

The Indiana Association for Infant and Toddler Mental Health is proud to nominate Darlene Kardatzke, M.D, as a Hero in the Fight. As one of only 6 board-certified developmental-behavioral pediatricians in Indiana, Darlene epitomizes a passion for infant-toddler mental health with her work with babies and families in the Division of Developmental Pediatrics at Riley Hospital for Children and Indiana University School of Medicine. As a founding Board member of the Association, she has played a major role in the association since its inception as well as in the success of a myriad of associated state initiatives. In countless ways, Darlene "gives a voice" to individual babies and their families as well as sounding a call to address the needs of babies across Indiana, making her truly deserving of recognition as a Hero in the Fight to prevent and treat mental illness.

In the late 1990's, Darlene participated in the original Infant Mental Health Development Team sponsored by the Indiana State Department of Health and First Steps through a SPRANS Grant, which culminated in several long-lasting supports to the mental health of families with young children in Indiana, including the creation of the current Indiana Association for Infant and Toddler Mental Health. Since that time, she has participated in the Indiana Department of Health sponsored Sunny Start project (Indiana's Early Childhood Comprehensive System Project), was appointed to the Interagency Coordinating Council on Infants and Toddlers, and participated in the Early Childhood Mental Health Regional Summit of the Ounce of Prevention Fund. She has nurtured the development of early childhood practitioners from many different disciplines to equip them to infuse infant mental health concepts and practice into their work with families with babies, toddlers, and preschoolers. Darlene has regularly presented at the annual conference on infant mental health of the association. Audiences for her highly regarded outreach trainings on early childhood mental health have included early intervention and child care providers, mental health practitioners, pediatric and family medicine residents and faculty, and members of the legal community such as judges. Topics on which she has taught are wide-ranging and include eating and sleeping challenges for young children in foster care, social emotional and behavioral screening, behavior problems of young children with cerebral palsy, feeding problems, early brain development and attachment, and challenges associated with dual diagnoses such as Down syndrome and autism.

Darlene's clinical practice in the Division of Developmental Pediatrics at Riley Hospital epitomizes cross-disciplinary collaboration on behalf of babies, toddlers, and their families. In this setting she has championed the need to provide mental health services to children with developmental disabilities and families with multiple needs, through her work in such programs as the Down Syndrome Clinic, Newborn Follow-up Clinic and the Outpatient Feeding Team. Darlene effortlessly infuses infant mental health concepts and practices into pediatric health care services, modeling truly integrated behavioral health care. Her vision of the pediatric provider-parent relationship as a scaffold for the parent-child attachment relationship is a perspective that has enriched the social emotional health of numerous families and the vision and activities of the Indiana Association for Infant and Toddler Mental Health.

In summary, Darlene is a tireless and powerful advocate for babies, toddlers and families in Indiana. As a writer, a teacher of the next generation of professionals, and as a direct provider of services to families and children, Darlene makes a difference every day in the fight to help those with mental illness in our state. We hope you will join us in honoring her as a hero in this fight.