Celebrating 51 years at Indiana University providing visionary solutions in disability and community through research, education, and service.

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From Our Director

Friends and Colleagues:

The last 18 months have been exceptionally challenging for so many within the IIDC and in the broader community in which we serve. Every aspect of our daily lives has been dramatically affected. Our kitchen tables have turned into offices and school rooms. We canceled and delayed trips to see family and friends. And, in the event we went into the community, we masked up for our own safety and the safety of others. Also, by now, we all know someone whose had COVID-19 and, sadly, too many have lost loved ones.

Persevering through this time has not been easy and I want to thank the entire IIDC faculty and staff for their amazing work and dedication during this once-in-a-generation event. Through countless video meetings and events, a great deal of adaptation and innovation, they truly rose to the moment, ensuring that the important work of Institute continued and the needs of people with disabilities remained a priority during a time of major turmoil and uncertainty.

For many with disabilities, the pandemic exacerbated inequities that existed long before COVID-19. Access to critical health care, necessary educational supports, and employment was dramatically limited. Many were also unable to connect with their friends and loved ones leading to greater isolation and exclusion. The effects of the pandemic will be felt long after the virus subsides and we, at the IIDC, are committed to doing our part to ensure a full recovery that rightly addresses the needs of people with disabilities.

Of course, we are not in the clear yet, but Indiana and the country have made major gains in vaccinations to contain the COVID-19 virus. The IIDC website contains many accessible resources about the virus and vaccinations, including videos, informational documents, and contact information for supports to become vaccinated. I encourage you to review the materials and share widely (https://www.iidc.indiana.edu).

Now, I’m pleased to present to you the 2021 Annual Report. I hope you can take some time to review and go to our website to learn about some of the great work happening at the IIDC.

Sincerely,

Derek Nord, PhD
Director

A Lifespan Approach to Disabilities

Imagine communities that facilitate and support equitable access to a desirable life for all people.

Early Childhood
School Age
Adulthood
Older Adulthood

Where family community partnerships provide all families the supports they need to nurture, teach, and advocate for their children.

Where the capacity of educational systems and universally designed services meet the needs of all students.

Where access is improved and expanded to provide opportunities for competitive integrated employment and community living.

Where individuals participate in all facets of community life and have choice and control over their health and independence.

Research Centers at the Indiana Institute
- Center for Collaborative Systems Change
- Center for Health Equity
- Center on Community Living and Careers
- Center on Education and Lifelong Learning
- Early Childhood Center
- Eppley Institute for Parks and Public Lands
- Indiana Resource Center for Autism

Institute staff Advance Improvement in policy and practices in disability through...°
- Advocacy
- Coalition Development
- Family Engagement
- Information Dissemination
- Pre-Service Education and Preparation
- Research, Evaluation and Policy Analysis
- Training and Technical Assistance
A Foundation of Excellence

The Indiana Institute on Disability and Community (IIDC), Indiana’s University Center for Excellence in Disabilities, has fostered a foundation of excellence for community investment in developmental disabilities since 1970. Our mission is to work with communities to welcome, value, and support the meaningful participation of people of all ages and abilities through research, education, and service.

Our work crosses the lifespan and is conducted across seven centers and an Indiana University disability-focused library accessible to all state residents.

Advancing Improvement in Policy and Practices in Disability

The Indiana Institute is a bridge that connects the university to the broader community through the sharing of ideas and innovations to improve communities and lives. The Institute’s work achieves this through:

• Advocacy – Advancing effective policy and best practices by informing and educating decision makers.
• Coalition Development – Developing collaborative solutions by connecting and convening diverse community stakeholders.
• Family Engagement – Supporting families through partnerships among educators and human service providers to strengthen learning, independence, and community connections.
• Information Dissemination – Communicating and sharing information and research findings with broad constituencies over various mediums.
• Pre-Service Education and Preparation – Supporting the training of professionals to become leaders and prepare future practitioners to implement best practices in the field.
• Research, Evaluation and Policy Analysis – Conducting disciplined inquiry to test and improve policies, programs, and practices.
• Training and Technical Assistance – Building capacity to support community members and professionals in applying specific skills and best practices.

By the Numbers

The Institute’s research to practice initiatives support the advancement of applied research, evaluation, and public policy; outreach that is community oriented and state-wide; technical assistance activities that are collaborative, systematic, and results driven; and educational preparation that supports the pre-service and in-service training of professionals to become leaders in the field.

56,975
People Impacted

6,242
Hours of Training Provided

71
Boards and Committees

1
National Award

Research

Service

Scholarship

Education

48
projects ranging in topics across the lifespan

56,975
people impacted at 492 events

83
products produced by Institute professionals

143
university students impacted by the Institute

38,273
Professionals/ paraprofessionals

36,219
Family members/caregivers

224
Academic courses and distance learning modules

6,242
People with disabilities

10
Electronic and web-based products

4,450
Students

21
Newsletters, pamphlets, brochures, fact sheets

11,899
General public

10
Book chapters and peer-reviewed journal articles

1,122
Students with disabilities

1
Conference presentations

2,482
Professionals

8
Other categories

2,149
Researchers

7
Press communications

318
Credit hours generated by IU students

117
Students taught during academic courses in 2020-2021

14
Undergraduate, masters and doctoral level students mentored or advised

9
Academic courses taught

A special thank you to our IIDC Advisory Council members: Sylvia Brantly, David Carter, Christine Dahlberg, Shannon Ellery, Frank Epperson, Shawn Fulton, Stacey Heath, Leah Helvering, Sarah Horwitz, Melissa Hayes, Mary Ann Lapenta, Kate McQuain, Cori Mitchell, Chris Myers, Cynthia Nassim, Dana Nord, Amber O’Haver, Chris Stroguiludis, and Karen Vaughn.
Early Childhood

Exploring Racial Equity in Indiana’s Part C Early Intervention System

The Early Childhood Center (ECC) is collaborating with the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) to identify and disseminate evidence-based practices for 3K-early literacy instruction. The umbrella project includes: (a) identifying and interviewing high performing Indiana elementary schools with above average IRead-3 outcomes, AND equitable literacy practices for PK-3 early literacy instruction; (b) providing early literacy responsive pedagogies; (c) providing early literacy professional learning (CELL) on a year’s project to integrate evidence-based, family-centered home visiting services and create evidence-based family-centered professional development focused on improving effective transition practices for Part C early intervention providers and Part B preschool program directors. The study’s second phase will include conducting a sample of 200 (total) Black and White family interviews. Half the interviews will be with families who chose to leave First Steps while their children were still eligible for services. The study’s third phase will consist of 30 semi-structured provider interviews with 10 agency directors, 20 providers (10 White and 10 Black). Results will be shared with Indiana’s First Steps leadership in late summer/early fall 2021.

Additional Featured Projects

Cross-Center Collaboration to Integrate Family Engagement into the New State Personnel Development Grant

The Early Childhood Center (ECC) is collaborating with the IDOE’s Center for Education and Lifelong Learning (Cell) on a five-year project to integrate family engagement practices within selected rural school districts. ECC Center staff provides content expertise to (a) create foundational modules, (b) curate resources for the Indiana Center on Health and Family Literacy (ICHL) website, (c) support CELC staff with incorporating family engagement practices into existing Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) training, (b) support IDOE staff to continue working with Part C leadership to adopt the evidence-based, family-centered home visiting services and create evidence-based family-centered professional development focused on promoting effective transition practices for Part C early intervention providers and Part B preschool directors.

Literacy and Improvement in 3rd Grade Reading Scores Among Children with Disabilities and Children of Color

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First Steps Personnel Study

A research study on First Steps workforce provider recruitment and retention is underway by the Early Childhood Center (ECC). This study examines policies and procedures to discover their potentially positive or negative impact on providers’ decisions about enrolling in, and resigning from, the First Steps System. Last year’s data revealed a higher percentage of providers leaving the system than enrolling in the system. Therefore, ECC staff are interviewing First Steps agency directors, Part C directors, current providers, and recently past providers to determine the cause of this discrepancy. We hope to discover from the interviews: 1) how the workforce has changed over the last 15 years, 2) the greatest personnel needs, 3) the impact this turnover has on families’ ability to access services, 4) why some providers remain and 5) successful small business recruitment and retention practices for maintaining an adequate workforce.

Maternal Advocates Resource Alliance

In partnership with Maternal Advocates Resource Alliance and the Indiana University Center for Rural Engagement, the Center on Collaborative Systems Change (CCSC) is using collaborative evaluation to inform the design and implementation of the Community Postpartum Support Training. Training outcomes are designed to assist community groups and faith-based organizations better understand the needs of pregnant, birth and postpartum women. Training includes a focus on reducing social isolation, increase service access, and optimizing maternal health and wellness in their community. Eight community groups in Indiana’s Monroe and Owen counties received foundational knowledge about the perinatal period and are supported in assessing the community’s needs, planning, implementing of sustainable community plans, and evaluating their success. Example plans include access to labor support, advocacy, transportation, house childbirth education, material and resource support (e.g., car seats, food security and home cleaning), childcare services, parent support groups and breastfeeding support.
In 2019, the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) published a Framework for Social Emotional Learning (SEL) specific to Indiana, with seven SEL competencies identified. The IDOE continued to share information and resources to assist schools and districts with implementing and integrating SEL into academics, college and career readiness, out of school time, and multi-tiered systems of support. The Center on Education and Lifelong Learning (CELL) worked with the IDOE to provide professional development and technical assistance, utilizing a district framework to achieve high quality, systemic and sustained implementation of SEL. The framework included engaging leaders in key activities that begin with building a strong foundation. Activities then focused on strengthening adult SEL as well as promoting SEL for students, differentiating the pace and depth based on the needs and strengths of a given district. Every step of implementation support was guided by a process of continuous improvement.

Scaling Up in Response to COVID-19

With the onset of COVID-19, staff of the Indiana Resource Center for Autism (IRCA) began to retool their work around visual supports, social stories, and reformatting workshops to be delivered virtually. The goal was to provide access to the networks of professionals and family members in Indiana as they worked to assist individual students on the autism spectrum as the pandemic evolved. The Center provided a series of free family Zoom meetings that reached over 500 individuals now archived on their website, on a myriad of topics including behavior, communication, and education. Additionally, Center staff developed a training series comprising 27 modules titled Comprehensive Programming for Students Across the Autism Spectrum. Center work also encompassed the implementation of needs assessment to determine how best to deliver information and support to school personnel overseeing mental health and social emotional learning work through the Indiana School Mental Health Initiative (ISMHI). Additional virtual workshop and meetings were also conducted with these school groups.

Additional Featured Projects

Social Emotional Learning

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Indiana School Mental Health Summit

The Indiana School Mental Health Initiative (ISMHI) works to create a community of practice to promote the social, emotional, and behavioral health of Indiana’s school-aged children. In February of 2021, ISMHI held its third annual Whole Child Summit. The Summit focused on sharing progress on how school districts and their community partners built capacity to address the development of the whole child through school mental health frameworks and improvement plans. Over 1,300 educators, mental health professionals, and community partners came together virtually to develop a plan for continued collaboration and learning and receive technical assistance to support their goals and plans from national, state, and district experts. As important as the “how” was, the Summit also addressed the “why” and the importance of doing so to change belief systems about behavior and learning. District teams were given time to reflect and plan next steps. Unlike a conference, the goal of the Summit was to leave with actionable steps to continue to refine a community of practice to meet the needs of Indiana’s students.

Educational Improv

Camp Yes And combines communication and social skills instruction for teens with autism and deep professional learning for general and special educators, speech-language pathologists, school psychologists, counselors, and social workers. The camp utilizes innovative instructional methods derived from improvisational theater (“Improv”), a form of drama in which plot, character, and setting are created during the moment of performance. Camp Yes And enables educators to practice new skills and receive feedback while working hands-on with youth on the spectrum. Camp evaluations have found measurable improvements in teens’ social communication skills and significant decreases in their social anxiety. Evaluations also found substantial increases in educators’ confidence and skill around working with autism, along with a higher degree of implementation in the classroom and sharing of strategies with colleagues. In June of 2021, two weeks of camp were held online using the Zoom platform due to COVID-19 restrictions.
Evidence-Based Sexual Health Education

S
ince October 2018, the Center for Health Equity (CHE) has been collaborating with the Indiana Resource and Information Center for Autism (IRCA) on the development of evidence-based sexual health training for women with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in Indiana. This project aims to increase the sexual health literacy and advocacy skills of Hoosier women with IDD to advance their general health and well-being, as well as their sexual health rights. Individuals with IDD do not have equitable access to sexual health education. When sexual health education is not accessible and tailored to their needs, women with IDD can be vulnerable to unsafe sexual practices, sexually transmitted infections, and sexual abuse.

The project in-person sexual health curriculum was developed based on extensive research during 2018-2020. Focused on determining the sexual health needs of Hoosier women with IDD, project staff conducted literature reviews, key informant interviews with stakeholders, and focus groups of both women with IDD and parents of adult daughters with IDD in Indiana.

- Fourteen key informant interviews were conducted with women with IDD, parents, and professionals serving this population, from different Indiana locations, to increase an understanding of the sexual health needs of women with IDD and related barriers and resources.
- Three focus groups were also conducted, two with adult women with IDD, and one with parents of adult daughters with IDD, to have a deep understanding of the sexual health needs of women with IDD including sexual health education and effective teaching methods.

In 2021-2022, the project is doing pilot trainings in both online and in-person formats to refine its development of evidence-based, accessible sexual health education. The curriculum focuses on sexual health knowledge, self-advocacy, and healthy relationships which are essential to health care access and health promotion, as well as healthy intimate relationships. Project staff are collaborating with women with IDD on the development of the sexual health curriculum, as well as on the creation of plain language publications about key project findings. CHE will also promote the importance of sexual health education for Hoosier women with IDD.

Additional Featured Projects

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion within the Context of the Indiana Institute

In an organization as large as the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community, we represent multiple perspectives, diverse personal and professional backgrounds, and sometimes, opposing ideas. Yet we share a commitment to working towards equity for marginalized communities of many kinds. For 51 years, the Indiana Institute has operated as a leader in the state of Indiana and nationwide with a focus on disability in every aspect of service. With the recent creation of the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee (EDIC), we honor our rich legacy while moving our disability-focused work forward with an equity, diversity, and inclusion mindset. In addition to hosting events and leading conversations at the Institute, the EDIC is proud to be a space where committee members can come together to discuss the complexity of intersecting inequities and how they relate to our work in settings across the state and nationwide.

National Core Indicators

The Indiana Institute has vast experience in identifying issues, finding solutions, and advancing research related to the needs of individuals with IDD and their families. In a collaborative effort with Indiana’s Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services (DDRS), the Institute is providing facilitation, data collection, analysis, and dissemination of information related to the National Core Indicators (NCI). This effort will ensure that Indiana’s ongoing assessment and progress monitoring is integrated into the state’s data-driven decision making and program management approach. The Institute is assisting in the development of new survey questions tailored to the MCBS waiver performance metrics. Additionally, the Indiana Institute is managing the survey process to both increase response rates via peer surveyors and increase the diversity of the survey team. Data analysis results will provide the state with evidence-based information that will align with national standards and detail progress towards the state’s identified outcomes. The dissemination procedures will also be customized to ensure they meet both the needs of the DDRS survey team and the needs of individuals with IDD and related barriers and resources.

Family Employment Awareness Training

In an organization as large as the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community, we represent multiple perspectives, diverse personal and professional backgrounds, and sometimes, opposing ideas. Yet we share a commitment to working towards equity for marginalized communities of many kinds. For 51 years, the Indiana Institute has operated as a leader in the state of Indiana and nationwide with a focus on disability in every aspect of service. With the recent creation of the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee (EDIC), we honor our rich legacy while moving our disability-focused work forward with an equity, diversity, and inclusion mindset. In addition to hosting events and leading conversations at the Institute, the EDIC is proud to be a space where committee members can come together to discuss the complexity of intersecting inequities and how they relate to our work in settings across the state and nationwide.

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Transition Portfolio Trainings

Working with the Indiana Department of Education, the Center on Community Living and Careers (CCLC) and the staff of the Indiana Transition Resource Center (INSTRC) project led a series of five trainings in the spring of 2021 for hundreds of Indiana educators and transition coordinators. Transition Portfolio Trainings walked teachers through how to create effective online portfolios for high school students. Students can use their transition portfolios to organize their accomplishments, interests, and job or volunteer experiences. Students and their families, educators, and service providers can come together to discuss the complexities of transitioning. The INSTRC team continues to provide technical assistance to transition teachers with their weekly Portfolio Office Hours.

Family Employment Awareness Training

Indiana is now the fifth state in the nation to offer in-depth Family Employment Awareness Training (FEAT) to transitioning students, young adults, families, and caregivers. Designed to be a series of in-person trainings, the Center on Community Living and Careers transformed FEAT this year into a three-week series of online webinars and discussions. Supported by AWS Foundation, FEAT gives attendees information about accommodations, systems, funding, and employment supports while also sharing success stories and connecting participants to state and local resources. FEAT trainers recognize that transition is complicated, must be person-centered, and that the learning curve for families and students is steep. Families, teens and young adults were able to participate in two sessions designed just for them. In addition, FEAT is excited to work with families post training to provide needed support on individual plans for employment. CCLC collaborates with INSOURCE, Indiana’s parent information and training center, in designing, delivering, and facilitating FEAT.

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Older Adulthood

Indiana Disability Resource FINDER

For those with disabilities and their families, trying to navigate a complex web of services, programs, and other disability-related community resources can be daunting. In November of 2020, the Indiana Institute partnered with AWS Foundation of Fort Wayne, IN, to implement Indiana Disability Resource FINDER as part of its library information and referral services.

With guidance from nonprofit organizations, disability-focused state agencies, and Indiana families, FINDER was launched in 2019 through an initiative funded by AWS Foundation. AWS supports a wide range of organizations and service agencies in northeast Indiana, working to develop a community in which people with enduring intellectual developmental, and physical disabilities are engaged fully and meaningfully in all aspects of community life.

Research has shown that locating information about disability services and resources is a major hurdle for community stakeholders and disability professionals. FINDER was developed to be a free and comprehensive online tool specifically designed to connect people with disabilities, family members, and professionals with disability-related programs and services.

“As Indiana’s Center of Excellence in Disabilities, the Indiana Institute is the perfect partner to administrate the FINDER program and take it to the next level,” said Patti Huys, CEO of AWS Foundation. “Combined with the Institute’s leadership and specialized skills and experience, FINDER provides the latest technology to expand collaboration and develop new partnerships to help empower parents, teachers, caregivers, and others to find answers to disability-related questions and become a more informed advocate.”

FINDER provides 24/7 access to community services, is easy to use, and supports first-time users with a step by step guide. For more experienced users, it has advanced search features. Regardless of how information is located, search results are immediately available, can be saved for future use and shared.

Service providers, community advocates, and medical professionals regularly contribute to FINDER, keeping the information current, relevant, and practical. All information and resources shared are reviewed, verified, and approved before they are published to ensure their accuracy and value. Promoting collaboration and sharing user feedback supports inclusion of opportunities and resources in all areas and types from every community state wide. FINDER supports the right for people of all abilities to freely choose how they wish to live their lives to the fullest.

COVID-19 Vaccination Projects

Vaccination is a critical tool for ending the COVID-19 pandemic. With recent funds from the Administration for Community Living (ACL) and Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD), the Center for Health Equity (CHE) worked to increase the vaccination rates of Hoosiers with disabilities. The ACL project, which is funded through September 2022, aims to expand access to vaccines for people with disabilities. The AUCD project, which concluded in August 2021, promoted vaccines and increased vaccine confidence among people of all disabilities and their caregivers. These two projects focus on education about the importance of receiving a vaccine and dispelling myths about COVID-19 and its vaccines. To that end, CHE is working on the following activities: social media posts, webinars, plain language fact sheets and infographics in English and Spanish, American Sign Language (ASL) videos, YouTube videos, and information dissemination and adaptation of existing materials.

Hotels 4 Homeless

In partnership with the New Leaf – New Life non-profit organization, the Center for Collaborative Systems Change (COSC) received a Trailblazer grant through the Clinical and Translational Sciences Institute to combat housing insecurity. The Hotels 4 Homeless (H4H) program focuses on providing immediate shelter to the homeless population affected by COVID-19 in the city of Bloomington, located in Monroe County, Indiana, by providing hotel rooms for individuals and families so they can safely isolate during the pandemic. Once an individual or family is referred to the program or applies directly, caseworkers assess their needs and place them in a hotel room based on the urgency of their situation. While in the program, caseworkers maintain continuous contact to provide connections to other social service resources that best fit their needs. The center has partnered with H4H to help the program establish best practices for data gathering and analysis, provide guidance on coalition building, assist in establishing community and university partnerships, and support grant writing efforts.

Indiana Institute Expands to Include Eppley Institute

In the summer of 2020, the Eppley Institute for Parks and Public Lands became the seventh research center at the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community. The addition of the Eppley Institute under the IIDC umbrella provides for a unique opportunity to expand the impact of the Indiana Institute into new spaces – national, state, and local parks and public lands. Established in 1993, the Eppley Institute partner with other state and federal agencies, recreation, park, and public land organizations to enhance access, choice, and quality of nature, cultural, and recreational experiences for all people. Eppley has assisted hundreds of agencies across the nation with strategic planning, workforce development, and technical assistance. Made up of a core team of parks and recreation experts, health professionals, researchers, educators, and a strong information technology staff, Eppley provides solutions to a range of industry challenges, creating positive impacts for agencies and their communities.

Park, Recreation, and Outdoors for Health

With record use of parks and public lands due to the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change impacts, the demands currently placed on natural and heritage areas has become overwhelming. Research shows that it is impossible to effectively care for parks, public lands, and protected areas without an engaged and informed citizenry. And, with thousands of protected places dispersed throughout the U.S. (over 400 national parks alone), the only effective way to educate citizens and professionals is online. To this end, the Eppley Institute for Parks and Public Lands online learning platform, Park, Recreation, and Outdoors for Health provides over 400 online learning courses to over 500,000 registered users. The Institute’s ‘common learning portal’ addresses a range of topics from chaotic water flowing strategies in the Everglades National Park to professional training in interpretive natural area education, learning the history of Indiana state parks, and much more. Training outcomes enable effective stewardship of the natural and cultural heritage places we share.