ERIKSON
PREPARED
PREPARED
TO LEAD
Erikson Institute graduates work wherever you find children and families.

Our students come to us with a range of different life experiences and interests. And as graduates, they pursue career paths that reflect the diversity of their backgrounds as well as the preparation they receive.

From social workers to child development professionals, classroom teachers to child life specialists, Erikson graduates find a professional niche, making an impact on the lives of children and families everywhere.

In the following pages, you’ll find the stories of some of our alumni who have gone on to work in settings and roles that represent the wealth of opportunities available to those with an Erikson degree.

*Based on our most recent triennial survey of alumni.
Early childhood education is her passion—and she leads on a national level.

Carol Brunson Day grew up in Chicago, where her mother taught kindergarten and first grade. In helping her mother prepare her classroom, Day developed a love for children and decided she wanted to work with them.

Day became one of Erikson’s earliest master’s students, joining a group of individuals who, like her, had a passion for working with young children. As a student, she experienced what she calls “the most exciting year of my professional preparation.”

“We focused on where the child is developmentally, who the child is, and what the family is like,” she says. “We learned that it wasn’t about teachers feeding information to children, but about children actively engaged in constructing their world. That is still, to this day, my approach to understanding teaching as a creative act.”

Since her time at Erikson, Day has devoted herself to improving the lives of young children, their families, and the professionals who serve them. She recently completed a four-year term as board president of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, leading an organization that serves 70,000 early childhood professionals. She has also served as chief executive officer of the National Black Child Development Institute and as a faculty member at Pacific Oaks College.

“Teachers of young children are key to children’s well-being,” she says. “When teachers are armed with the right information, and when they understand that institutional policy and practice really has to change almost constantly in order to improve the settings where children are learning and living, then they can truly teach with integrity.”

Carol Brunson Day
DEGREE
MEd in Early Childhood Development
OCCUPATION
Consultant and Past Board President, National Association for the Education of Young Children
ON ERIKSON
“I was fortunate to find Erikson Institute. I have always felt greatly rewarded by the experience. But more than the experience, Erikson has been a critical support for me all these years.”
Tracy Vega

DEGREE
Master of Social Work

OCCUPATION
Child Welfare Social Worker, Marin County Children and Family Services, California

ON ERIKSON
“There isn’t any other graduate social work program like this. Erikson takes working with families very seriously. They don’t just let anyone out in the field. They want you to be as prepared as possible. You’re impacting people’s lives, and Erikson understands that.”

Her personal story and Erikson preparation help her connect with families as a social worker.

After working for a youth program in some of Chicago’s most ethnically and socio-economically diverse communities, Tracy Vega knew she wanted to work with children and families, but she felt like she lacked the skills and knowledge to make a greater impact.

She was drawn to Erikson’s Master of Social Work program because of the unique way its social work curriculum is infused with a deep understanding of child development and quickly learned that enrolling was the right decision for her.

The coursework and field work were intense, but she found a community of faculty, staff, and other students who supported one another through the entire experience. During her two years in the program, she gained an understanding about how early experiences impact a person later in life, which deepened her desire to work with young children.

Today, Vega is a child welfare social worker at Marin County Children and Family Services in California. She takes pride in working with families, including those who have an immigration story similar to her own, and connecting them with services that improve their lives.

“Being able to share similar stories is a benefit,” she says. “Not only am I able to provide services in Spanish, which is a high need, families also feel they can trust me. I can give them a space to open up.”
She works to improve relationships between primary caregivers and teachers.

Even after teaching in the field for over a decade in both Montessori and Reggio Emilia-inspired schools, Lisa Moulton says she had more to learn about early childhood education. She found what she was looking for at Erikson. After graduating, Moulton was not only able to use her newfound skills to enhance her role as lead teacher at Kinderhaven Preschool Academy in Lake Forest, Illinois, but she also imparted that knowledge on to her colleagues.

“Any good teacher is a life-long learner, and my co-workers were excited to hear about and discuss all that I was learning throughout this program,” Moulton says.

A self-proclaimed “older” student at Erikson, Moulton completed her master’s degree online, allowing her to continue teaching while she deepened her understanding of child development over the 28-month program. She says the structure and attention to detail of the coursework helped her juggle her responsibilities as a student and a teacher.

“The organization and support Erikson provided was critical to my ability to complete this rigorous program,” Moulton says. “Each semester is planned out with exactly what classes are required. Everything about this program has been well thought out with the students’ needs and perspective in mind.”

Lisa Moulton

**DEGREE**
MS in Early Childhood Education (online)

**OCCUPATION**
Lead teacher, Kinderhaven Preschool Academy, Lake Forest, Illinois

**ON ERIKSON**
“Erikson’s well-rounded curriculum provided many reflective discussions on how education has evolved in our own classrooms and the expectations of both parents and school districts.”
An understanding of child development theory helps her shape public policy.

While serving at-risk children and families through the Ounce of Prevention Fund, Anita Harvey-Dixon saw high-quality, intentional early childhood education and modeled her own practice on her observations. She realized, however, that something was missing: She didn’t understand the theory behind the practice.

With her supervisor’s support, she entered Erikson’s child development program to deepen her knowledge. “The experience was amazing. I learned so much through Erikson’s relationship-based education,” she says.

While attending Erikson, Harvey-Dixon served as site administrator for Educare Chicago, a division of the Ounce of Prevention Fund. Currently, as part of Educare Learning Network’s implementation staff, she travels across the United States to help ensure children and families have access to quality early learning. She also advocates for better early childhood policy at the school, state, and federal levels.

In 2014, Harvey-Dixon was selected as a member of the Early Childhood Leadership Academy, a signature project within Erikson. The goal of the academy is to engage with leaders across many disciplines to raise awareness of how policy impacts the lives of children and families while advocating for positive change.

“I see policy work as an opportunity to create change and leave a lasting legacy,” she says. “I believe that all children deserve a great beginning, and policy work is one way I can help make that happen.”
Personal experience inspires her to help children from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Sandy Carrillo always wanted to help kids, particularly children of immigrants. At Erikson, she found the lifelong connections and resources she needed to do so.

“Many early childhood professionals helped me and my family, and I wanted to be in a position to do that for others,” Carrillo says.

Before attending graduate school, she held several roles in a Head Start program, but she wanted to fine-tune her knowledge base. At Erikson, she was immersed in deep conversations with her classmates and professors about educational philosophies, practices, and tools. With that knowledge, she became a resource teacher for English language learners in Burbank, Illinois, where she also plays a leadership role in research and policy decisions affecting students learning to speak English.

“Erikson helped me find the next step in my career and supported my exploration of the best ways to serve diverse children, first as a student and now as a professional,” Carrillo says. “If I have a question or concern, I know that I can always reach out to the Erikson community.”

Sandy Carrillo

DEGREE
MS in Early Childhood Education

OCCUPATION
Resource teacher for English language learners, Kennedy Elementary School, Burbank, Illinois

ON ERIKSON
“Erikson enables you to explore in depth every idea of early childhood. You can’t find that anywhere else.”
Clare Killy

DEGREE
MS in Child Development

OCCUPATION
Manager of Inclusive Solutions, Aspire Kids, Chicago

ON ERIKSON
“The classes at Erikson never felt like instructor-led lectures, but more like a gathering of professionals engaging in deeply reflective dialogue. I have a great respect for the faculty at Erikson, as professionals and as people. Many of them served as mentors and resources with whom I still stay connected today.”

She helps individuals with disabilities succeed.

Clare Killy had been teaching preschool for a few years when she realized she wanted to connect with children and families at a deeper, more individualized level. Friends and colleagues in the early childhood field gave her the same advice: “Erikson is the place.”

“When I began exploring and comparing graduate programs, it quickly became evident that Erikson was where I needed to be,” Killy says. “During my tour and interview, I recall taking in the environment and thinking, ‘This doesn’t feel like a campus, it feels like a professional learning community,’ and that was exactly the level of engagement I was seeking at that point in my career.”

Killy is now putting her Erikson knowledge to work at Aspire, a Chicagoland nonprofit whose mission is to support the successes of children and adults with developmental disabilities; strengthen their families; and build embracing, inclusive communities. There, she connects schools and community sites with Aspire Kids’ tools and resources they need to be more inclusive of children with disabilities.

“I’m confident that my Erikson experience contributed to the trajectory of my career path,” Killy says. “From classroom teacher, to educational consultant, to manager of a consulting service line, I’ve been able to broaden the positive impact I create with each step forward in my career.”
In a rapidly developing area of early childhood practice, he’s a leader.

Many Friday and Saturday nights during college, Brian Puerling could be found at a local bookstore reading his way through the education section.

“I knew that there was a lot more to know, but I didn’t know what it was,” Puerling says. “After doing my research, I could tell that an Erikson master’s degree was unique and would help me really dig deeply into theories, ideas, and practice.”

At Erikson, reflective practice and exposure to different perspectives were central to his education. He loved the ongoing conversations between students and faculty, which helped him apply the information he was learning to his own practice.

Puerling is now a leader at the intersection of children and technology. At Chicago’s Catherine Cook School, he helps teachers determine when and how to use technology to help children learn. He’s also a book author, guest blogger, and international consultant and presenter on children and technology.

“No one has all the answers, but together, we can become much more intentional about the choices we are making for our classrooms and programs,” Puerling says. “If you see yourself as a learner and open your mind to different perspectives, you will find the information you need to support your practice and the children and families we serve.”

Brian Puerling

DEGREE
MS in Early Childhood Education

OCCUPATION
Director of Technology Education, Catherine Cook School, Chicago

ON ERIKSON
“At Erikson, I became a better thinker and writer and sharpened my ability to ask the big and small questions.”
As a developmental therapist, she seeks to make a ‘global difference.’

Working at a nursery for families in crisis and later at a women’s treatment center, Colette Gatling could see how the first few years of a child’s life are pivotal to development. But until she came to Erikson, she did not completely understand why.

“Erikson gets all the pieces right,” Gatling says. “The curriculum doesn’t focus on just one aspect of child development. Instead, it focuses on the whole child and all the variables that contribute to health, from culture and language to parent-child relationships. This was important, since I want to make a global difference rather than concentrate on a particular aspect of the child.”

As a developmental therapist in the University of Chicago Early Intervention Outreach Program, Gatling works with children and families from various backgrounds and a range of specialists, including physicians, physical and speech therapists, and social workers.

“I see little successes every day as parents learn what their children need to flourish and children create the strong, trusting bonds they need with their parents. I truly believe that these everyday successes early in life will help lessen larger societal issues such as poverty, abuse, and crime.”

A decade after graduation, Gatling has already helped the next generation of child development professionals by hosting Erikson interns at her practice.
Erikson prepared her to help children process complex experiences in a hospital setting.

During a visit to the Medical University of South Carolina Children’s Hospital in 2011, Regan Shaw saw firsthand how a child life specialist, who also happened to be an Erikson graduate, worked with her nephew in the emergency department. The experience convinced her to pursue a similar career, and the next year, she enrolled at Erikson.

In 2014, Shaw graduated prepared to change the lives of young children and their families. As luck would have it, her first job was at that same hospital in South Carolina. She leaned on the tools and knowledge Erikson provided her as she started her career in what she says can be a challenging field.

“I find myself most grateful for my Erikson experience during difficult moments at work,” Shaw says. “In a hospital setting, you encounter every type of person, family, and situation—the good, bad, and tragic. In those moments, I’m able to fully assess these situations, quickly reflect on my own perspective, and decide the best course of action as a professional.”

Shaw is now a Certified Child Life Specialist at Advocate Children’s Hospital in Oak Lawn, Illinois. There, she helps children and families process their thoughts and feelings during trying medical experiences involving sickness, accidents, disease, or even terminal illnesses. One technique she uses with children is therapeutic play.

“We bring toys to almost every child,” Shaw says. “You see children who just woke up from surgery or just got to the hospital after being in an accident, and one of the first things they want to do is play. They are way more resilient than adults when it comes to healing.”

Regan Shaw

DEGREE
MS in Child Development with concentration in Child Life

OCCUPATION
Certified Child Life Specialist, Advocate Children’s Hospital, Oak Lawn, Illinois

ON ERIKSON
“Erikson was a rigorous but worthwhile experience. The focus on content, experience, and self-reflection was unlike any other program I explored. Along with high expectations for students, there was a high level of support and encouragement from faculty and staff.”
Whether in a clinical or administrative role, she channels her passion.

A desire to understand how children develop brought Ruchira Gulati Hantman from India to the United States—and Erikson helped her discover that knowledge.

“I was especially interested in the early years, when communications are not yet verbal and children are mostly formed in relation to their primary caregivers,” she says. “I wanted to understand how it all starts so I could effectively help children and families move through a process of change for the better.”

Erikson’s focus on development, relationship-based work, and reflective supervision prepared Hantman for a career working with families. Until 2014, she served as a program supervisor for the Early Childhood Project at Erikson, a partnership with the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, overseeing developmental screeners and coordinators while offering clinical supervision and consultations on cases in the child welfare system. Today, she is a staff clinician for Erikson’s Center for Children and Families and provides therapy to families and children up to age 8.

“It’s very humbling and rewarding to be invited into vulnerable parts of people’s lives and help them in their growth and overcoming human struggles,” Hantman says. “I’ve also enjoyed being an administrator contributing to an early childhood program using best practices I learned at Erikson.”
After three decades, his leadership continues to improve the lives of children and families.

Leon Denton entered the early childhood field thanks to his daughter. Each day, he took her to a Head Start program and built such a strong rapport with the other children that the director offered him a part-time job.

From there, he became a teacher and an Erikson student. At Erikson, Denton got the encouragement he needed to become a thoughtful advocate for Chicago’s children and families. Professors pushed him to become an administrator so he could make a difference in the lives of even more children. They also helped connect him with a job at the Salvation Army.

Three decades later, Denton remains at the Salvation Army, overseeing a staff of 80 across many child care sites. Under his leadership, the Salvation Army has launched innovative programs, including the first Head Start program in the Chicago Park District, a Head Start program for homeless families, and an on-site Head Start program at the only school in Chicago serving young mothers and pregnant students.

“Even after all these years, I still feel such a reward when I see children’s smiles and work with them and their families,” Denton says. “Even better is to receive a call years later from a former client inviting me to her college graduation or telling me about making the honor roll.”
Prepared for a range of careers, our alumni tell us they are deeply satisfied with the Erikson experience.

Hearing from our graduates helps us understand what sets the Erikson educational experience apart. Our alumni tell us that they leave with the knowledge, experience, and confidence to excel in a variety of careers that touch the lives of children and families. Importantly, our graduates let us know that Erikson prepares them for more than a job, that the time spent here is an important personal investment that positively impacts the quality of their work.

*Based on our most recent triennial survey of alumni.

For more information about career resources, contact

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Photos by Cheri Eisenberg, Robert Knapp, and Loren Santow
About Erikson Institute

Erikson Institute is the nation’s premier independent institution of higher education committed to ensuring that all children have equitable opportunities to realize their potential. We uniquely prepare leaders in child development, social work, and early childhood education to improve the lives of young children and their families. We educate, create new knowledge, provide direct services, and advocate—because nothing matters more than a child's early years.