



Growing Times April 2022

Promoting the maximum development of the whole child and adult through innovative, individualized and comprehensive brain-centered programs and services.

S.M.A.R.T. Steps: Providing Readiness

How do we best prepare our children for future success? For nearly 25 years, our Minnesota Learning Resource Center has addressed this question via the S.M.A.R.T. program (*Stimulating Maturity through Accelerated Readiness Training*), a movement-based program designed to enhance brain development in elementary-aged children.

With decades of proven results in academic settings, the S.M.A.R.T. team took the next logical step: In 2020, they launched S.M.A.R.T. Steps, a version of the program adapted for Family Child Care Providers working within their homes with newborns to five-year-olds.

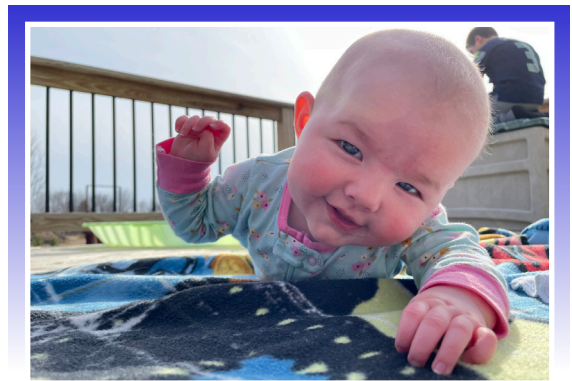
“This stage in a child’s development sets the foundation for a wide range of skills and learning capacities,” says Katie Hansen, Assistant Director of the program. “S.M.A.R.T. activities strengthen these foundations, like balance and coordination, eye movements, and auditory discrimination. Once these skills become automatic, a child is more equipped to sit still in a chair, read smoothly across a page, and hear differences in sounds - all essential for learning readiness and academic success.”

With input from the providers, S.M.A.R.T. activities have been specifically tailored to meet their needs. And the first 18 providers we’ve trained love it! The plan is to take the program statewide in the near future.

Discovering the Benefits of S.M.A.R.T.

Too often, babies are placed in swings, exersaucers, or on their backs in play gyms, limiting their ability to explore. “I went to school for elementary education and took child development courses,” says Alissa, a provider in New Ulm, Minnesota. “They were talking about this stuff, but never the full importance of it. Tummy time (letting children move and explore while lying on their belly) is way more important than I could have ever realized - developing neck muscles, core strength and body awareness. I didn’t know it could all be so beneficial!”

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Tummy time helps infants strengthen their muscles and develops body awareness.



Calming Your Mind: De-Stress with Brain Training Wednesday, April 20, 2022 | 6:00-7:00 pm

The Brain-Training Workshop Series returns on April 20! Join Kelly Pittman and learn how brain-training interventions work! Break free from the noise in your head and find your calm with Neurofeedback and Audio-Visual Entrainment. Attendees will have an opportunity to sign up for a free brain-training session of their choice. To register, to view the full workshop calendar, or for more information, please visit [ACTG.org/brain-training](https://actg.org/brain-training).

Says Darla, a S.M.A.R.T. Steps provider in Sleepy Eye, MN: "A lot of the things I knew in the back of my head, but I just wasn't putting the two together, like how it was actually helping the child with little things, like sitting or focusing. Knowing that this is really helping my kids in the long run of their lives, and how it can be useful even for me to do, it's just so positive!"

LaDonna, another provider from Sleepy Eye, says her kids love the activities and are now doing them every day. "We like to do stuff all the time - fine motor, gross motor, at least a taste of it every day. And it's easy for me because I'm not using a big curriculum," she says. "When we make our projects or read our books, we can get it all put together quickly, no problem."

S.M.A.R.T. Support

S.M.A.R.T. Steps is designed to give providers all the training and support they need, at times and in ways that work for them, as well as valuable knowledge that helps them provide high-quality care. The goal was to make S.M.A.R.T. Steps very easy to incorporate into any daycare environment. With lots of little ones running around, it needs to be. Providers don't always have the capacity to orchestrate activities because they are constantly being pulled in different directions. The key to making it work is an online learning management system, called *Thinkific*, that gives providers easy access to training and resources necessary to integrate the program into their day.

As with other S.M.A.R.T. programs, we provide mentoring services, something other programs don't always offer. LaDonna says she loves the mentor visits and the hands-on instruction she receives. "They give ideas and help us fine-tune movements - like the pencil roll, for example, to use their hips and to get some speed - I wouldn't have known those things, but the mentors watch closely to see if we're doing it correctly." Currently, these services are offered in person; as the program grows, they will be online to keep the program affordable and accessible.

Alissa and her kids like the visits too. "I have some kids that I kind of worry about," she says, "and Katie can tell me what to do with them. It's great watching the kids' eyes light up when they finally get something. We all benefit from it."

Making a Difference

According to our providers, their young charges have embraced S.M.A.R.T. Steps activities. "They do the majority of the activities without even being told," says Darla. "They'll hop in to wash their hands or do different balance moves



Belly crawling helps both sides of the body work together and understand how much force is needed to do things.

like flamingos. Today, we're working with scissors and cutting with two hands. We'll do courses with tunnels, balance beams, we do hopping and jumping and helicopters. They like doing fine motor, but their favorite is getting out the large muscle movements."

These activities are more than just play, they support the development of skills needed for school success. "I've seen the difference," says LaDonna. "They can sit and read a story forever, several books, they'll stay put. They don't mind doing that, because I think all the movement built those wires. What an easy way for all providers to help our kids do well in school," she says. "We can be more purposeful with things now and do activities with a reason. I know that it's going to be beneficial for them, but it's also changed me a little too. I guess you learn all the time."

Providers said that their children's behavior and social skills have improved as well since the activities were introduced. "The kids get along better," says Alissa. "The older ones attempt to help the younger ones learn things, like how to do the courses. They challenge themselves and each other - to go faster." Likewise, Darla says her kids' ability to work together has improved, especially when it comes to sharing.

For the S.M.A.R.T. Steps providers, that's what it's all about. "You think you may only have a child for a little while, but why not help that kid out?" says Darla. "Why wait until they get into school when they're so frustrated? The teachers have 20 other kids, and that poor kid is so frustrated and behind. We can help them out before."

Become a S.M.A.R.T. Steps Provider!

If you are a Family Child Care Provider, or know of one who may be interested in the S.M.A.R.T. Steps program, visit [ACTG.org/smartsteps](https://actg.org/smartsteps) and apply! Details on our next training cohort will be shared soon. For questions, contact us at smartsteps@actg.org.

2022 S.M.A.R.T. Workshops Dates Are Here!

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The 2022 Summer S.M.A.R.T. Workshop dates are here! Boost your students' learning readiness skills and prepare them to become life-long learners with our amazing S.M.A.R.T. program! Our experienced instructors will help you understand how to easily implement these brain-stimulating activities in your classroom. If you are an educator working with Pre-K - 3rd graders, this program is for YOU! [Register today at ACTG.org/workshops](https://actg.org/workshops).

S.M.A.R.T. Workshops

- June 21-23, 2022
- July 12-14, 2022
- October 25-27, 2022
- February 21-23, 2023

S.M.A.R.T. Pre-K Workshops

- June 28-30, 2022 (Kasson, MN)
- July 19-21, 2022
- August 2-4, 2022 (New Ulm, MN)
- November 1-3, 2022



Can't make a 3-day workshop? We are holding a 1-day **Bridging the Gap** workshop on Wednesday, September 28, 2022. All workshops will be held at A Chance To Grow in Minneapolis, MN unless otherwise noted. Register two weeks in advance and save \$25! Register today to secure your spot!

Advanced-Brain Wellness Program: AVE Brain Training

Are you stressed or do you find it hard to focus? Do you lie awake at night with your thoughts spinning? Are you lacking energy? If you said yes to any of these, then this program may be a perfect fit for you! Support your brain's health and take charge of your wellness with Audio-Visual Entrainment - a holistic brain-training program that uses lights and sounds to improve your focus, energy, and calm.

Train once or twice weekly, for 3-6 weeks, in our private training rooms with a custom program that fits your schedule! You'll be amazed at how you feel after a 30-minute session. Imagine how you'll feel after regular training tailored to your goals. It's one of the easiest and most relaxing ways to support a healthy brain and bring back some calm and focus into your life. Register today at [ACTG.org/advancedbrainwellness](https://actg.org/advancedbrainwellness).

ADVANCED-BRAIN WELLNESS PROGRAM // AVE BRAIN TRAINING //

ONLY \$199!
15% SAVINGS



**6 AVE SESSIONS
+ INTRODUCTION TO AVE
+ WEEKLY ASSESSMENTS
+ \$50 AVE UNIT CREDIT**

**BRING CALM AND FOCUS
INTO YOUR LIFE WITH AVE!**

Advanced-Brain Summer Intensives: Neurofeedback + AVE Brain Training

Skip the summer slide with our comprehensive summer brain-training program! Combining in-clinic neurofeedback sessions with in-home support via Audio-Visual Entrainment, this flexible program allows you to train your brain on your schedule! If you or a loved one struggles with emotional instability, poor focus or anxious thoughts, please visit [ACTG.org/brain-training](https://actg.org/brain-training) and complete a program inquiry form.

Includes 20 in-clinic neurofeedback sessions with assessments at each session, as well as your own AVE unit. For intensive pricing and questions, contact (612) 789-1236 or email neuro@actg.org.

Advanced-Brain Summer Intensives Neurofeedback + AVE Brain Training

**Improve emotional regulation and focus
for academic and personal empowerment!**

All Ages / All Summer / Visit [ACTG.org](https://actg.org) to Register

Neurofeedback Rental Units Available!

Train your brain from the comfort of your own home, on your own schedule!

Great for families with multiple members and safe for all ages!

Visit [ACTG.org/NeurofeedbackRentals](https://actg.org/NeurofeedbackRentals) or email neuro@actg.org to enroll.



Save the Date! Race for the Children Returns this Summer!

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A Chance To Grow is excited to announce we will be holding our **31st Running of the Race for the Children** event on Sunday, August 7, 2022 at Canterbury Park in Shakopee, MN. Attendees will receive a complimentary racing form and buffet lunch in the Longshots Party Area, and the event will feature fun activities for the whole family and great live racing! Proceeds support ACTG's programs and services. Registration is now open and sponsorship opportunities are available. To sign-up, or for more information, please visit [ACTG.org/RacefortheChildren!](https://ACTG.org/RacefortheChildren)



Get Your Eyes and Ears Checked!

A Chance To Grow's Vision and Audiology Clinics are here to support all of your vision and hearing needs. If you or a loved one is struggling to see or hear clearly, or you just need an annual check-up, contact us at (612) 789-1236 to schedule an exam. Our experienced clinicians provide comprehensive care plans to quickly identify and address any vision or auditory-related issue. Custom therapy programs are available as well! Visit ACTG.org/ClinicServices to learn more and to submit a scheduling request.



Contract School-Based Services - Our Clinicians Will Come To Your School!

A Chance To Grow contracts its speech and occupational therapists, optometrist and audiologist to schools across Minnesota for students with IEPs. Our team supports sensory processing needs, fine motor development, language skills and much more. We provide student-centered, academic-focused, and evidence-based therapies on-site by fully licensed clinicians. **We can also save your school money!** Our Third-Party Billing services help schools receive maximum reimbursement of Special Education costs. If you are a parent or an educator interested in bringing our Contract School-Based Services to your school, contact us by calling (612) 789-1236 or email contractops@actg.org.

Home-Based Services: Custom Care Plans

Need help caring for a loved one with special needs? We can help! ACTG's Home-Based Services provide Personal Care Assistants, Homemaking Services, and Respite Care to families in need. Demand for our high-quality home care has never been greater. Our experienced team will guide you through the process and provide a custom care plan tailored to your situation. Call us today at (612) 789-1236 to get started!

Now Hiring at Turnquist Child Enrichment Center - Join Our Team!

We are looking to add new members to our child care team! If you enjoy working with children in a fun environment, we encourage you to visit ACTG.org/employment and submit an application. Current openings include a Full-Time Lead Preschool Teacher and Full-Time Assistant Preschool Teacher. Both positions include a \$500 sign-on bonus! Apply today!

Will you support A Chance To Grow's programs and services?

Visit ACTG.org, click on the "Donate" tab on the homepage and fill out the form. Your contribution makes a difference in the lives of individuals with learning disabilities, developmental delays and brain injuries. All donations are tax-deductible.

View our newsletter online! Visit ACTG.org and subscribe!

Equal Employment Opportunity

A Chance To Grow provides equal employment opportunities to all employees and applicants.

Employment is based upon capabilities and qualifications without discrimination because of race, color, ancestry, religion, sex, sexual orientation, pregnancy, age, national origin, disability, gender identity, genetic information, service in the military or any other protected characteristic as established by law. This policy of Equal Employment Opportunity applies to all policies and procedures relating to recruitment & hiring, promotion, compensation, benefits, termination, layoff, recall, transfer, training and all other conditions of employment.



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