

First STEPS: The Supporting Transitions into ECEC Programs Study

UQ Ethics Approval Number: 2023/HE001878

Dear Service Director,

We would like to invite your service to participate in First STEPS. First STEPS is an exciting new study that aims to understand the experiences of children and families as they first transition into Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programs, as well as the perspectives and experiences of educators regarding this process. Findings from this study will help us understand how best to support children and families during this important step in their lives.

First STEPS is recruiting families of children aged 1-3 years (12 to 36 months) who are entering ECEC for the very first time. Across their transition to ECEC, families will be invited to participate in research activities designed to understand their experiences of starting ECEC, including measuring their sleep patterns, behaviour, and emotional responses.

As a service director **we would ask your permission to provide information about the study to families who will be entering your ECEC program within the next 6-12 months.** If families agree to participate, we will ask to visit your ECEC service on four days during their initial weeks at your ECEC service. During these visits, researchers will collect information about the study child, conduct observations in the child's ECEC room, and ask their educators brief questions about their perspectives on the child's transition into ECEC.

The information statement and consent form on the following pages provides more detailed information about the study. Please read this information. We are happy to answer any questions you have about the study.

First STEPS is being run by researchers at The University of Queensland (UQ) and is funded by a grant from the Australian Research Council (ARC). If you have any questions or concerns about the study after reading the following pages, please do not hesitate to contact the research team at any time on 0447 923 587 or via email at firststeps@uq.edu.au.

We hope that you can take part in this important study.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Sally Staton
Queensland Brain Institute
The University of Queensland

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Participant Information Sheet for Service Directors

Thank you for taking the time to read about **First STEPS**. Your service is invited to participate in this exciting new study that aims to understand the experiences of children and families as they first transition into Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programs and understand how best to support families and educators to support children during this important step in their lives.

This document describes the research study. The information is to help you to decide if you would like your service to participate.

Please read this information sheet, and, if you would like your service to participate, please complete the consent form which follows.

What is the research study about?

Starting an Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) program is a big first step in the lives of young children and their families. For many children this represents the first time attending a group program, in the absence of a family member or friend. How families and services can best work together to support children across the transition into ECEC is currently not well understood.

First STEPS is focused on understanding the experiences of children, families and services as children transition into their first ECEC program. The findings of this study will be used to inform the development of resources for families, educators, and policy makers to support positive transition of the many children entering ECEC programs each year.

Who are the Researchers?

First STEPS is being run by researchers at The University of Queensland (UQ), Queensland Brain Institute and is led by Associate Professor Sally Staton. PhD student George Normore will be using the data as part of his studies on early life transitions. This project includes collaborators from the University of Western Ontario Canada, and the University of Melbourne. This project is funded by a grant from the Australian Research Council.

What will your service be asked to do if you choose to participate?

If you choose to participate in this study, your service's participation will involve:

- **Providing information about the study to families** who have a child aged 1-3 years (12-36 months) entering your ECEC program within the next 6-12 months. Families will be able to choose to participate and there is not pressure for families to do so.
- If families agree to participate, we will ask to **visit your ECEC service on four days during the study child's transition into your ECEC service**. Two visits will occur during the first two weeks (once per week) in your ECEC service and two visits will occur six weeks after. Please note that we will NOT visit your service on the child's *first day* in ECEC.
- During these visits, researchers will:
 - **conduct observations in the child's ECEC room**. These observations will help us to understand the child's daily experiences and their behaviours. An experienced and trained researcher will conduct these observations as discretely as possible, to minimise any disruption to the study child and children in the room. We will also ask the educators some brief questions about their perspectives on the child's transition into ECEC. These questions will take less than 5 minutes to complete and be completed at a time that is convenient to the educator/service.
 - **collect saliva samples from participating children**. Samples will be collected once in the afternoon on each visit day. This sampling allows us to measure cortisol, which is a hormone that can tell us about how a child is adjusting to ECEC and is particularly useful in young children where it is more difficult to ask them directly. All children will have had experience with the sampling process at home with their parent prior to sampling in childcare. Sampling is quick (~2 minutes), easy to collect, and can be taken either by the researcher or an educator. If educators at your centre are willing to perform this procedure it will enable minimal researcher interference with your daily activities, however if not, a researcher will be available to do the sampling. All equipment and instructions will be provided by our research team.

What will educators at my service be asked to do?

Educators at your service will be invited to participate in the study and will be asked to provide consent by completing a consent form. We encourage you to discuss this study with the educators at your service prior to agreeing to participate. Educators will be invited to participate in the following:

- We will ask educators to allow researchers within their room to conduct observations during the study.
- We will ask educators to collect the saliva sample from the study child, or to allow a researcher to collect this sample.
- We will ask educators brief questions (less than 5 minutes) regarding their perspectives on the child's transition into the ECEC service.

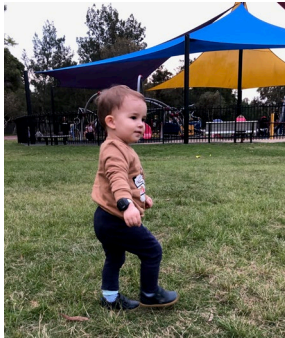
What are participating children and families asked to do?

Children and families in this study will participate in activities across their transition into ECEC. These activities will occur 6 weeks prior to their entry to ECEC (at home), during their first two weeks in ECEC (at home and at ECEC) and 6 weeks after they first start ECEC (at home and at ECEC). Activities will measure each child's sleep patterns, emotional responses to starting ECEC, and behaviours. Parents will also participate in activities to measure their sleep and understand their experiences during this period. You will be provided with copies of completed consent forms for each participating child for your records.

Participating children are given consent from their parents/carers to engage in the following research activities:

- **Actigraphs.** To measure children's sleep, light and activity patterns, children will wear a small watch-like sensor on their wrist or ankle called an actigraph (please see image of the watch shown below). You can find out more information about actigraphs through the Actigraph FAQ or Parent Information documents available on our website (qbi.uq.edu.au/firststeps). Participating children will wear the 'watch' continuously for two weeks at a time: 6 weeks starting ECEC, during their two weeks in ECEC, and 6 weeks after starting ECEC. The *watch* is durable and waterproof and comes with a special child-sized band and fabric sleeve to ensure it is comfortable to wear.

This is what actigraphs look like:



- **Saliva Sampling.** Saliva sampling is a simple procedure in which a soft swab is placed under the participating child's tongue for 1-2 minutes. The swab is then gently removed and inserted into a plastic tube, sealed, labelled, and stored sanitarly in a freezer until it can be collected by the research team. Parents will collect saliva samples at home in the morning and evening and educators or researchers will collect one sample from the child each afternoon at the ECEC service during each visit.
- **Observations.** Experienced and qualified researchers will conduct observations on four days - two visits during the first two weeks (one day per week) in ECEC and two visits six weeks after starting ECEC. Children will be observed undertaking their daily activities by researchers. Researchers will take notes during these observations, but not interact with the study child in any way. The research team has considerable experience undertaking observation in ECEC and will ensure minimal interruption to the child or other children in the room.

Participating parents/guardians will engage in the following research activities 6 weeks prior to their child's entry to ECEC, during their first two weeks that their child is in ECEC and 6 weeks after their child first start ECEC:

- **Actigraphs.** All parents/guardians will be asked to wear actigraphs across the same period as the child (see above) to measure their own sleep patterns.
- **Daily Activity Diaries.** Parents/guardians will complete daily diaries of the families' activities during the two-week period in which they wear their actigraph watch.
- **Family Survey.** Parents/guardians will be asked to complete a short, online survey to understand their child and family's background and experiences.

What are the expected benefits?

By participating in this study, your service will be contributing to research that will have be used to support children, families, and ECEC services via enhancing knowledge about early education transitions. The findings of this study will be used to inform the development of resources for families, educators, and policy makers to support the transition of children into ECEC programs.

What are the risks?

There are minimal risks associated with participation in this project. The possible risks include children being unhappy wearing the actigraph or during the saliva sampling process. Children will not be asked to continue with any activities if they do not wish to do so. During visits to your service and in the room/s of participating children, researchers will aim to minimise disruptions to the routine or staff.

There is potential for minor discomfort and inconvenience for parents/guardians in completing the surveys and for educators in responding to the verbal questions. All questions are designed to be as brief as possible and appropriate for use by parents/guardians and educators and participants will not be required to provide any information that they are not comfortable sharing.

We can foresee no other inconveniences or risks for your service, your staff, or children. All research staff are highly competent and experienced researchers and are qualified to work with children, including holding a Working with Children (Blue Card) check. Furthermore, the study team will provide you with direct access to a Senior Researcher to answer questions relating to the sampling and data collection process.

How will your confidentiality be protected?

Any information we collect from your ECEC service will remain confidential. We can disclose information from your service only with your permission, except as required by law.

When we write or talk about the results of this study, we will report aggregate information about de-identified participants. This means that no one will be able to identify your ECEC service, staff or families. In our data collection, we will remove all identifiable information (names, addresses) and participants will be identified by a unique code only. Non-identifiable data collected in this project may be used as comparative data in future projects or stored on an open access database for secondary analysis.

All information will be stored securely as per UQ's Research Data Management policy and will be retained indefinitely in accordance with the obligations under the Public Records Act 2002 and associated State policies, retention and disposal schedules and other official advice issued by the Queensland State Archives' State Archivist. Please note that non-identifiable data collected in this project may be used as comparative data in future projects or stored on an open access database for secondary analysis.

How will we inform you of our results when the study is finished?

At the end of the study, we will send you a summary of the results for your information. This summary will not identify individual information about your service or the staff, parents, and children at your service but provide information about the general results of the study.

What happens if you agree to participate and then change your mind?

Your service's participation in **First STEPS** is entirely voluntary. If you do agree for your service to participate, your service can withdraw from the study at any time (by contacting the research team on the number or email below) without comment or penalty and can withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied by your service. Your decision to participate, or not participate, will in no way impact upon your current or future relationship with The University of Queensland.

Where can you get further information?

If you would like more information about the project or if you need to speak to a member of the research team, please contact us via phone (0447 923 587) or email (firststeps@uq.edu.au).

Concerns or complaints regarding the conduct of the project

This study adheres to the Guidelines of the ethical review process of The University of Queensland and the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*. Whilst you are free to discuss your participation in this study with the **First STEPS** research team (contactable on phone: 0447 923 587; email: firststeps@uq.edu.au), if you would like to speak to an officer of the University not involved in the study, you may contact the Ethics Coordinator on +617 3365 3924 or email humanethics@research.uq.edu.au.

You may find a copy of this participant information sheet on our website (qbi.uq.edu.au/firststeps) please take this opportunity to print this document or save a copy to your device. Alternatively, if you decide later that you would like a copy, please contact the **First STEPS** research team.

Thank you for helping with this important research