



March 2021

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# Keep Connected

*OFO's mission is to be the leader in developing innovative solutions that promote healthy lives, thriving families and caring communities.*

## The Door to Learning

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### What can Early Head Start and Head Start offer your child and family?

- Optional settings for learning
- Fun social experiences for the whole family
- Health and development screenings
- Dental and nutrition education
- Family support and education on topics of interest
- School readiness skills needed for children to successfully enter Kindergarten

**You can now apply for  
Early Head Start and Head  
Start online at :**

**[www.ofoinc.org/hsapply](http://www.ofoinc.org/hsapply)**

## Introducing...

**Please join us  
in welcoming the new  
Head Start Director!**



Hello!!!

I'm glad to be a part of the Head Start family! Everyone has been welcoming and I look forward to meeting the children and families we serve throughout Otsego County as we continue to transition to our post pandemic normal.

I have over twenty years' experience in the non-profit sector with a background in program operations, strategic planning, and financial management. I'm excited to collaborate with community partners and continue to provide high quality services to the families of Otsego County.

Thank you for entrusting me with the most treasured members of our community.

*"It is not the magnitude of our actions but the amount of love that is put into them that matters"*

*- Mother Teresa*

Submitted by Nicole Cashman, Head Start Director

## Staying Safe Together

It has been quite a year and we could not have done the amazing work our program has accomplished without the support of our wonderful staff, families, and community. Despite all the changes we will tackle whatever 2021 has in store for us!

The health and safety of our children, families, and staff continues to be a top priority for our program. We have utilized guidance from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Department of Health (DOH), Office of Head Start (OHS), and Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) to implement strategies and practices to create a safe environment for staff, children, and families.

Staff have been provided personal protective equipment, have received support and training on new safety procedures, and are required to wear masks while working with children and families. Children over age two are also encouraged to wear a cloth face covering. Though most children have adjusted to face masks, those having difficulty adjusting will be given support to help ease the transition to wearing masks.

We continue to evaluate the needs of children and families to adjust our work accordingly to reduce risk of COVID-19 pandemic and help keep families safe. We acknowledge the future is unclear, but remain unwavering in our work and commitment to our community.



Submitted by Joanne Guernsey, Health Specialist

## Early Head Start



Early Head Start is open and currently enrolling prenatal woman and children up to the age of three. We are offering in-person visits, virtual services, or a combination of both. No matter how we see your family, home visits are planned to meet individual developmental milestones.

During home visits, children and families work on activities together with staff. Children have been enjoying painting, sensory activities, and exploring with textures and colors. In preparation for virtual visits, staff create learning packets and activities that will be dropped off prior to the virtual meeting. The children and families will be able to work on the projects before and during the visit.

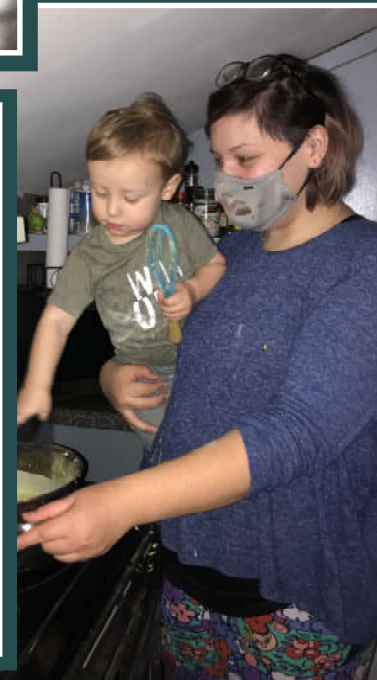


Early Head Start is following recommendations provided by the Department of Health to ensure the safety of the family and staff during in person home visits. Staff and family members wear masks during the visit. Children over two are also encouraged to wear masks to promote safety during the pandemic.

Submitted by Melissa Fetterman, Home-based Specialist



(Prenatal - 3 years)



## Toddler Classroom



There have been many adjustments that staff, children, and families have had to make during this pandemic. We have learned new ways to communicate, use different technology, and think outside the box to serve our families. It was great to be able to learn and grow in new ways with families, but we all look forward to being back in the classroom full time.

Our classroom is running Monday through Friday from 8am-12pm. To continue to safely serve families we developed a new pick up and drop off procedure, staff and children over two years old wear masks, and our classroom activities have been redesigned to ensure physical distancing. We ask families every day how they are feeling, check temperatures, and watch for signs of illness to make sure we all stay healthy while we are together.



With small changes and a lot of thoughtfulness, we will continue to thrive as a team. Hopefully, there are better times and warmer weather coming our way.

Submitted by Stacie Mark, Early Head Start Classroom Teacher

(18 months - 3 years)



We still have a lot of fun in the toddler room! We are learning new things every day from all of our experiences in the classroom. We explore, build, use our senses, play with a variety of toys and materials, do art projects, science activities, dance and sing, and spend time with our friends and teachers, all while learning and growing.



## Head Start



Due to the COVID-19 pandemic our program has had to modify the way we deliver services to families. During our initial shutdown, our staff relied on phone calls and email to stay in contact with families, provide educational resources, and offer other needed referrals and supports. As the closures and restrictions persisted, staff learned to use other virtual platforms such as closed classroom social media groups and Zoom virtual meetings to connect with families in new and meaningful ways.

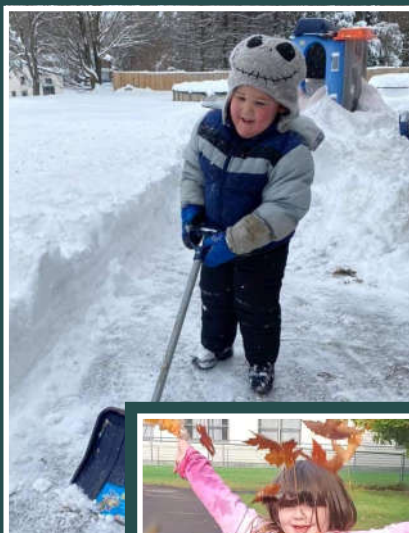
In Fall 2020, the program began to open some Head Start and Early Head Start centers as allowed by guidance and governance from various sources. Safety protocols, such as changes in the daily schedule and drop off and pick up procedures at centers, help keep our staff and families safe. All of our staff continue to work hard to provide the best program possible through these hard times.

We are currently offering 4 hour days for children enrolled in center-based programs. Centers that have been unable to open in person, are offering a home-based model based on our Early Head Start program. Families receiving virtual services receive education materials delivered by staff to help engage the family in our daily activities. For virtual families we use a variety of methods for contacting them and providing educational resources and family support.

Submitted by Crystal Hamm, Education/Disabilities Supervisor



(3- 5 years)



"The teachers and staff at Opportunities for Otsego Head Start are absolutely amazing and my children have learned so much. The environment is so safe and inviting. I am so thankful for this program!"  
- Ashley Mendez

## A Few Words From our Parents

*"Virtual visits have been great for our family. It gives my daughter a chance to still learn and explore during these hard times. She looks forward to Miss Maura calling and doing one on one activities. Virtual visits has been the best choice for our family. I would recommend it to any family looking for ways to learn and explore but without direct contact."*

*-Tiffany Mabie*

*"When raising a child, you try to give them as much stability and consistency as possible. Head Start was a huge part of that for us, with our daughter. Her father and I were going through a divorce and it was really nice for her to have somewhere to be her home away from home with so much love. She loved seeing her teachers every day and learning from and with them. The whole staff was like an extension of our family. We were sad when she was too old to go back but we look forward to sending our son when he is old enough. Thank you Head Start!!!"*

*- Rebekah Hopkins*

*"To me, Head Start was one of the most influential programs that my children attended. Both of my boys attended this program for 2 years. In those 2 years, they were met every morning with a smile by teachers who had grown to love them. This interaction with the teachers gave my boys the confidence and ability to learn through play, and absolutely gave them a head start in life. I am forever grateful for such a wonderful program in our area".*

*- Ashley Head*

*“Virtually this year has been challenging for all, but all the teachers try and make it as easy as possible for the kids. The excitement for in person is higher because they don’t see you as often and it’s great watching the kids actually be excited for school.”*

*-Donna Lutz*

*“Virtual learning has been great! Being able to watch the videos and do the projects along with the videos has been amazing! The children love being able to see the teachers do the same projects they are working on! “Side by side or miles apart, virtual learning makes us feel together at heart”.*

*– Nikki Utter*

*“ Head Start was a great experience for my family. They focus on bringing together the family with the child’s learning experience and development. They are skilled at seeing areas where a child with special needs will need early intervention for the years to come as well as offer resources to help with those needs. They are skilled in helping children develop positive social interaction, personal responsibility, helping others and using manners. They do all of this with well thought out lessons and play. They also give parents the opportunity to join in as a volunteer, provide a parent group to support the staff and help with planning and decision making. During our time with Head Start, I was able to serve as president of the group and helped with the planning of fundraising events and end of the year celebrations. I was proud of the work we accomplished both in and out of the classroom. The program was fundamental in getting my children ready for K-12 instruction. I will forever be grateful to the staff for their roll in my children’s learning and growth.”*

*– Wendy Budd*

# Frozen Yogurt Pops

This quick and easy treat will have everyone asking for more. Making your own frozen yogurt pops can be a fun way to teach children about healthy choices while satisfying their sweet tooth. Try a variety of fruits to encourage everyone to try new foods.

## Ingredients

- \* 12 oz plain yogurt
- \* 2 cups chopped fruit
- \* 1 tablespoon of honey (optional)
- \* Craft sticks or straws



## Directions

- \* Place all ingredients in a blender and blend until smooth or use a potato masher to blend them by hand.
- \* Divide the mixture into small paper cups or ice cube trays and cover with foil (use a cookie sheet as an easy way to move them to the freezer).
- \* Insert a craft stick or straw into the center of each pop and freeze 4-6 hours or until frozen.



Submitted by Amy Losee, Dental/Nutrition Specialist