



Healthy Start

Okaloosa and
Walton Counties

Baby Business Vol. 10, 2026

Farewell, Ardelle! Congratulations on your retirement!

"And just like that, my 28-year journey with Healthy Start has come to a close. It's been an incredible privilege to spend my career promoting positive birth outcomes and supporting the health and well-being of mothers, fathers, and their babies. Serving as Executive Director, I've been fortunate to work alongside an amazing Board of Directors, dedicated staff, passionate home visiting providers, and strong community partners. Together, we've studied our communities, followed the data, identified opportunities for growth, and taken meaningful steps to improve outcomes for families.

I've always believed that healthy families are the foundation of thriving communities, and that belief has guided every step of my work. I'm proud of what we've accomplished together and grateful for the relationships, lessons, and impact along the way.

While this chapter is closing, my commitment to supporting families and advocating for stronger systems of care continues—just in new and different ways."



Meet the Team:

Welcome Emily!



Hello! I'm Emily Jennings, and I'm honored to serve as the Executive Director of the Healthy Start Coalition of Okaloosa and Walton Counties. As a lifelong resident of Okaloosa County, this community holds a special place in my heart, and I'm deeply committed to supporting families with the resources they need to thrive.

With more than 17 years of nonprofit experience, I'm excited to build on the strong foundation established here and to continue strengthening partnerships that advance our shared mission of healthy pregnancies, healthy babies, and thriving families.

I hold a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology with a minor in Social Work from the University of West Florida and am a Certified Association Executive (CAE).

Outside of work, I enjoy spending time outdoors with my family, especially on the water. I'm grateful to join such a dedicated team and look forward to working alongside our staff, partners, and community to make a meaningful and lasting impact.

Prepared and Proud: A T.E.A.M. Dad Testimony



Pictured above: T.E.A.M. Dad graduate, DT, with his wife and son

"I've really enjoyed being part of the T.E.A.M. Dad program. Darrin was awesome - always supportive and ready to answer any questions I had. I'm especially grateful to Executive Director, Ardelle, for being so sweet and caring, and for giving me the opportunity to join the program and meet other dads. I learned so much about what it means to be a good father and I feel much more prepared to support my child and family.

There are so many great resources available to help dads feel more informed, supported, and ready for fatherhood. I highly recommend T.E.A.M. Dad to any new or expecting fathers!"

-D.T., T.E.A.M. Dad graduate



Happy National Home Visiting Week!



Thank you to our Okaloosa County Healthy Start home visitors!!

Pictured above (left to right): Elsie Goss, Amy Miller, Haley Bryant, Kristen Porterfield, Natalie Eller, Ivelisse Valentine-Cabrera, and Kristen Griffin



Thank you to our Walton County Healthy Start home visitors!!

Pictured above (left to right): Jessica Craig, Kristy Armstrong, Peggy Gill, and Rosalia Nevins



Thank you to our T.E.A.M. Dad coach!! Pictured above: Darrin Miller with a T.E.A.M. Dad graduate

During National Home Visiting Week (April 20-24) we proudly recognized the incredible individuals who make our work possible - our Healthy Start home visitors and T.E.A.M. Dad coaches.

Our home visitors are the heart of Healthy Start, providing compassionate, high-quality support to families throughout Okaloosa and Walton Counties. Their dedication to mothers and infants makes a lasting impact every day.

We also celebrate our T.E.A.M. Dad coaches who empower and support fathers as they build confidence, strengthen relationships, and become active, involved parents.

The work we do would not be possible without this amazing team. Whether it's offering a listening ear, sharing resources, or celebrating milestones alongside families, their compassion and dedication do not go unnoticed. We are deeply grateful for the meaningful connections they build and the positive difference they make in the lives of the families we serve!

PJs for Safe Sleep



Pictured above (from left to right): Amanda Saffelle (Special Projects Coordinator), Abigail Baumann (Community Liaison), Ardelle Bush (Executive Director), Victoria Worlds (Assistant Director), Emily Jennings (Executive Director), and Morgan Bush (Coordinated Intake & Referral Specialist)

In recognition of National “Wear Your PJs to Work Day” on April 16, Healthy Start proudly participated in Cribs for Kids ***PJs for Safe Sleep Day*** to help raise awareness about infant safe sleep practices.

Staff members wore their pajamas to work as a fun and meaningful way to spark conversations about the importance of safe sleep and reducing the risk of sleep-related infant deaths. This initiative serves as a reminder that something as simple as creating a safe sleep environment can make a life-saving difference for infants.

Through this fun initiative, our office helped highlight the importance of the ABCs of safe sleep—babies should sleep **Alone, on their Back, and in a Crib.**

We are proud to join organizations across the country in supporting Cribs for Kids and their mission to prevent infant

sleep-related deaths. Together, we can help ensure that every baby has a safe place to sleep.



The World's Greatest Baby Shower was held on Tuesday, April 28th at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center, bringing together new and expecting parents along with their families for an evening of celebration and support. Healthy Start was proud to host this exciting event, which welcomed nearly 900 attendees! With more than 50 informative exhibits, numerous prizes, guest swag bags, and refreshments, the evening was lively and fun-filled. Our goal remains to connect families with valuable resources to help them and their babies succeed, while surrounding them with support, gifts, and congratulations - and this year's event did just that.



Pictured above (left to right): Don Tritz, Victoria Worlds, Darrin Miller, Abigail Baumann, Karla Rojas, Morgan Bush, Drisana Coons, Amanda Saffelle, and Emily Jennings

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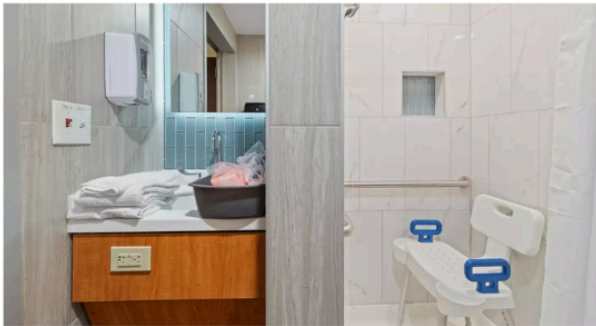
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WE KNOW WHAT YOU ACTUALLY NEED FROM A SHOWER

(Spoiler: It's not a koozie.)

**Visit booth 39 at the World's
Greatest Baby Shower and grab some
diapers on us!**

**April 28 | 5:30 - 8:00 PM | Destin-Fort
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If you would like a physical copy or are interested in being added to our next copy, please reach out to abigail@hsow.org.

Resource Directory

Healthy Start Coalition of Okaloosa & Walton Counties | 850-833-9284
amanda@hsow.org | <http://healthystartokawalton.org/>

Follow us on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn!



Healthy Start is a free program that provides education and care coordination to pregnant women and families with children under the age of three.

Healthy Start Coalition of Okaloosa and Walton Counties | 1130 Eglin Pkwy Unit 101 8508339284 | Shalimar, FL 32579 US

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