>> SPEAKER: Okay, we're going to get started with our presentation, taking the wheel of early intervention, um, and information about the Wyoming Early Intervention Initiative for families and their children who are deaf or hard of hearing. We call it the WEII. I'm Sarah Fitzgerald, and I'm one of the coordinators of the Wyoming EHDI program, um, primarily focusing on the newborn side of things, screening, diagnosis, and entry into early intervention, and I'll let our other presenters introduce themselves.

>> SPEAKER: Hello. I'm Christie Fritz, and I am a teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing in Wyoming. I work for the Department of Education there as an outreach consultant currently, and I'm also part of the WEII team.

>> SPEAKER: Hi. I'm Cheryl Johnson, and I am contracted to the Marion Downs Center to facilitate this entire process for Wyoming, so, I'm here for support.

>> SPEAKER: So, we do have a lot of information to share, and we knew we couldn't get through everything, so, in the presentation uploaded on the website, there are additional slides with more information, if anyone is interested, or you can, of course, talk to us after the presentation. So, today, we're going to share with you about our roadtrip, um, and offer some strategies that may be useful to you, if you are on a similar journey within your jurisdiction. We started the WEII work a little more than three years ago, and there will be more on that timeline a little later in the presentation, but our initial key step was getting the right people on the bus, building a cohesive team of stakeholders from all of the entities around Wyoming that work with children who are deaf or hard of hearing and, then, as well, um, having facilitation and, um, so much more from the Marion Downs Center, to bring things together at the very beginning, to get things started and even continuing our implementation through today. So, I'll just briefly let you know about some of our core team, our pit crew. We're lucky enough to have quite a few people here today with us. We have some parents here from Hands & Voices, um, Wendy Hewitt and Kim Reimann.

(Off mic.)

>> SPEAKER: Yes. Sorry. We also have our part C coordinator from Wyoming here, Judy Jungle, and our Wyoming EHDI program audiologist, as well as the clinical pediatric audiologist, Callie Ellis here and, also, from the Marion Downs Center, we have Sandy Gabber. We have a few more people back home, um, our WEII plus coordinator who works through Hands & Voices, we have a teacher of the deaf, Betsy Tingstall and, then, um, Nancy, our former EHDI coordinator and, also, um, a consultant or liaison through the Marion Downs Center. We have some more people from the early intervention education program in Wyoming, which is where all of the part C EI services, as well as, um, part B services for 3 to 5 year olds are contracted from. Someone from the University of Wyoming, representative from the child development centers and, then, an additional person from EIEP. So, I just wanted to share about, um, just four factors that contributed to us getting started on this current project. We have HRSA funding that goes to support, um, some of the positions within Hands & Voices, as well as some of the EHDI team members. We have the Marion Downs Center, as mentioned, um, and, then, in addition, we're really fortunate to have Colorado as a neighbor. We've also been able to share resources with the Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind and the Colorado Home Intervention Program and, then, Wyoming has also been participating in the outcomes and developmental data assistance center for EHDI programs since September of 2020 and, then, along with that, we all know that, um, once kids are screened and diagnosed, what really matters is getting them into good, high-quality early intervention. I will hand things off to Christie at this point.

>> SPEAKER: Thank you. It was exciting to hear Wisconsin's presentation, because I kept saying, that's just like us, that's just like what we're trying to do. So, that was really neat to see, that they're building an early intervention program and that we're doing something similar. More the Wyoming way, but a lot of familiar components. So, I'm going to attempt to, um, explain, as much as we can in the limited time that we have and, then, we'll be able for questions afterwards, if any of you have additional questions. So, I don't think I need to arm-wrestle anybody in this room to, um, agree with me on this statement, that, um, we screen to intervene, right? This is the reason that we screen. We want to be able to identify what our little ones need and, just in general, early intervention is important for brain development, language development, minimizing developmental delays and just overall long-term success, because we know what we're doing now for them really impacts them for the rest of their lives. So, our WEII team, when we got together, we were like, so, what's so special about deaf kids? What's so unique about them and their needs in the time of early intervention? And we decided, well, there's this small window of neurological development, before those brain synapses stop, you know, connecting so well. They need direct access to language very young, because whatever foundation we're building with them when they're very young, just everything builds on top of that, and they don't have the same access as hearing kids to incidental learning. We need to get them the language with some direct instruction and important information, and whether it's signed or spoken language, they need it. They need it. So, as we were trying to determine how we were going to be building an early intervention program for our kids, I need to, kind of, step back for a second and say Wyoming really doesn't have a special program for our early intervention kids who have hearing loss, we just have a general early intervention program, nothing special for our little ones who are identified as deaf or hard of hearing. So, this is why we came together. We were like, all right, enough, we have got to do something about this early intervention piece. We have too many little ones falling through the cracks, showing up to preschool and kindergarten without skills, without language and, then, we're just playing this catch-up game, and I'm hearing it from the teachers of the deaf Ktwelve, you know, I'm getting these little ones out of the preschool, and they're just so behind. So, this is why we all met, to make this work, but we have to consider Wyoming. Wyoming, how many of you have ever been to Wyoming? Oh, more than I thought. Yay. Okay, so, it's, you know, it's vast, right? It's tenth in physical size, but not a lot of people. You know, we have 580,000-ish people in Wyoming. That's it. Just for reference, there's 310,000 people who live in the city of Cincinnati, and we have 580,000 in the whole state of Wyoming. We love it. This is why we live there, right, Wyoming peeps? Yeah, but it's a lot of area and, as far as outreach goes, um, you know, we don't have a School for the Deaf, you know, we have two outreach consultants for the state, I'm one of them and, so, we travel this vast state and try to do everything we can to help support, um, professionals who are working with our kiddos. Um, we don't have a lot of deaf and hard of hearing-specific professionals. You know, we have teachers of the deaf, but they're working in the school districts, we don't really have them in the early childhood center. Um, we have one program, we're lucky, in Cheyenne, where we have a teacher of the deaf who works with our littles, and that's one place, and the rest of them, they might be able to find teachers of the deaf who show up, um, working in districts and pull them for a little bit of time, but it's very few and far between. Um, our part C and part B, this is, kind of, a neat thing. We have regions. We have 14 regions and 40 childhood development centers within those regions, and that's how our littles with disabilities are served, including our little ones with hearing loss. They're in these centers with other children who have other disabilities. As far as qualifying for part C, any child with any hearing loss, unilateral, any degree, will qualify for part C services. The last consideration we needed to make for Wyoming is that change is difficult and, y'all, in Wyoming, change is difficult, right? It's just, we like our things to be the way they are and nobody to come in and tell us what to do and, so, we just always have to approach it through the Wyoming way. So, our team, we call ourselves the WEII, we came up with a goal, which is to promote collaborative efforts to increase Wyoming's capacity to provide quality early intervention services for children who are deaf or hard of hearing, birth to kindergarten, and their families, and we were looking for a systems change. We had one position that was working through Hands & Voices, um, per EHDI funding, and she was serving some families, maybe, 15 families prior to all of this and, so, she was, really, providing some services via Zoom with about 15 of our families. We said that's not going to work forever, like, this is only a handful of kids, we want a systems change, where we're going to be getting into those centers and providing supports to whoever's in there, working with our kids, so that they have the information they need to provide quality early intervention services from today and forever on. We just had to figure out how to do it. It was just real easy. Let me tell you about it. If I look back at the starting line, you know, we've been working on this since about the end of 2019 and, um, we're just going to go back and tell you a little bit, I'm going to have Cheryl comment a little bit on how we got started back then and, then, I will continue on.

>> SPEAKER: So, um, the comment that Sarah made early on about getting the right people on the bus is really essential, and what you have to do to get people together is, first, starting with identifying every stakeholder that may have a role in early education families and, so, we began with doing that, and we started with the leadership team and, then, for planning purposes, um, then, we brought all the stakeholders together and, fortunately, that was just before COVID, so we actually were able to meet, um, together and, then, everything moved to Zoom and online, but we had to start with an assessment, and I think the Wisconsin group also talked about the doing the needs assessment, but, this time, when we did our needs assessment, we had all of the players in Wyoming who might be involved through early identification, part C, specialists, and parents participate in that, and we used the JCIH, parents' assessment of those JCIH guidelines, and I think that was really helpful, because they're comprehensive, and we spent a lot of time on Zoom, doing a group self-evaluation, but it was from that data, then, that we were able to identify what the goals and priority needs were going to be for Wyoming and, so, you know, it's this process, and it takes time, but when, together, you're doing the assessment, together, you're identifying the gaps and, together, you're identifying the next steps, it keeps everybody engaged, and I think that's the big piece, is how do you keep all the partners engaged when they may have just a little part of their responsibilities around deaf and hard of hearing children, but Wyoming has managed to do that, and I think that really relates to the success of continuing to move that, um, program together. So, again, the joint committee assessment tool was really, really helpful and, then, our whole prioritization process to come up with the first year goals. Then we had core teams that met, were assigned to each of the goals that met continuously to implement the activities that were necessary and, really, from there, the group has continued to evolve, and we have core stakeholder team, as well as this, um, broader group as we extend out, and I think, you know, that was the essence, is that it takes time, you have to move slowly to build the relationships, to continue to make the progress that you want to make.

>> SPEAKER: Thank you, Cheryl. So, as Cheryl mentioned, we came up with goals. Our big WEII group met, and we said what are, we're taking the information from our, um, needs assessment and picking out our top five goals. There were a lot of needs, but we picked out the top five. So, we decided communication was important, and this means communicating with centers, communicating with parents, communicating with, um, providers, any kind of communication. Family-to-family support, how would we support our families? Progress monitoring, how are we going to track our little ones and see if this is even working and that they're getting what they need and that we're programming in the right way? That's where the Odyssey same in. That was mentioned earlier by Sarah. Professional and parent training, what kind of trainings did they need? This is a big one. We do a lot of trainings, a lot of information, and this could mean, you know, our websites or things that are already out there, webinars, or parent trainings that we have. Then hearing technology training. We found out in our needs assessment that there was a lack of knowledge about how technology works and if it's broken and, just even from my own professional experience, going into centers, you know, hearing aids that were just handed to me when I walked in, these have been broken for a week, those sorts of things were showing up, so, how can we address those? So, I just need to stop here before I tell you the rest of the story, because our BFFs from Colorado, um, they're so wonderful, we were working on a manual, and we happened to have, um, our, she used to be our read plus coordinator, she was also a CHIP provider in Colorado, they've got a home intervention program there that she works for, and they'd had this amazing manual, this guide, and we wanted it. We wanted it so badly, and we loved it, and we kept taking information from it and, so, there was several e-mails that went around, like, who's going to ask, how are we going to do it, do you think they're going to ask for chocolate, how are we going to get it, and we just asked, and they said yes and, so, they gave us the digital format of it, and we were able to adapt their information and make it, um, a combination of our Wyoming information, and we created what's called the WEII manual, and it's kind of like our book, our guide. It has wonderful information in it, and we share it with our resource providers, they've got one and, then, families also have one. So, as we, you know, we built this WEII team, and we had, in our many, many, many, many, many meetings that we had within our teams and building our goals, we made resources, and we made things on the website, and we, um, provided trainings and planned trainings and, then, we just said, okay, we want to go ask people to do this in these child development centers who are serving our kids and, so, we asked them to come onboard, and a lot of them said no, no, we're good, thanks, we don't want to come along, we're not going to go for your little journey and your ride, we're just going to keep doing what we're doing. So, we tried, um, and we got a few of them on, and we saw that it was working, and we were able to provide some supports to some of the child development centers, but we decided we needed to really get into all of the centers. There was 40 of them out there, and not all of them were serving our students, our little ones, because we don't have a huge population, but they were out there, and we didn't know about them, or we weren't able to get them some of the important services they needed. So, we had a plan. So, we worked with Judy. Where is Judy? Where is my friend, Judy? She's back there, hiding. Um, so, the Department of Health, um, in Wyoming is the, um, department that oversees, it's the agency that oversees our early childhood birth to 5, and we went to them, they're part of our team, and we talked to them, how could we ask you to ask your child development centers to connect with us on the WEII and provide them with these services? There was no teeth in it, right? We were just offering this free service, and they were just not, they were, change is hard. Change is hard. So, what we did is we asked them if they could put it in their contracts, Department of Health, um, contracts out with these child development centers to provide early intervention services and, so, we asked, well, could you put it in your contract every year, that if they have a child who's identified as deaf or hard of hearing, that they connect with the WEII and, then, we can work with them? And they said sure. We didn't even have to give them chocolate either. They said yes and, so, they put it in their contracts and, so, now, the child development centers, when they have a child who's identified as deaf or hard of hearing, there's a process, and there's a slide in here that shows the process of how that works, they connect right away with our coordinator and, then, we start helping them figure out what to do with this little one to get them quality intervention services. So, this is just a description of, um, oh, I think, oh, I'm sorry, let me go back for a second. We did name this new program where we're going into, we had our overarching WEII team, but we built this little program, the program that's going out to the centers and meeting with people on Zoom as the WEII plus, we titled it WEII plus. It was, like, the additional piece of our overall WEII initiative. It was this, the group that's going to really be helping provide these early intervention services. So, the WEII plus, under the umbrella of WEII, is a state-wide service delivery model provided through the Wyoming child development centers, and we're working to build capacity in them. They're already seeing our kids, just like Wisconsin said they've got early childhood providers who are serving those kids, we do too. Most of our littles with hearing loss are being served by speech-language pathologists, but some of those speech-language pathologists don't have the background in deaf and hard of hearing, so, we need to figure out how to get them up-to-speed. Um, we wanted to be able to do it in a coaching model. We're going to help them help the child and family, and our intended income was that the early intervention providers and families were supported, to make informed decisions, to give the child the opportunity for their highest potential of achievement. This is the part about the contracts. So, a piece of, um, this is, kind of, the inner workings. There's so many components to it, and I could stand up here for, probably, two hours and tell you everything about the WEII, so, I'm just telling you some of the most important things that we have. We have a WEII coordinator. The WEII coordinator is the paid position that is paid through Hands & Voices via the EHDI grant, or EHDI monies, and that is the person who connects with people out in the child development centers and, in those child development centers, we have identified facilitators. They have told us who their facilitators are, or we've worked with them to say, hey, we know you have this person who is working with our, um, children who are birth to 3 who are deaf or hard of hearing, can they be a facilitator? That's just their title, facilitator, with us and, usually, it's somebody within their center, a speech-language pathologist or, maybe, if we're lucky, a teacher of the deaf, um, working with those littles, and we support those facilitators. The coordinator meets with that person, she might go on visits with them via Zoom, because she actually lives in Colorado, she works for us, but she lives in Colorado, she's an SLP who has background in, um, working with children who are deaf or hard of hearing, and she supports the SLP up in teeny, tiny Wyoming, where there's 300 people living, but there happens to be a deaf child. She might Zoom in on those sessions, she'll provide them with information, meets with them one-on-one via Zoom, um, we meet monthly to check-in with everyone, we provide trainings. If a family is using sign, we will help them identify an ASL instructor who's competent and, then, we help guide that ASL instructor, and they're paid for through that child development center. If they need an LSL coach, we have someone on our team who can provide that LSL extra piece of coaching to the teams, and this is all at no charge, the pieces that we provide through the WEII are at no charge to the centers, and the facilitators are already working in the centers. Just like Wisconsin, those people are already working with our kids. We're just helping them understand how to work with them. So, a little bit under the hood here. Like I said, the WEII facilitators are identified in each region. At first, we thought it could be anybody, then our goal was to get it to be an SLP or a DOT, if we were lucky, or an audiologist, if we were even more lucky. We do an initial onboarding. We don't just take the Wyoming manual and say, here you go, have fun, go serve our kids. We have an onboarding, we train them. It's the Wyoming way to be in everybody's business and know everybody and, so, it's kind of nice. It's, like, a big family and a connection. We're using the Odyssey assessments. Have any of you been able to attend any of Allison's Odyssey trainings? They're excellent. We use her. You know, Odyssey, it's a list of assessments that help track our students, our facilitators who are working in the child development centers are doing them with the help of our coordinator, and it's giving us valuable information. We're just now getting this data, we've been doing it for two years, and we're just getting this information, and it's telling

us how our kids are doing, and it's powerful, and areas that we need to improve upon. Again, our WEII coordinator meets, um, to coach and mentor our facilitators. So, our coordinator doesn't go in and provide direct services, they help the facilitator, she helps the facilitator provide those services. So, this is a slide that just shows, in case any of you are interested, kind of, the process of when the child's IDed, identified as deaf or hard of hearing, birth to 2, what happens? And this is the process. It changed often. We kept saying, I don't know, who do they contact? Do they contact us first? I mean, this was many meetings, to try to decide how this process would work. Um, who connects with who? So, right now, now that we have it in the contract, um, they're contacting our WEII coordinator, and the ball's getting rolling, I'm saying, like, within days. We know about that child, services are getting out there. Some of the resources that we provide for the facilitators, um, we have scope and sequence with a fillable form that they'll fill out. They have a link, and they go in, after they meet with the family, and they say, you know, we hit this target, we talked about the child's audiogram, and this is how it went and, so, we're tracking that information. We have a padlet that's available to them, um, with information, I'll show you a picture of that. This is, in our facilitator manual that I showed you that we, um, that we copied from Colorado, that we took from Colorado and borrowed, um, it has all of this information, and these are all the areas that the facilitators are trained on. I won't read them, but they're in the power point for you. This is an example of our padlet. This is, um, specific to our facilitators, so, any information, for example, I had a, um, facilitator who called me the other day about, um, the audiogram, and we were talking about it, and I said, hey, there's resources on the padlet, if you go to the padlet, you'll find this. So, she did and pulled off some information, so, when she was meeting with that family, um, she could have that information. Families are huge in the WEII. We know that our families are the best teachers for their child, right? So, we want to support the facilitators in supporting and coaching the families, and that's our goal. This is a timeline overview of, um, our process. We didn't just do this in a day. I mean, it's taken us, we're on our fourth year, and we're still changing, and we're still, um, adding information and adding things. I can't tell you how many meetings I've been in, or group meetings where we say, oh, I think we might, do we need a process for that? Do we need to come up with some sort of outline for that? Oh, yeah, do we need to come up with a plan for that? Then it starts this whole other group, and we're building and constantly changing. Um, so, this just shows a roadmap of where we're at. You can see, in 2022 and 23, like I said, we're just getting our Odyssey data, and that's going to, probably, change some things for how we're providing services, and our goal is that we're going to take this data, and we're going to go to the governor, and we're going to say, can we please have an early intervention position in outreach? Because we just need help. There's only two outreach consultants for the whole state, and we would just love, love, love to have a boots on the ground outreach person, to really target that early intervention piece. Wish us luck. So, just a few of the challenges so far. Progress takes time, right? It's not always linear. Two steps forward, two steps back. We're pretty stable now, but getting and keeping stakeholders onboard can be tricky. People are busy, you know, um, but I think we've got a good core team now. I feel like we're a little family. Developing and maintaining a cohesive core team, the inner team, we're pretty solid there. Getting and keeping CDCs and EI providers onboard. Like I said, change and hard, and just teaching them, they just don't know, so, we just have to keep communicating. The Wyoming early intervention providers, they may only work with a deaf or hard of hearing child once every five years and, then, if you train a professional, you know, they may not stay and, by the time that next deaf child comes in, we're starting all over and, so, those are some of the challenges we're facing. Families understanding the importance and urgency of EI. It's so, you know, it's scary for families, when they have this child that's born deaf or hard of hearing and all of the things they need to take on just to be a parent, um, and, then, they have this on top of it. So, helping them understand the urgency and the importance of early intervention services and, then, of course, our desire to have boots on the ground position, which we're working on. The governor, I have a good feeling about the governor. I'm going to take him to dinner. So, this is our why. This is why we do what we do, to impact families. These are our little kiddos, some of our little kiddos in Wyoming that we just love, and we see them grow up and, then, they graduate and have babies and make us feel really old, but we love it. So, our road goes on forever, this is definitely not the end, we are still building. It is not perfect, I am telling you, but it is so much better than it was in 2019, and we're going to keep going. So, as Sarah said, there's some slides at the end, you'll see many, many slides at the end and our contact information for you. If you have questions for us, let us know. There's additional slides in there. I don't know how much time we have or if there's even time for questions, but, please, connect with us afterwards, if you have any questions, and thank you for listening to our presentation.

(Applause.)