



The First Step Private Developmental Program

For Children with Special Needs



Welcome to First Step

First, a Personal Note...

Enrico, Loane, Alicia and Giovanni are infants and children who were diagnosed with developmental delays and special needs. Raising children is certainly tough and complicated, particularly for parents who weren't prepared for coping with different lifestyle and physical and mental difficulties it entails.

At First Step, we treat children with developmental delays and special needs. Under that umbrella definition, we address a broad spectrum of disorders, including: genetic syndromes, brain injuries, autism and communication disorders, motor delays and disorders, low muscle tone, epilepsy, severe eating disorders, and ADHD.

From years of experience working with families, we know that when parents obtain information, tools, training, and support, it has a significant impact on their children's development. It also helps improve their coping skills and the family dynamics. That's why part of the First Step therapeutic process is an extensive learning process with the parents, as a key to creating change in their children's development.

At First Step, our motto is that every child can realize his or her potential. After years of working with many children, our conclusion is that **even children with injuries, syndromes, and disorders can learn new functions, overcome their vulnerabilities, and create new learning pathways that lead to better performance.**





How does it work?

At First Step, we generate the correct environmental conditions for the child, and give him/her the appropriate professional training. Our team first focuses on identifying and exploring each child's potential and opportunities. Then, through a personally tailored work-process, we strengthen and develop them. During the therapeutic process, we look beyond the child's problem or syndrome.

Step by step, the child relearns all the processes that he skipped, the absence of which has created (or reinforced) the developmental disorder. As a result, the child is able to dramatically decrease the gap between his/her chronological age and developmental situation.

Learning processes via the First Step method are intensive, and involve the whole family. Dozens of families have gone through this process and outcomes clearly demonstrate their efforts to have been worthwhile.

Because change is possible.
For you as well.

Yours,

Shai Silberbusch,
Founder of the First Step Method





First Step's Therapeutic Approach

Each developmental stage leads to the next one, and provides its basis. For every developmental milestone in an infant's development, there is an important 'classroom', where many aspects of neuro-sensory motor development are internalized and embedded. Returning there, relearning those milestones and constantly practicing them encourages the brain and nervous system to improve performance skills. Thus, a solid foundation for the child's future learning capabilities is put in place.

Working with the child on the process of relearning every skipped development stage - the key to creating change

Relearning all the stages and instilling them in the brain is what enables behavioural change.

Take the example of a six-year old whose developmental level is appropriate for the age of five months. Instead of saying - 'At his chronological age, he should be walking, so we'll teach him how to walk'. First Step focuses on the child's actual developmental stage and builds from there. In this case, we begin working with skills appropriate for the developmental stage the child didn't go through, such as lying on his tummy, rolling over, or sitting up unassisted. Step-by-step we move ahead until his developmental age catches up with his chronological age. For the child, this means that suddenly, he receives information relating to the place where he is; he can incorporate it and, more importantly, learn to respond to it.

Another example illustrating the success of this approach is found in four-year old Jimmy who, before attending First Step, would only move forward by crawling on his bottom. During the process of work with him, the First Step team began by diagnosing and removing the environmental conditions that encouraged and sustained such movement. Following which, they began building the tools of successful movement from the beginning. First, by giving Jimmy the tools to crawl properly and then, guiding him to stand independently and lastly achieving the chronological age expectation of walking. Jimmy's story is one of many successful life changing cases that the First Step method has been able to address.

Even in cases of brain injury or different syndromes, learning ability exists

Even if born disabled, a child doesn't necessarily remain restricted for lifetime. When given the right stimuli, the brain responds and can reorganise the network of its connections. Even if a certain part is damaged, another one can take its place, and replace old cells with new ones. Through learning, the network of connections in the brain can be reorganised, more sophisticated development capabilities can be developed and results achieved. **The child learns how to stop using the incorrect behaviours she adopted because of her disorder (and her parents learn how to change them) and how to create new functions, appropriate for the stage where she is.**

The First Step programme has 7 key factors which contribute to its success.

1. Therapy is intensive.
2. Creation of an appropriate developmental environment is imperative.
3. The therapy must be integrated both in the cognitive-motoric functioning of the child and in the lifestyle, environment and approach of the family.
4. Each individual factor relating to the current situation must be addressed and if necessary deconstructed and reconstructed.
5. Parents are involved as partner therapists.
6. Communication between all those involved in the child's development must occur.
7. The First Step method encourages the integration and incorporation of other disciplines that can enhance the experience for the child.

Therapeutic intensiveness

The First Step method uses intensive processes.

The therapeutic process must first neutralise the flawed functioning patterns that prevent children from learning. Next, it must replace them - in a short time-frame - with new, high-quality learned patterns. That's why we work with the child and family intensively, with enhanced practice, repetition, and assimilation.

Creating a developmental environment

The developmental environment generates the right stimuli for correct neuro-sensory motor learning. It comprises the parents, siblings, the extended family, the child's friends, the nursery-school or school staff, and the home itself. Interacting with the correct learning environment is a vital and influential aspect of the child's development, and a central part of the First Step team's therapeutic thinking. Often the therapist does not approach the child directly in the therapy process, and instead works towards changing the parents' behaviour, or family habits at home. We analyse the child's daily life in the environment, in motor and behavioural terms, and guide towards changes.

Take the example of a child who still isn't walking and relies on his parents in order to move around within space. Here, we instruct those around him to stop being a dependable prop, and instead to become a dynamic prop, that forces him to cope with his balance system, to develop the right reflexes, and learn to rely on himself, not on 'the crutches' of those around him. His nuclear family and regular caregivers acquire different habits for use with the child, and the repetition and practice process becomes an integral part of daily actions and routine habits. When a child who is accustomed to being passive in the getting-dressed process - we guide parents so that a routine practice becomes a learning process carried out in the home environment, and is defined as a therapeutic goal.

Therapeutic Integration

The First Step therapeutic method combines all developmental elements: motor, sensory, behavioural, emotional, social, and familial. It works with everyone together, and each one separately, using a wider peripheral perception of all systems involved. Our therapy language and therapeutic axis is the neuro-sensory motor language: through it, we can access wider aspects of development.

Example: In one specific case, we identified that the source of a child's speech difficulties lay in the fact that he had not learnt how to create eye contact with the environment. When there are eye contact problems, children find it hard to learn by imitation, because imitation requires organised, correct eye contact. We worked with him to develop the skill of reaching for an object, one of the first skills that requires eye contact.

Once he had mastered this, we worked to develop skills allowing him to hold and eventually play with the object. The result achieved was apparent - a nervous system that is better organised, receptive to learning and able to support the on-going process of addressing his speech difficulties.

Deconstructing a function

The First Step method lets us identify and isolate each development factor individually, and to understand the cause and effect relationship.



Parents as significant partners in the therapeutic process

Parents are an integral part of the First Step therapeutic process. Their collaboration is essential for the success of the child's therapy. And so after the child is diagnosed, we also diagnose various interactions, such as how the parents play with the child, their response to the child's difficulties and degree of support. Observing the parents' activity with a child reveals a lot about the child's development dynamic. In the First Step method, parents are also therapeutic figures for the child, and so we train them on introducing therapeutic principles into everyday life and every shared activity with the child. An example of this aspect of work at First Step, was a child with the functional problem of being unable to hold food and eat it on her own. To impart those skills, we had to regress with her to the stage of eating with the hands. It transpired that for cultural reasons the parents did not let her eat using hands. Once they received an in-depth explanation why eating with the hands is an important developmental value, they changed their habits and behaviours, and created a different developmental environment for the child, through which she acquired the skills of holding and eating food independently.

Communication between all factors in the therapy

First Step's extended local team always aspires to professional coordinated communication with everyone involved in caring for the child: the nanny, the kindergarten and even the way the home is run. This work method enables an overall professional perception, and of course provides parents with the strong confidence that they have an address for questions and consultations, during the therapeutic process, and between therapy sessions. Every First Step therapeutic process has a Process Manager - the liaising person who sees the whole picture.

Multidisciplinary professional team

In addition to the therapeutic programme of First Step method experts, other professionals also form part of the extended team at First Step. They include physicians, neurologists, a psychologist, a physiotherapist, an occupational therapist and a speech therapist. At First Step we are strong believers in the group practice method, which provides professional added value and maximises the efficacy of therapy.



The Therapeutic process

1 Stage 1: Questionnaire and clarifying needs

The family receives the First Step questionnaire, fills it out and returns it, together with medical documents and a short recent video. After Shai Silberbusch and the First Step staff study the case, the decision is taken whether the First Step method can offer therapeutic help to the child and family.

2 Stage 2: The Integrative Diagnosis

We use the integrative diagnosis method at First Step. It's based on examination of the compatibility correlation between emotional and sensory development, skeletal structure, the muscle system, and the child's sensory interaction with the environment. The diagnostic emphasis is on the child's potential, not only the disorder or problem. Usually, the diagnostic process starts with questions about the pregnancy and birth, developmental problems, medical diagnosis and so on.

We relate to a broad spectrum of functions:

The child's responsiveness to structured stimuli.

The degree of correlation between the child's biological age and the development age/stage where he is.

Senso-Motor skills: raising the head while lying on his stomach, rolling from side to side, sitting without help, the transition to standing up and walking. At the same time we check the quality of performance, which helps us draw conclusions on the location of flaws and difficulties in the system.

Function of the sensory system: how responsive the child's sensory system is to different kinds of contact.

Muscle-tone diagnosis (high, low, or normative).

Function of the reflexes; matching them to chronological age.

The child's interaction with his/her parents, the therapist, and the environment.

A three-hour meeting with the family is part of the diagnosis, and is a significant part of the process.



3 Stage 3: Drawing up the Therapeutic Programme

Following the diagnostic process, the therapeutic team convenes and crystallizes a wide-ranging plan for therapy, which is then submitted for the family's approval.

4 Stage 4: Intensive Treatment Process

This stage can be performed in Tel Aviv, or in the family's country - up to the family's preference. The process takes from a week to a month, with 6 to 8 hours intensive daily work with the child and parents. Previous to the process, the family home becomes a therapeutic centre which includes all the equipment needed.

If the process is conducted in Tel Aviv, training takes place in several sites: the First Step centre, the family's rented apartment, the beach, playgrounds, a local park and so on. Throughout the day, the staff documents events, and feedback is given at the end of each day. Data is collected on a central server, and can be accessed and used in real-time by all staff-members.

5 Stage 5: Back to Routine - Equipped With a Toolbox

At the end of that initial intensive process, the family receives a work-plan and a full toolbox. The task ahead of them is to apply in routine life everything they learned in the intensive therapy stage. To continue the process, they must use the tools, knowledge and skills they acquired. The First Step team continues accompanying the family on an ongoing basis.

6 Stage 6: Implementing the Process at Home

After the initial intensive process, the therapist who accompanied the family comes to the family's home for a week, for further therapy. The family makes the needed adjustments for childcare in the home, in accordance with their lifestyle, and the therapist continues to guide the parents and other family members. In many cases the therapist meets other caregivers such as physiotherapists, ergotherapists, and occupational therapists, and works jointly in synchronicity with everyone involved.

7 Stage 7: Follow-Up Sessions and Training via Video Software

Once a week, the family participates in a training session by video conference. The therapist observes the interaction of the child and family, and performs any needed adjustments. Together, they ask questions, make assumptions, decisions and new weekly plans.

In Summary...

At the end of the process, the family returns to routine life, equipped with an effective toolbox that provides them with developed parental-therapeutic skills.

If they make the utmost use of the process, they'll become more and more independent in their ability to help the child, able to maximize her capabilities and lead a life that's better balanced alongside the disabilities.





The Options for Therapy

In Tel Aviv

Participating in the therapy process in Tel Aviv provides the optimum conditions - in the designated apartment and at the First Step centre that is specially equipped for the process. Throughout the process, Shai Silberbusch and First Step's team of experts oversee and guide the process as it unfolds. Supervised meetings with other children take place at the Centre in Tel Aviv, creating normative social interactions.

The family takes a time-out from routine life with its daily tasks, and can focus their attention on the intensive therapy process. The weather in Tel Aviv, sunny most of the year, means that work can go on outside - to the beach and in playgrounds - so the process is an enjoyable one.

Usually the process is conducted in English. If necessary, First Step's team of interpreters in various languages are available to help: they join the process and help the family.



Therapy in the family home or country of origin

If the family is unable to come to Tel Aviv, the process can be offered within the family home or at a First Step centre in Europe.



Results

At First Step, we can promise you one thing: a process. A professional, qualified, meaningful, family process. We know from experience that hard work, faith in your child and yourself, internalizing the therapeutic tools you acquire, persevering and applying them in your daily life will bring results, progress, and improvement.

The People behind First Step



Shai Silberbusch

Shai is the man behind the First Step method; he created the method and applies it. He is an expert in infant and child development, and he is a senior teacher of the Feldenkrais Method. Shai is renowned in the field of child development, and is an accurate diagnostician with powerful intuition. A veteran consultant, he appeared regularly on a panel of child experts in an Israeli morning TV programme.

Over his 25 year-career, Shai has diagnosed and successfully treated hundreds of children with special needs and their families. He founded and directs the First Step College, which trains hundreds of infant-development therapists.

Shai heads the centre's team of experts, and his involvement is reflected directly and indirectly in each diagnostic and therapeutic process. He is the professional manager of the First Step Centre which works with babies and children from birth. Every month, over 400 infants attend the centre.

Shai believes (and proves it in his work), that children with special needs can advance, develop and realize their potential, even if it is not visible. To do so, it's essential that their parents and close environment better understand their needs and know how to communicate with them. The tools that the families receive in the therapeutic process at First Step help them, first of all to feel better about themselves and no less importantly, to get along better with the environment.

Shai's vision is that every family in need of help can experience a therapeutic process using the First Step method - and with its help - to achieve change.

Shai speaks five languages fluently - English, German, Italian, Portuguese, and Hebrew.



Ornit Silberbusch

Ornit Silberbusch is the director of First Step's international operations. She has a degree in communications and business administration, and substantial experience in marketing and management. After a career of more than a decade in global technological marketing,

Ornit decided to devote herself to something she believes in - helping children with special needs and their families. Ornit now manages the business relationships with First Step's partners and customers. She is responsible for running the therapy programme worldwide and managing the company's customer-service setup. Ornit and Shai are the parents of three children.

The Senior Staff

Working together with Shai is a team of senior therapists, who are all graduates of the First Step College and are qualified experts in working in the First Step method. They provide intensive therapy with families across the world, and teach the First Step method at the college in Israel. The team of therapists speak English, French, Russian, and Hebrew.



Francesca Seegy Bohner

Pharmacist and mother of two children, Francesca is the First Step representative in Switzerland and Italy.

She discovered the First-Step Method in 2009 and successfully used it with her own children. Her youngest son had epilepsy and has a developmental delay due to inborn hypothyroidism. Her experiences with this method were so convincing that she decided to become a First Step instructor and successfully completed the professional training course. From the beginning Francesca shared with other parents her success using the First Step method. The cumulative success of all the cases she witnessed, allowed her to present this method to a variety of special children organizations, including associations for orphan diseases, and more. She represents First Step because she is convinced of the beauty of this method for a better life of families with children with different needs.

Francesca established the First Step Center in Kilchberg (Zurich, Switzerland) where she offers workshops and private sessions for babies, focusing on the preventive aspects in early childhood development.



Giovanni

Born October 2010, in Milan, Italy



Giovanni was born with Wolf-Hirschhorn syndrome, which presented in Giovanni as extensive developmental and

language delays. When we first met him at the age of 2 and a half, he didn't crawl or walk, he only shuffled on his bottom, and spoke very few words. He ate only soft food, and in very small amounts. Following several intensive processes, Giovanni started crawling, then walking, and today he is running on his own. He eats solid food, and in large amounts, speaks fluently, communicates very well, and attends nursery-school with children of his age - and functions like a regular kid.

"When we met First Step, our little boy was 2 and a half years old, hypotonic and not even crawling. We put our trust in Shai and the First Step people, their suggestions, and their methods. In May 2012, we went to Israel for the first time - and by September 2012 GioGio started walking. Now Giovanni is 4, and almost running. First Step was a life-changing experience for him - and for us as parents too."

Camilla and Lelio Prandi

Alicia

Born May 2007, in Lausanne, Switzerland



Alicia was born with Sturge-Weber syndrome - which appears in the central nervous system, a facial birthmark, and partial deafness.

Alicia was hospitalised at a very young age, and underwent several surgical procedures. Because of her symptoms and prolonged stays in hospital, Alicia had various delays - development, motoric, communication, and language. After two intensive processes, at age three Alicia started walking without assistance for the first time. Today she is an independent little girl who talks, writes and attends a regular school twice a week.

"Until we got to know First Step, all the therapists told us what Alicia was unable to do. At First Step, we heard what she can do, and we received tools and training for working with her at home, as well. It was the central change that took us to these wonderful results..."

Bouchra and Ibrahim Murseli

Emma

Born August 2009, in Lausanne, Switzerland



Emma was born with cerebral palsy. When we first met Emma she was three, and hardly used her arms and legs. A few months later, she was able - for the first time - to crawl forward on her tummy and to roll over from her back to her tummy, and from her tummy to her back. Today she is using her arms and legs much more, she feeds herself, and holds a toy or pencil.

"First Step was able to give us the support, tools and knowledge that we needed to get Emma over a huge hump in her development. Just about a year ago, Emma had little head control and stability in her trunk and we had to do everything for her. She is now rolling over, can commander-crawl, and is using her hands with much more precision. She is learning her independence which is changing her and our lives."

Maggie and Guillaume Goudy

Mila

Born August 2007, in Lugano, Switzerland



Mila was born with the rare 'Flat Brain' syndrome. At age two and a half, she had an extensive developmental delay, did not talk, just emitted monotonous sounds and expressed herself in basic ways, like laughter and crying. She was sensitive

to contact, voices, and odours, was artificially fed through a PEG tube, and for most of the day sat without moving. After two weeks of an intensive process Mila started crawling on her belly and today she walks with support and communicates better with her environment.

"It was and still is a fundamental experience for Mila's development. Two years ago Mila did not move from a sitting position, now she walks with the support of a hand. It was a difficult and long journey, which is not yet completed. The First Step method has led us and allowed us to get where we are now".

Anna Sarnelli and Dario Bonetti

Enrico

Born June 2006 , in Zurich, Switzerland



Throughout Enrico's first year of life, his parents felt that something was not in order with his development. Medical tests showed that all

the relevant parameters for development were good. At eighteen months, he was diagnosed with epilepsy. When we met Enrico at the age of three, his levels of development - communicative, language, and sensory-motor - were quite low. He had substantial difficulty in adapting to life and basic functions, as well as extensive behavioural difficulties.

We embarked on a therapeutic process that lasted for three years - and today Enrico has closed the gaps with his peers, and attends a regular school.

*"Enrico and we as parents went through an incredible process during the last three years of therapy with Shai and his team. The change in our life and the progress of Enrico's development has been enormous. From a 3 years old child who was not talking and motorically insecure, we have a very social and talkative young school boy!
To us this is a gift for life."*

Francesca and Thomas Bohner

Loane

Born August 2005, in Lausanne, Switzerland



Loane was born with a rare genetic syndrome - Complex V deficiency mitochondrial disease. At the

age of 5 and a half, she couldn't walk and didn't talk, except the word "no". She sat in the W-position, crawled using six-points, or propelled herself on her bottom. Today, after a number of developmental processes, Loane is walking almost freely. Even when she falls down she knows how to get up on her own, she plays with other children, understands everything, is able to explain herself - and her progress surprises the doctors and teachers at school.

"Before this therapy, Loane was as if in a shell. In Tel Aviv the shell was broken and Loane became open to the world around her - she is cheerful and happy with life. That was not the case during her first years of life".

Sandra and Christophe Corpataux



"A journey of a thousand miles
begins with a single step"

Confucius



www.firststepmethod.com

The First Step Centres:

Tel Aviv 5 ArieH Dissentshik St, 69353 Israel Tel: +972-3-6487253 Fax: +972-3-6441454 info@firststepmethod.com

Zurich 4 Alte Landstrasse St, 8802 Kilchberg Tel: +41-79-2403029 francesca@firststepmethod.com