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Horizon

SPRING 2026
EDITION

News and Resources for Head Start in the WEST

A Season of Belonging, Growth, and Collective Action

A message from our executive director, Edward Condon

Spring 2026 has arrived in the WEST with intensity—both in our physical environment and in the momentum building across Head Start. As a community, we warmly welcome our new Office of Head Start Director, Lizbeth Casco-White. We also encourage you to take a moment to read *Our Voice: A Shared Call to Action for the Future of Head Start*. At the same time, NHTSA is calling on all of us to advocate for adequate funding in Federal Fiscal Year 2027 to sustain the comprehensive services our programs provide, especially as operational costs continue to rise.

At the local level, spring marks the beginning of enrollment efforts for the upcoming program year. Programs across the region are working diligently to recruit and retain children and families, ensuring the early years are filled with opportunities for learning, growth, and healthy development. We continue to see strong partnerships forming within communities to make services more accessible to those who need them most—and we are proud to share and celebrate this important work.

In 2026, Head Start WEST organized our efforts into three focus areas: **Learning, Belonging, and Elevating**. This year, we are deepening our commitment to building a strong peer-to-peer community—one where you feel supported, connected, and valued in your profession.

Belonging to the Head Start community may come with your role, but actively participating in that community is a shared opportunity. We've expanded our network meetings to include Directors, Fiscal, Human Resources, and Communications staff. We've celebrated educators through Early Childhood STEM Week, highlighting joyful, hands-on learning. And for families, we've introduced financial literacy resources through our partnership with Know Yourself, Grow Your Wealth—available in English and Spanish, at no cost.

Belonging is the experience of being accepted and connected in ways that affirm who you are and what you share with others. As we continue this work together, we ask: ***What can Head Start WEST do to help you feel greater joy and connection in your profession?***

Meet Our First 1,000 Days! Conference Keynote - Mr. Stu Perry



Stuart "Mister Stu" Perry, LCSW, ASDCS, is a child therapist and professional speaker who has worked in children's mental health since 2011—and has spent his entire life working with kids in a wide range of roles and environments.

Known for his engaging and relatable style, Mister Stu helps adults better understand kids so kids and their caregivers can thrive. While he's new to Head Start WEST, he's not new to Head Start—and is excited to serve as the opening keynote for the June 2026 First 1,000 Days; Early Head Start Conference.

We sat down with Mister Stu to explore what he'll be bringing to this year's event.

Q: What will you be presenting at the conference?

I'll be sharing a keynote called Be the One: How One Trusted Adult Can Transform a Child's World (in the First 1,000 Days—and beyond).

At the heart of it is a simple idea: one consistent, trusted adult can change everything for a child. We'll look at what the research tells us—from places like Harvard and the CDC—but more importantly, what that actually looks like in real life. I'll walk through the five characteristics of a trusted adult, why consistency matters more than getting it "right, and how small, everyday moments of connection shape a child's brain, behavior, and long-term outcomes.

My goal is for people to leave thinking, "I can do this. I can be that person."

Q: What has shaped your view of early childhood?

More than anything, it's been working directly with kids and families and seeing how often behavior gets misunderstood.

Bad kids don't exist. But misunderstood kids do. And a lot of that misunderstanding comes from expecting children to function like miniature adults. One of the biggest shifts I try to help adults make is getting comfortable letting kids actually be kids again. That means play. That means movement. That means not rushing development.

When we understand how kids' brains develop—and how things like stress and trauma impact them—behavior starts to make a lot more sense. And when it makes sense, we can respond in a way that actually helps.

Q: You share a lot of resources on YouTube—what's your goal there?

My goal is simple: help more adults understand kids.

I use that space to break down research, challenge some of the myths we hear about children and behavior, and give people practical ways to respond differently. Because kids aren't miniature adults—and when we treat them like they are, we miss what they actually need. Whether someone is a teacher, a parent, or just someone who cares about kids, I want them to walk away with something that makes their next interaction with a child go just a little bit better.

That's how things start to change.

Visit Mr. Stu on YouTube



Event Spotlight

Executive Leadership Council & Workforce Summit

July 27-29, 2026, Denver, CO – Embassy Suites, Downtown Denver

Leading an organization in early education, human services, or community action has never been more complex. Whether in a community-based nonprofit, school system, public agency, or national organization, CEOs, Executive Directors, and senior leaders responsible for long-term sustainability are navigating increasing regulatory pressures and financial uncertainty.

We invite you to join fellow program leaders in Denver, Colorado this July for meaningful conversations and relationship-building with peers who understand the challenges you face. In consultation with RISE Partners LLC, we are committed to delivering an engaging and impactful experience.



"It was empowering to spend time with executives of agencies like ours. The discussions were powerful, the networking and connections so helpful in these times of uncertainty."

Steve Ly, CEO
E-Center, Yuba City, CA.



"This was an excellent gathering for program leaders delivering essential services to our community. Well done Head Start WEST!"

Dave Sanberg, CEO
Sunrise Children's Foundation, Las Vegas, NV.

2026 Upcoming Learning Opportunities

The Leadership Challenge

May 13-14, 2026

A powerful two-day leadership experience designed to help Head Start professionals at every level reset, recharge, and lead with impact through proven, real-world strategies.



The First 1,000 Days! Early Head Start Conference

June 8-11, 2026

A meaningful gathering for Early Head Start professionals to reflect, connect, and deepen their practice—centered on the power of relationships, patience, and trust in shaping strong foundations during a child's first 1,000 days.



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Early Childhood STEM Week 2026

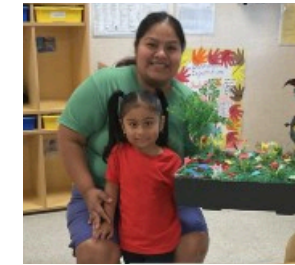
From curious questions in the classroom to discoveries in the garden and beyond – Early Childhood STEM Week 2026 was everything we hoped it would be and more. Thank you to every educator, family, home visitor, and community partner who showed up, leaned in, and reminded us all that STEM begins the moment a child asks "why?"



Sunrise Children's Foundation Nevada



Community Action Opportunities North Carolina



Community Action Partnership of Kern California

EC STEM Week now has a permanent home – the second week of March every year. Start dreaming, planning, and gathering your ideas. We cannot wait to do this again with you.

Also Special Thanks To:

- Sacramento Employment and Training Agency
- KidZCommunity
- Stanislaus County Office of Education
- North Bay Children's Center
- Head Start Association of New Mexico
- El Concilio California
- Pacific Clinics
- Orange County Head Start
- Kansas Head Start Association

The Head Start WEST Legacy Scholarship - Applications Open May 1, 2026

We believe in uplifting the individuals who make Head Start thrive. This scholarship exists to honor your work and the leadership of parent policy council members to help you pursue the education that moves your dreams forward. Keep an eye out for details in our weekly Heads Up! Newsletter.



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