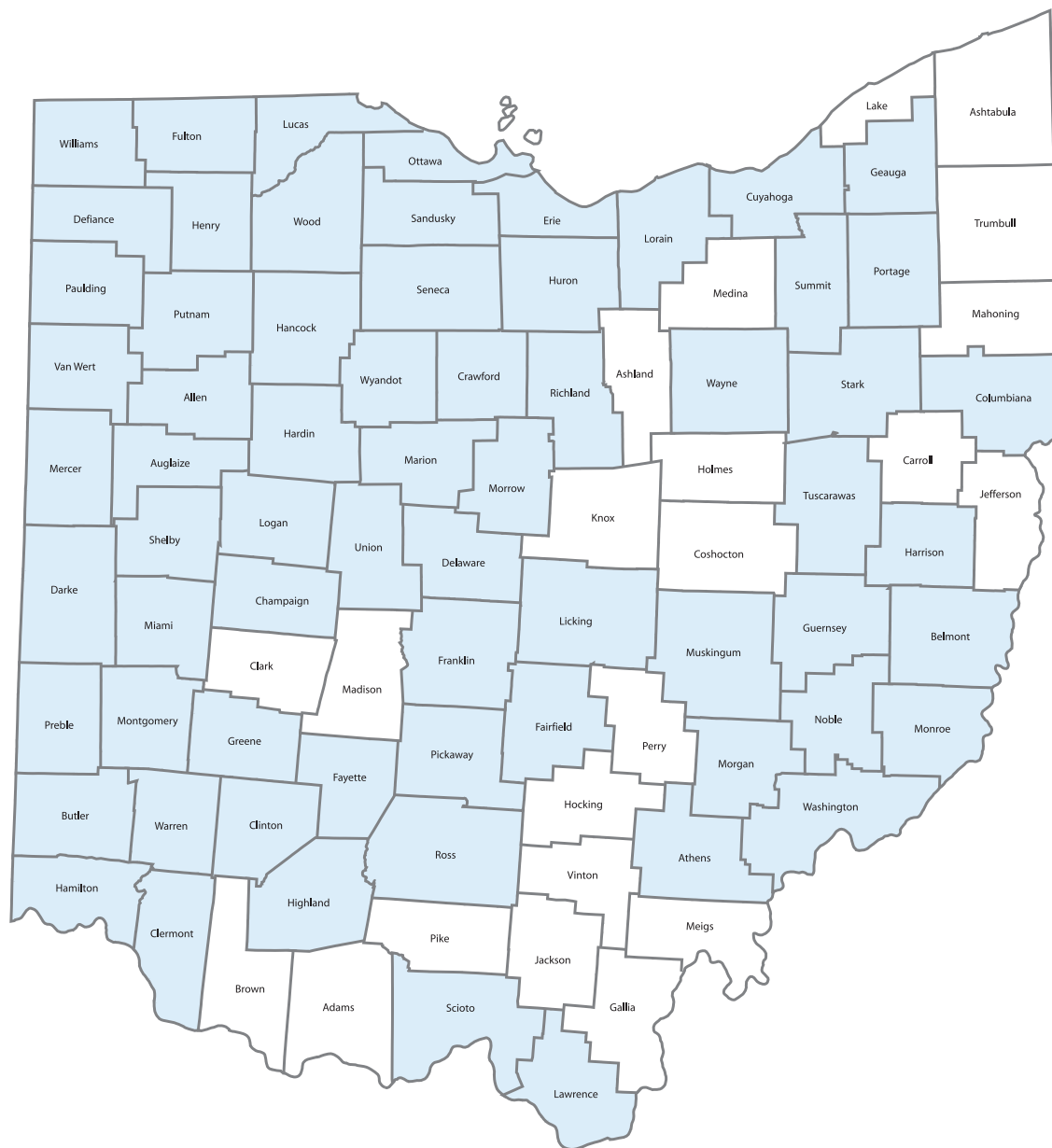
These child development professionals, or "trainees" or "trainees-in-process" as they are referred to within this context, undergo an initial intensive training, followed by approximately 18-24 months of follow-up supervision by PLAY Project Supervisors and staff. Trainees are expected to submit 15-20 videos of home visit sessions with a family, showcasing the trainee interacting with, coaching, and modeling the PLAY Project methods and techniques with the caregivers. These videos are then reviewed and scored by PLAY Project Supervisors. Trainees are also expected to complete online case study exams, and participate in group supervision sessions. Once all of the necessary items are completed and the body of work submitted by the trainee is approved by PLAY Project staff, a trainee is then considered a certified PLAY Project Consultant.

For additional information and details on the PLAY Project, please visit www.playproject.org.

¹ <http://www.playproject.org/about/>

Participating Counties

A total of 65 counties either have a certified PLAY Project Consultant residing in their county, or at least have access to a certified Consultant through shared agreements among a regional group of county boards. This map features the counties who currently provide or have access to PLAY Project through Ohio Early Intervention services.



PLAY Project in Ohio by the Numbers

95 Total Number of Active Certified Consultants

21 Total Number of Trainees in Process

65 Total Number of Counties with Access to PLAY Project Services

Data Collection

In response to an independent evaluation completed in 2015 by the Family Child Learning Center, an online survey was developed and disseminated to all Ohio PLAY Project Consultants and trainees in March 2016.

Each Consultant and trainee was asked to submit these data after each child exited PLAY Project services:

- PLAY certification status of submitter (certified, or trainee-in-process)
- How PLAY is implemented during the majority of visits
- Child's county
- Child's county-assigned ID (as a means of de-identifying each child)
- Age of child at first and final PLAY visit
- Status of child's diagnosis at first and final PLAY visit
- Child's gender
- Frequency and typical length of PLAY Consultant visits before age 3
- Frequency and typical length of PLAY Consultant visits after age 3
- Total number of visits completed
- Reason for ending PLAY

As of June 30, 2017, Consultants submitted data for 119 children representing 33 counties. The average age at which these children began receiving PLAY Project intervention was 28 months and received on average 14 visits from a Consultant.



Trends Relating to PLAY Project in Ohio

The implementation of the PLAY Project autism intervention within Ohio Early Intervention is an ever-evolving process, growing and changing as the needs of families and providers shift. In the earliest years of the initiative, the primary focus was on the intervention itself. Now the focus is the implementation of the intervention, and ensuring it is embedded properly and to fidelity within the early intervention setting. Four key areas shaped the landscape of the last 12 months:

1. Increased Need for In-Depth Technical Assistance

From the time Ohio launched the PLAY Project model within EI, a large part of the effort was focused on training a large quantity of people. The goal was to train and provide at least 80% of counties with access to a PLAY Project provider. The certification trainings offered from 2011 through 2014 averaged 30-50 people, meaning there were numerous providers who were newly trained, but maybe had not yet achieved their certification status as a PLAY Project Consultant.

For several years, the number of trainees-in-process significantly outweighed the number of certified Consultants, meaning efforts were primarily spent supporting those who were brand new to the model and its implementation. Within the past year, however, the scales have tipped, and there are more certified Consultants (95) than trainees-in-process (21). With this shift, concentrated efforts are now being spent on providing Consultants with a much deeper and richer understanding of the model and its place within early intervention. The early years of the project were spent training higher numbers of providers and reaching a wide swath of the state; now the aim is to go deeper in our efforts to make sure the model is implemented to fidelity, and to provide a more intensive mentoring and coaching system of support for certified Consultants.

2. Clarification on How the PLAY Project and Service Delivery Models Coincide

In recent years, Ohio began shifting its mode of early intervention service delivery to the primary service provider model, based on Dathan D. Rush and M'Lisa L. Sheldon's work, *Coaching in Early Childhood*. As more counties are adopting this approach, PLAY Project Consultants within those counties are uncertain as to how the service delivery model and the curriculum of PLAY Project work in tandem and complement one another. The ongoing success of implementing PLAY Project within the state will focus on clarifying and solidifying Consultants' understanding of how these two models work together in a cohesive and strategic manner.

To help provide clarity, a simple side-by-side comparison of what PLAY Project intervention should look like in the context of Ohio Early Intervention was created, modeled after the Workgroup on Principles and Practices in Natural Environments, Office of Special Education Programs TA Community of Practice: Part C Settings, (2008, March).

To view the comparison document, click [here](#).

3. Defining Fidelity

As a result of the independent evaluation conducted by the Family Child Learning Center in late 2015, and after listening to feedback from Consultants, the need for a clear definition of fidelity was of utmost importance. How does DODD define fidelity, and what is the expectation for how the model is delivered within Early Intervention? How do Early Intervention providers properly embed this intervention within the service delivery model, and what happens if one approach is in conflict with the other? What facets of the intervention are providers allowed to modify, and which facets allowed for flexibility?

Questions like these were routinely asked of project leadership, and as a response, an implementation checklist was developed. In collaboration with DODD, OCALI, and The Childhood League Center, a 6-section checklist was released in May 2017. The checklist was designed for use as a self-reflection tool for PLAY Project Consultants and their county board supervisors. The checklist integrated PLAY Project's elements of fidelity, as defined by their Fidelity Manual, with Ohio Early Intervention's principles.

To view the implementation checklist, click [here](#).

4. Earmarked Funding for the Childhood League Center

As part of the 2015-2017 state biennial budget, The Childhood League Center received \$1 million in earmarked funding, intended to pilot, advance and increase capacity of the PLAY Project curriculum specifically in Franklin County. The Childhood League Center, a non-profit early childhood agency that provides education, therapy and intervention services, works with more than 450 children, birth to age six, with developmental disabilities in Franklin County. With the funding, and in collaboration with the PLAY Project, The Childhood League Center launched in April 2016 the first PLAY Project Center in the country, which provides training and professional development opportunities to pediatric providers in Franklin County and across Ohio.

Through the new center, additional early childhood service providers have access to the PLAY Project model, allowing the state to expand and build capacity, and ultimately reach more children. Between OCALI, DODD, PLAY Project and the Childhood League, all four agencies collaborated on a regular basis over the course of the past year to ensure efforts to serve young children in Ohio with ASD remained cohesive, strategic, and high-quality.

For additional details on The Childhood League Center and their new initiative, please visit www.childhoodleague.org and www.interveningearly.org.



Recommendations for Moving Forward

In light of these trends and the independent evaluation released in October 2015, there is ample room to make improvements to the initiative, while continuing to capitalize on the foundation and successes of previous years. As the work continues to evolve, the coming fiscal year will focus primarily on these objectives:

- Further ensuring integration and understanding of evidence-based early intervention initiatives such as PLAY Project into Ohio Early Intervention.
- Promoting sustainability of the established work, both at the local and state level.
- Providing ongoing clinical support and mentorship for certified Consultants and trainees-in-process.
- Evaluating what data are collected and analyzing accordingly.

Timeline of Training and Technical Assistance

In order to support PLAY Project trainees and Consultants in Ohio, a variety of training and professional development opportunities occurred throughout the year. The two primary means of support came through half-day and multi-day workshops. The first training opportunity for Consultants was the PLAY Project Certification Training, which is the starting point for all who wish to become a certified PLAY Project Consultant. Here, trainees received information on the core tenets of PLAY Project, and learned how to implement the methods, principles, and techniques. This training was two full days of face-to-face teaching and discussion, followed by 6 weeks of additional online learning and support. The second style of trainings provided was group supervision workshops, which were typically regional, half-day events, facilitated by one of the 5 Ohio PLAY Project Supervisors. These days consisted primarily of in-depth case studies, as well as group discussions. Trainees who attended received credit for participation, which counted toward the total number of requirements necessary to be certified.

The third training opportunity for Consultants was the Advanced Training, which was a two-day training, and was reserved specifically for certified PLAY Project Consultants. The Advanced Training is held once a year, and provides dedicated time for certified Consultants to discuss in-depth case studies, and network with other Consultants.

A series of stand-alone introductory workshops, "Welcome to the PLAY Project" were provided, offering basic information on the PLAY Project in the early intervention setting, including how it can be integrated into development of the individual family service plan (IFSP). These workshops were free and provided regionally throughout Ohio, with a total of 222 attendees.

The following learning opportunities were provided in 2016 – 2017:

2016

December 1-2 – certification training
December 5 - group supervision, Northeast
December 5 – group supervision, Southwest
December 7 - group supervision, Central
December 16 - group supervision, Northwest

2017

March 27 – Welcome to the PLAY Project, Southwest
April 6-7 – certification training
April 10 – Welcome to the PLAY Project, Northeast
April 20 - group supervision, Central
April 21 – group supervision, Northwest
April 26 – group supervision, Southwest
May 1 – Welcome to the PLAY Project, Central
May 12 - group supervision, Northeast
May 15 – Welcome to the PLAY Project, Southwest
May 22 – Welcome to the PLAY Project, Northwest
May 24-25 – Advanced Training

PLAY Project in Ohio Partners

Apart from the staff of PLAY Project itself, the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities worked jointly with a small contingency of people to focus on the implementation and development of the PLAY Project in Ohio, including:

Kim Hauck, Assistant Deputy Director
Division of Policy and Strategic Direction
Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities

Diane Fox, Early Intervention Program Manager
Division of Policy and Strategic Direction
Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities

Laura Maddox, Program Director
Center for the Young Child
Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence

Jody Fisher, Consultant
Center for the Young Child
Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence

Courtney Yantes, Early Childhood Grants Coordinator
Center for the Young Child
Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence
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Vicki Kelly, Director of Early Childhood Education
The Childhood League Center

Monica Lott, Special Projects Manager and Ohio PLAY Project Supervisor
The Childhood League Center and Relate & Grow

Maggie Gons, Speech-Language Pathologist
The Childhood League Center

Colleen Zunk, Ohio PLAY Project Supervisor

Rebekah Doak, Ohio PLAY Project Supervisor

Diana Holderman, Ohio PLAY Project Supervisor

Mary Schiavone, Ohio PLAY Project Supervisor

PLAY Project Staff

Richard Solomon MD, Founder and Medical Director

Onna Solomon LMSW, Lead Trainer and Certified PLAY Project Consultant

Perri Zimmerman, Chief Operations Officer

Shana Wirth MA, LPC, Manager of Training Operations

Kate Bernhardt, Event and Office Manager

Resources

To view additional resources, please visit the following links:

PLAY Project official website
www.playproject.org

Complete Listing of PLAY Project Licensed Agencies in Ohio
<http://www.playproject.org/play-project-locations/>

Spotlight on Diagnosis and Early Intervention in Ohio
https://youtu.be/WJ1HN_ElRkg

Ohio Early Intervention
www.ohioearlyintervention.org

OCALI
www.ocali.org

Intervening Early, an initiative of The Childhood League Center
www.interveningearly.org

For more information or questions regarding PLAY Project in Ohio, please contact Courtney Yantes.

Funding for PLAY Project in Ohio is provided by the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities.