

EVERYDAY HEROES

An inside look at the people who make dreams come true at Meeting Street

Winter 2022

Welcome to the inaugural e-version of our EVERYDAY HEROES newsletter!

In it, we celebrate the dedicated people who make Meeting Street the amazing place it is – our talented professionals who care deeply, our students who strive, our families who hope, and our donors who give selflessly so that all of our children can thrive. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as we have enjoyed preparing it for you. – *Lori Sousa, Director of Development*

Meet two of our Everyday Heroes

Karin Taylor and Alina Kapustin love their work in our Early Intervention (EI) programs, available through Meeting Street's New Bedford, MA and Providence, RI campuses.

What is Early Intervention? Early Intervention provides children and their families with the services they need during the crucial early years of a child's development — from birth to three years old. Our personalized approach includes a team of professionals who identify areas of need and build a customized plan with families to achieve their child's developmental goals.

Meet Karin Taylor

An EI Specialist, an EI Mom

Early Intervention Developmental Specialist, New Bedford Campus



Before joining Meeting Street ten years ago, Karin Taylor was fostering an infant with developmental delays. Enrolled in an Early Intervention program in Massachusetts, the baby girl was eventually diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

The loving foster mom adopted the child, who today is eleven years old and highly functioning.

For Karin, the life-changing outcomes of early intervention are evident every day, at work and at home.

"I love working with our families," says Karin. "Each of their situations has its own unique set of challenges, which I address with compassion and real empathy — my own experience gives me a deep well of understanding."

As a Developmental Specialist at Meeting Street, the former day care director works with families

Meet Alina Kapustin

Building bonds, Changing lives

**Early Intervention Educator
Providence Campus**



Alina Kapustin is a passionate believer in early intervention. And she should know. She witnesses its success every day.

At any given time, the Early Intervention (EI) educator works with as many as 30 families who are typically referred to

Meeting Street's program by pediatricians, day care centers, social workers, or by the parents themselves when their children experience delays in meeting developmental milestones.

"If we don't tackle developmental challenges head-on at the earliest stage possible, the gaps continue to grow and the harder it is for a child to catch up later on," Alina says.

With an educational background in speech and language, she sees a lot of little ones who struggle with communication delays. Young children may experience frustration and even aggression when unable to express themselves, necessitating behavioral services, as well.

in group sessions. "I love wearing different hats, depending on what is transpiring on any specific day," Karin says.

The group setting — which can run for six, eight, or twelve weeks — is key for children learning to socialize with their peers and learn from one another.

Parents fully participate in the groups (and have their own weekly sessions), gaining insights and awareness along with their kids in a safe play environment. Sessions include singing, crafts, and painting, among other activities.

Enrolling a child in the Early Intervention (EI) program can be difficult for parents, Karin says.

"Families may be in denial about what is happening with their child," she explains. "Trust in providers is not automatic for many parents, and that's understandable. Trust needs to be built, day by day. EI teams work hard at that to become an essential part of each child's support system."

A grateful grandparent recalls her granddaughter's concerning mobility delay. The baby was a year old and still not crawling. Her family reached out to Meeting Street for an assessment.

"The physical therapist found no underlying disability," says the grandmother. "She worked with the parents on targeted play that encouraged the baby to exercise her limbs. After three sessions, my granddaughter was starting to crawl and transitioned to walking soon afterwards."

"My daughter and son-in-law were blown away by the Meeting Street team," the grateful grandma says. "Not just because of their expertise but the reassurance they gave the young parents when they needed it most."

Services available through Meeting Street's New Bedford-based EI program include nursing; occupational, physical, and speech language therapy; behavioral health; sensory and feeding needs; lactation consults, and infant massage.

Some of our kids are medically fragile with significant health needs. EI team members may accompany parents to appointments and assist them in navigating next steps in the health care process — a lifeline for families in often overwhelming situations.

Children age out of Early Intervention services at the age of three. Karin says some kids are ready to move on, while others are not. She and her colleagues help with the transition to the next stage in a family's journey, making it as smooth as possible.

Being there, whenever, and wherever our kids and parents are in need, generates a huge sense of reward for Karin.

"Working at Meeting Street in Massachusetts is very fulfilling for me," she says. "Our EI program is full of compassionate people who want to educate and help families. There's no ego here. We want parents to learn to be the best advocates they can for their kids."

As one grandmother, grateful for E.I., explained, "My grandson was two-and-a-half when he began acting out in day care because he couldn't communicate with the other kids. His mom and dad turned to Meeting Street — and all I can say is thank goodness they were there for them. In the comfort of their home, they learned how to help my grandson calm himself, while speech-language specialists worked on his language skills."

She continues, "In seven months of treatment, my grandson is now talking up a storm and the Meeting Street team even helped the family make the transition to pre-school when he aged out of services at three. I'm beyond grateful for the lifeline Meeting Street provided to my son and daughter-in-law."

Some children receive services for a brief time, others remain in the program for the entire three years. However long, Alina and the E.I. teams work hard not only to resolve delays but to build strong bonds with families. She shares her phone number with parents and encourages them to call or text her with questions or if they just need reassurance.

"Building that bond of trust with parents and the child is vitally important," Alina says. "We want them to know that no matter what, we are here for them."

In Rhode Island, Meeting Street has three E.I. teams — in the north of the state, Providence, and East Bay — composed of educators, speech-language therapists, occupational and physical therapists, nutritionists, infant mental health professionals, and sensory, feeding, and lactation consultants.

"We really do work as a team," says Alina, who loves and takes great pride in her colleagues. "We support and share our expertise with one another to help our families move forward. You never feel like you're alone."

Creativity is an essential tool when working with families, Alina says. When Covid necessitated delivering services virtually, for example, she engaged families in parallel play, encouraging them to mirror her therapeutic use of toys with their children. If they didn't have building blocks, for example, Alina said to use cereal or pasta boxes instead.

Importantly, she coaches parents to have fun with their kids when they are working on skills together.

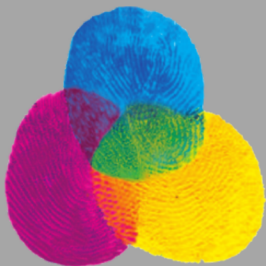
"The sillier the better is my motto," she says. "Kids are more apt to respond if you're willing to be silly with them."

Giving their utmost is what Everyday Heroes do. It's what they love and what they trained for.

"Every day, I experience these beautiful 'Aha!' moments," Alina says. "When progress happens, everyone is so proud — the family, the child, and our team. And even if our kids won't remember our work together when they grow up, their families do. Long after we stop working with them, they still share pictures and letters and progress reports with us. We will never forget any of them."

All children move on from the Early Intervention program. But many families keep in touch.

“It’s wonderful that they want to stay connected,” Karin says. “It means so much for all of us here. It means we’ve had a positive impact.”



Meeting Street