PROJECT ELLA

Early Language and Literacy for All

How a century-old nonprofit is rethinking early language, access, and opportunity

CLEVELAND Hearing & Speech CENTER



Caregivers and toddlers play and practice language together in the Parent-Toddler Room.

What if providing excellent care isn't enough?

For more than a century, Cleveland Hearing & Speech Center has helped people communicate. That history led us to ask: What if the children who could benefit most from our expertise never make it through our doors? What if the barriers are financial, geographic or systemic? Project ELLA is our answer: a redesigned system that removes those barriers early, when it can change a family's trajectory for generations.

MORE THAN A PROGRAM: A SYSTEM

1. Science informs outreach
2. Outreach identifies need
3. Funding removes financial barriers
4. Location removes geographic barriers
5. Clinical care changes outcomes
6. Data tells us where to go next

Starting with serve and return

A baby babbles and a caregiver responds. A toddler points and someone names what they see. These back-and-forth exchanges build the developing brain and lay the foundation for language, literacy and school readiness.

Removing the cost barrier

Deductibles and copays can turn a referral into a financial decision, and the years when language grows fastest can't be given back. Philanthropic and grant funding covers out-of-pocket costs for eligible families.

Making impact visible

Sound Insights, our data visualization platform, shows who we reach, where families live, where gaps remain and what outcomes our investments produce. Data shouldn't only tell us what we did. It should tell us what to do next.

Meeting families where they are

Our speech-language pathologists partner with outreach specialists in libraries, childcare centers and other trusted spaces. They coach caregivers, identify children who may be falling behind and build a bridge to professional care.

Geography is access, too

After decades in University Circle, we moved our headquarters to Cleveland's Midtown neighborhood, closer to the communities ELLA was designed to reach. We left behind what worked for us to build what works better for families.

Why it matters

A child who starts kindergarten struggling with language starts behind, and that gap can compound through literacy, graduation and employment. No single program solves intergenerational poverty. Early language is one place we can intervene.

ELLA by the numbers

Sound Insights, 2022 to 2026

96% of clients meeting or progressing on goals

897 unique clients served

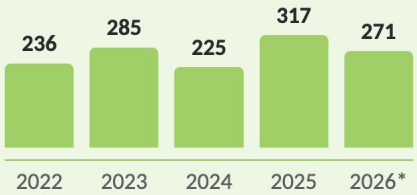
8,218 hours of clinical care

443 children screened in the community

290 outreach events with 44 partners

4,639 caregivers, children and neighbors reached at events

Clients by year



*2026 year to date

We're not trying to help children escape poverty after it has shaped their lives. We're intervening at the moment they are first learning how to shape their own.

Cleveland Hearing & Speech Center
www.chsc.org