

Loud and Clear



Shaking
Things Up
(P2)

44 Years of
Compassionate Service
(P3)

"Kiss Your
Brain!"
(P4)

The Future of
Deaf Ed
(P6)

Up Next @ St. Joe's,
Support Us
(P8)



Fridays With Miss Jen

A look inside how crafts, activities, and experiments help Indiana primary school students to build the skills they'll need to thrive beyond St. Joseph services.
(Story continues on p. 4)

Listen.
Speak.
Support.

Shaking Things Up

Baby Rattle Initiative Grows Across Indiana

In Indiana, Newborn Outreach Coordinator Cara Prieshoff is at the helm of our statewide efforts to expand access to quality early intervention services.

Funded by the Early Years Initiative at Early Learning Indiana, St. Joseph's rattle outreach initiative is a key component of the Hear it Begins program. "Our goal is to reduce the time between newborn screenings, diagnosis, and intervention for our youngest Hoosiers," Prieshoff said. She has connected with hospitals and audiologist offices across Indiana, delivering baby rattles and information cards about St. Joseph's Listening and Spoken Language services. Hospital and audiologist partners then distribute the package to families if their infant is referred for further testing after their initial newborn hearing screening. "Families are gaining immediate access to resources, support, and intervention options," said Prieshoff.



Hundreds of baby rattle packages have been distributed across Indiana.

Since the initiative's launch in November 2025, more than 930 rattles have been delivered to 20 hospitals and 5 audiologists. In addition to reaching counties in every corner of Indiana, the rattle initiative has evolved since its launch to reach Hoosiers across language barriers. After receiving feedback from hospital administrators, Prieshoff created translated versions of the information cards in both Spanish and Haitian Creole, further expanding the accessibility of the initiative.



As a new fiscal year begins for St. Joseph, Prieshoff is ready to take the initiative into its next phase, focusing on creating partnerships with more audiologists and continuing to nurture existing relationships. "This has been such a fulfilling experience," Prieshoff said. "We know every day counts for these babies, so helping families sooner in their hearing loss journey has been so impactful and rewarding."

44 Years of Compassionate Service

Barb Meyers Honored with Annual Service Award

While many things have changed since 1982, one thing has remained a constant: Barb Meyers is ready to greet you with a smile and a joke.

In April 2026, Barb Meyers was honored with the Mary Boucher Jones Compassionate Service Award. Named in honor of late LSL therapist Mary Boucher Jones, the award is presented each year to a St. Joseph staff member or partner provider that exemplifies Mary's dedicated and compassionate service to children with hearing loss. Meyers, after being nominated by peers and families in our community, is the first recipient of the award after its dedication in 2025.



Meyers and Mariana Barquet (left), recipients of our 2026 service awards.

Meyers has had an immeasurable impact on St. Joseph. After beginning her tenure as a preschool teacher, she transitioned out of the classroom in 2009 to pilot the iHear teletherapy program, focusing on providing Early Intervention services to children both in-person and virtually. Meyers also serves as a Professional Learning Coordinator, working alongside Indiana counterpart Kristin Schaaf to provide tools and resources that help families support their child's LSL development at home.

Over 44 dedicated years, Barb Meyers has created an incredible legacy of service that will impact our staff and community for decades to come. She's served families in China, Turkey, Vietnam, and across the United States. Her sessions, while focused on helping each child develop their Listening and Spoken Language skills, are rooted in compassion and humor every step of the way. During her acceptance speech at St. Joseph's annual Sound of Speed fundraiser, Meyers said, "When alumni visit and ask, 'Ms. Barb! Are you still at St. Joe's?' I smile and respond, 'Yes I am, and there's nowhere else I'd rather be!'"

“Kiss Your Brain!”

A Look Inside St. Joseph’s Primary School Classroom

There is never a dull moment inside our Indianapolis preschool and primary school, but Friday afternoons bring a special energy into Jennifer Graff’s classroom.

All seven students in our combined kindergarten-first grade class will transition into their local school programs for the upcoming year. Primary school teacher Jennifer Graff, teaching assistant Tania Rivera, and our team of school-age LSL providers spend the year helping them develop essential communication and academic skills. Each week of language and cognition building culminates with crafts, activities, and free-flowing conversations in the form of Fun Fridays- proof that just about anything can become a language lesson.

After 18 years at St. Joseph, Graff knows that the increased expectations and decreased individualized support of a mainstream school make this transition a pivotal time for her students. “I try to run my class like a typical kindergarten class, because that’s where they are heading,” she says. Students will need to build strong listening, language, and self-advocacy skills to thrive alongside their typically hearing peers.



During a week centered around the life cycle of a chicken, students take a peek inside an ostrich egg, courtesy of Tania Rivera and the Indianapolis Zoo. Conversations ensue about how the egg feels and the patterns visible inside.

Fun Fridays are more than an entertaining way to round out the week. They’re a tool to help students retain the information they’ve studied and expand their observational and incidental learning abilities. These are things that typical children pick up naturally, Graff says, so helping our students develop these skills is of upmost importance. Each week, centered around a different theme, begins with building foundational context about the chosen topic.

Weekly themes range from weather patterns to habitats and ecosystems around the world. Throughout the week, the class reads a book about their topic, revisiting and building up their background knowledge through structured conversations each day. Students even learn a thing or two that an adult may not know! One week, Graff and Rivera- a former zookeeper at the Indianapolis Zoo- taught their class about oviparous animals, a classification for all animals that lay eggs.



Jennifer Graff helps a student through a hands-on activity demonstrating how bees support the pollination process while collecting nectar to make honey.

By Friday afternoon, students are ready for a challenge. Graff opens each Fun Friday by asking her students to retell the story they've been learning each week. Together, they walk through each step of the topic they've been reviewing. When a student answers a difficult question correctly, Graff invites them to celebrate by cheerfully calling, "Kiss your brain!" From there, Fun Friday can begin in earnest.

Whether it's a craft, snack, or hands-on activity, each Fun Friday experience is designed to help cement the week's lessons while encouraging students' incidental learning skills. During a particularly exciting week leading up to St. Patrick's Day, students helped to create a trap for the leprechaun that's been causing chaos in their classroom. During the activity, Graff asked questions designed to bolster conversation: "How would a ladder help to trap the leprechaun? Why would gold coins lure him in?" Through fun and games, Graff is performing the craftiest trick of all- teaching her students to observe and analyze the world around them.

Though Fun Fridays are always, as advertised, lots of fun, it's never just about ending the week on a high note. Graff hopes that these activities help her class develop curiosity about the world around them and the ability to ask difficult questions. While she's sad to see these students depart for their new schools, Graff knows that they'll be kissing their brains often- and that St. Joseph will be there to continue providing support along their journey.

The Future of Deaf Ed

Organization-Wide Efforts to Solve the Teacher Shortage

The deaf education field is not immune to the national teacher shortage. According to the OPTION Annual Survey released in the fall of 2025, 41 Teacher of the Deaf openings existed across 26 OPTION Schools member programs. An additional 25 Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) positions were open, making for an average of 2.5 unfilled positions per OPTION program. Teacher and provider shortages place a strain on existing staff and limit the resources available to children with hearing loss and their families.

St. Joseph is an active participant in solving the teacher shortage issue. Chief Program Officer Lindy Powell currently serves as chair of the OPTION Teacher Shortage Committee, working with leaders from across the country to conduct an annual survey of open positions, facilitate national focus group sessions, and host an annual virtual career fair for OPTION member programs. Additionally, St. Joseph's own teacher retention rates are consistently higher than national averages. Our presence at national conferences, innovative programs and initiatives, and top quality service delivery make St. Joseph an exciting destination for deaf educators.



Powell and Director of LSL Advancement Bailey Clay (left) at the OPTION Annual Meeting, April 2026.



What is OPTION?

OPTION Schools Inc. is a non-profit organization committed to sharing resources and support within a nationwide network of LSL education programs. St. Joseph, a founding member program, has been an OPTION School since 1981. In addition to hosting annual meetings and webinars, OPTION operates a digital resource library and legislative advocacy toolkit that is accessible to all member programs.

St. Joe's At School

St. Joseph staff are students, graduates, and faculty members at universities across the country.



Left to right: **Jennifer Bragg**, Preschool Teacher- MA in Deaf Education, Fontbonne University, 2025
Tia Knox-Dawkins, Preschool Teacher- MEd in Deaf Education, Utah State University, current student
Brooke Loudon, Preschool Teacher- MEd in Deaf Education, Utah State University, 2025
Sarah Mills, Preschool Teacher- MA in Deaf Education, Butler University, beginning fall 2026
Audrey Nemeth, MO Campus Coordinator- Lecturer, Washington University in St. Louis
Tammi Smith, Preschool Teacher- D/HH Licensure Certificate, Indiana State University, current student
Christina Turner, Early Intervention Specialist- Lecturer, Ball State University

Another way St. Joseph is combating the teacher shortage is through diverse relationships with universities across the country. Each year, we welcome undergraduate students to complete their practicum placements and student teaching assignments. Additionally, St. Joseph staff in both Missouri and Indiana are present in university classrooms as students and faculty members, sharing their practical experiences with others seeking advanced degrees while bringing fresh perspectives and updated research back into our programs. St. Joseph's presence at universities across the country help both staff and leadership to foster strong relationships with future teachers and SLPs while remaining at the forefront of a competitive job market.

St. Joseph's connections at the university level will continue to grow as Butler University welcomes the first cohort into its Masters in Deaf Education program for the fall 2026 semester. Students will gain field experience through externships and practicum placements across St. Joseph programs. "This collaboration creates rich opportunities for students to learn alongside experienced professionals while applying evidence-based practice in real-world settings," said program director Dr. Jenna Voss. "Partnerships like this ensure that future Teachers of the Deaf are prepared to serve children and families with confidence, compassion, and competence."

Up Next @ St. Joe's

**Join us for an all-day music
marathon with brand-new acts
and watch party opportunities
in St. Louis and Indianapolis!**

Learn more at
sjhearingspeech.org/club-cochlea



Support Us



We are proud to have a strong community of donors and partners who help to make our Listening and Spoken Language services available for all children and families in need.

Please consider making a gift to help fund our classrooms, Early Intervention, Outreach programs, and other services for children with hearing loss and their families.



Make your donation here