



# Impact Report 2026





# Contents

- Welcome P3
- About Ei SMART P4
- Our Mission & Vision P5
- Our Approach P6
- What The Experts Say P7
- What We Delivered P8
- Who We've Helped P9
- Our Impact In Practice P10
- Ei SMART In Action  
Across Organisations P11
- Case Study #1 - Baby Evan P12
- Case Study #2 - Baby Poppy P13
- Case Study #3 - Baby Dylan P14
- The Lasting Effect of  
Early Intervention P15
- How Can You Help? P16
- What Your Support Can Achieve P17
- Contact P18

# Welcome

## Improving developmental outcomes for High Risk Infants

### A message from our CEO Betty Hutchon MRCOT DSc (Hon)

The first 1000 days are now known to be the most important for a child's growth and future wellbeing, and for babies born at high risk of developmental difficulties this period is especially critical. Yet, for many of the families we work with, this time is marked by fragmented and inconsistent care. Ei SMART was founded to address this gap and is a unique and pioneering early intervention clinical reasoning framework, designed to support families through these vital early months and years.



We transform what research already tells us into practical, context-sensitive interventions. By putting the best available evidence into action, we turn knowledge into meaningful, measurable impact for children and families.

#### We do this by:

- Bringing parents and professionals together to co-produce a shared early intervention approach that supports each baby's development
- Training NICU and community healthcare teams in applying the Ei SMART early intervention framework in practice
- Advancing research to strengthen the early intervention evidence base
- Reducing long-term developmental inequality

#### Ei SMART fulfils its mission by:

Creating a shared, relationship-centred approach to early development - bringing together parents and professionals to support babies from the very beginning of life.

Ei SMART gives parents and clinicians a shared language and way of thinking about development - grounded in relationships, guided by understanding.

We are delighted to hear that many of our colleagues now view the Ei SMART clinical reasoning framework as the leading holistic approach to early intervention for high-risk infants. This is particularly remarkable as this has been achieved by a large team of volunteers who are experienced healthcare professionals from different disciplines and expert parents with unique yet shared parenting stories. With your help, we will continue to grow Ei SMART, extending its reach so that all babies and families can access this shared, relationship-centred approach from the earliest moments of life.



Babies born prematurely or with medical complexity face increased risks across multiple areas of development. Sensory processing, movement, emotional regulation, attention, and early relationships can all be affected, often in ways that are subtle at first, but significant over time. These early challenges will have an impact beyond infancy on school readiness, frequently resulting in additional needs throughout education for the child. For the family this new situation means a time of worry and uncertainty, with greater and different childcare responsibilities.

# About Ei SMART

Ei SMART is a UK-registered charity, co-founded by parents and clinicians, born from lived experience and frontline practice to address the lack of a unified early-intervention strategy for infants at high risk of developmental difficulties following preterm birth or neonatal complexity.

Ei SMART is a unique and pioneering evidence-based framework to improve neurodevelopmental outcomes for high-risk infants. It is the first of its kind - a truly holistic framework which addresses all aspects of a child's development: Sensory, Motor, Attention and Regulation, and Relationships.

Right from birth, health practitioners and parents work together in co-production to create the early intervention plan for premature and sick infants.

It is an approach founded in research, which combines multiple disciplines and is a unique collaboration supporting infant development and promoting effective interventions for infants and young children with developmental challenges.

## 20+

countries across the world using Ei SMART resources

## 1000s

families introduced to the Ei SMART network worldwide using our free resources

## 1000s

professionals introduced to the Ei SMART network worldwide



# Our Mission & Vision

Ei SMART is a uniquely collaborative approach, where professionals and parents work together to deliver therapies, and build a brighter future for neonates.

## Mission

Our mission is to lead and transform the face of early intervention, so every infant with developmental challenges is supported using an Ei SMART approach, from birth for as long as support is needed.

## Vision

Our vision is the global adoption of Ei SMART as the way of supporting infants with developmental challenges from birth onwards.

It is an approach where Sensory, Motor, Attention and Regulation, and Relationships, form part of every interaction and intervention.

Together parents, therapists and health carers, seek to understand the lived experience of the infant and agree on interventions according to each child's needs.



**“ Ei SMART is not about generating new evidence. it is about applying existing evidence wisely and contextually to achieve meaningful, real-world impact.**

**At its core Ei SMART is a best-practice implementation approach.”**

*Dr Anna Basu, Clinical Senior Lecturer  
+ Honorary Consultant Paediatric Neurologist*

# Our Approach

## Listening to parents' experiences:

Ei SMART was founded on the principle of co-production, underpinned by genuinely listening and responding to the experience of parents who told us about:

- Parents feeling that they are not being listened to by healthcare professionals
- Parents reported communication between specialists was not always joined up and lacked cohesion
- Once interventions are offered, they are not frequent or consistent enough
- Or not the right kind of interventions with limited long-term benefits

There was a need for a more effective, multidisciplinary therapeutic approach working together with parents to support not only the care but also the development of their children. Given the steep increase in the number of babies and families affected by neurodevelopmental differences, this need became more urgent for Ei SMART to address.

## What makes Ei SMART different?

The Ei SMART approach extends beyond the medical model of healthcare, to include psychological and social aspects including interactions and engagements with families and infants and the healthcare staff supporting those families. Integration of the Ei SMART framework requires changes in the environment in the neonatal unit and early intervention settings in the community in terms of care, expertise, interaction, and attitudes of the multidisciplinary team.



## The Ei SMART Threads

### Ei

#### **Early Intervention:**

Supporting development early, with practical strategies families can use in everyday life.

### S

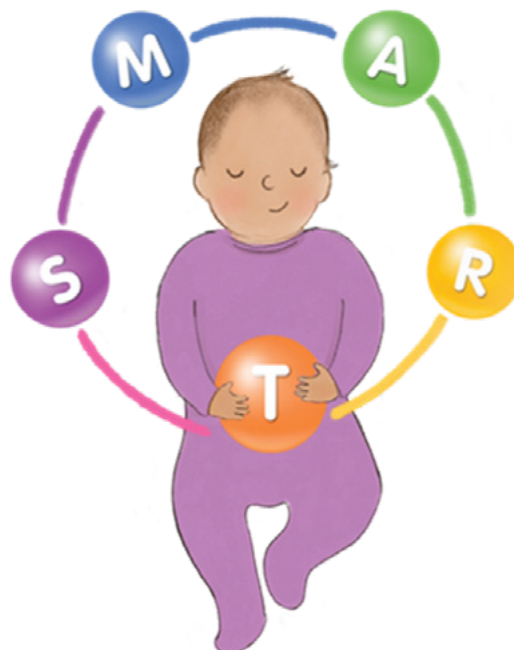
#### **Sensory:**

Supports how babies experience and make sense of the world, helping them engage, learn, and feel secure.

### M

#### **Motor:**

Goes beyond movement alone, encouraging active participation and learning through meaningful, child-led activity.



### A

#### **Attention & Regulation:**

Helps babies develop focus, emotional regulation, and self-soothing through sensitive, responsive caregiving.

### R

#### **Relationships:**

Strengthens the parent-infant relationship, building confidence, resilience, and secure attachment.

### T

#### **Together:**

Brings parents and professionals together in a shared framework, ensuring consistent, coordinated care that supports babies and families to thrive.

# What the experts say

## Listening To Science For Better Outcomes

Research consistently shows that the brain is most adaptable in the earliest months of life and early experiences shape long-term developmental trajectories.

Brain development is experience dependent and Ei SMART taps into those experiences to ensure high risk infants, who have often had a traumatic start in life, have experiences which positively support their cognitive, motor and social-emotional development.



### Professor Topun Austin

Ei SMART Trustee and consultant neonatologist:

*"Ei SMART is the first programme of its kind to provide tools for parents and healthcare workers to support high-risk infants through the crucial phases of early development. Based on scientific evidence, Ei SMART provides a unique set of tools to help those who have had a difficult, or very early start in life to develop to their own potential"*



### Professor Neil Marlow

*"Optimising parental and child support during the early phases of brain development provides the best chance of improving long term development for child and family"*



### Professor Mijna Hadders-Algra

*"Early detection of high risk of neurodevelopmental disorders offers the opportunity to exploit neuroplasticity and allows families to learn to cope with the situation of potentially having a child with special needs"*



### Professor Gillian Forrester

Professor of Comparative Cognition, Faculty Lead for Public and Civic Engagement, University of Sussex

*"We're only just beginning to understand how motor and sensory behaviours in the first days of life influence later social and communication ability. This provides earlier opportunities for novel interventions to support healthy cognitive development - when brain development is at its most flexible"*

# What we delivered

Ei SMART applies existing evidence wisely and contextually to achieve meaningful, real-world impact. Grounded in genuine co-production with parents, it is a best-practice implementation approach that shapes everything we do, from videos and Baby Courses to collaborations and funded projects, ensuring support is evidence-informed, practical and designed around families.

## • Early assessment and early intervention courses

100s of parents throughout the UK and beyond have attended our early intervention baby courses where they learn practical techniques to use at home to support their child's development through everyday routines.



## • Professional Training

Evidence-based training for health and early-years professionals to embed Ei SMART in practice.

### **Training impact:**

In one study we found that pre-training, whilst **only 11%** of participants rated their knowledge as "very good" in the Infant Development and Parental Support domains, **this increased to 60%** for Infant Development and **50% for Parental Support after training.** Quite a transformation!

*"It has made such a positive impact on us as clinicians and outcomes for our children and families."*  
– Colleague feedback

*"The hybrid course that we attended online and in Cardiff was transformative to our practice and the service we offer to infants with complex needs."*  
– Colleague feedback

# Who we've helped

## • Workforce Strengthening

Helping whole teams build confidence, consistency and shared language for early intervention.

**Demand:**

**100s of health practitioners** have attended our **SMART study days** in the last few years, with growing interest from whole teams to training this approach.



## Playing in Side Lying

## • Free Resources

Open-access developmental videos and play leaflets, posters and other resources, many in more than 10 languages (evidence of their popularity) to support families and health practitioners from the earliest days. These free resources are used widely in neonatal units and developmental clinics across the UK - in the latter it may be as much as 100% of clinics use our resources.

**See the full list of free resources here:**  
<https://eismart.co.uk/resources/>

*"The appointment was great, it was good to gain an understanding of where my child's development is."*  
 – Parent feedback (Ei SMART clinic)

*"I can finally stop worrying!"*  
 – Parent feedback (Ei SMART clinic)

Baby Ava unlocks her potential during the baby course

Dear Betty + Chris  
 This has been a monumental week for me. I have learnt so much and built so much confidence. It has been a reminder of all the potential I have to reach with a clear pathway on how to achieve it. It is a testament to the power of early intervention and will have a profound and lasting effect on my life.  
 Lots of hugs + thanks, [heart]

## Digital Reach

**100's**

of clicks every week since our launch on Bliss's website just 3 months ago.



# Our Impact in Practice

## What families and professionals say about our impact

The impact shown here reflects our commitment to early intervention, coordinated care, and parents as true partners. We're deeply grateful to the families and volunteers shaping this work, and we're committed to extending our impact further.

### For parents

- **Increased confidence** in understanding and responding to their baby's developmental needs
- **Reduced anxiety** during a critical developmental period
- **Stronger** sense of support and reassurance

## 100%

of professional trainees reported that the Ei SMART approach will make them a more efficient and effective intervention therapist

### Referenced by NHS England:

Included in the new NHSE Commissioning Framework for children and Young People with Cerebral Palsy. (NHS England commissioning guidance, May '25).'

### For professionals

- **Increased confidence in assessment and intervention** of neurodevelopmental needs when working with high-risk infants
- **Shared, relationship-centred language** for early development
- **Greater understanding of the need to view each baby holistically** and integration of sensory-motor, attention, and regulation needs into everyday relationship-based practice
- **Improved collaboration** with families as a result of co-production with parents
- **Better team** working
- **Increased** job satisfaction

### Award-winning outcomes:

Award-winning outcomes: At this year's annual neonatal Allied Health Professions conference, a Cornwall physiotherapy and occupational therapy team won Best Poster following their submission on 'Promoting the Power of Ei SMART on Early Infant Development in the Neonatal Population' Ei SMART clinics.

## Ei SMART is the 'missing link'

*"The more I learned about Ei SMART, the more I started to feel as though this approach was the 'missing link' to delivery of multidisciplinary therapeutic services to young children, particularly those identified as 'high risk'. I was witness to the transformative nature of the approach during the 3-day intensive that was facilitated as part of training and saw first-hand the power of co-production on development of trust and belief in the parent-child-therapist relationship. I was lucky to complete this training with a Physiotherapy colleague and we immediately started to implement the approach in our everyday clinical practice*

*- to great effect. - Course feedback from NHS therapist.*

# Ei SMART in Action across Organisations

1. Following training a UK neonatal delivery network reports that all discharge packs now mainly consist of Ei SMART materials and resources in addition to the red book.
2. The Institute of Health Visiting have recently included the Ei SMART link into their latest educational tool for parents on where they can get more information to support their infant's play.
3. Ei SMART became available in 2025 via the 'essential parent' App used in Birmingham City Council, Greater Manchester and Cheshire & Merseyside where parents can instantly navigate our resources in their own language. A data report is due soon.
4. Ei SMART has been included in the NEW Early Years module of PRISM - an educational tool for those supporting prematurely born children in early years and pre-school.

"The Ei SMART training has made me a different and better therapist and I use learning from Ei SMART every day. It really does work! We have children who are better regulated, talking and walking better, or who have overachieved what we might have expected for them given their history or MRI.

We have confident parents who know what their child needs and we don't have to be involved with them for as long as we used to be. We give Anticipatory guidance as often as we can now so parents can judge for themselves where their child is and what is next for them and how they will know they have got there".

*Speech & Language Therapist NHS Trust*



The EISMART course provided the evidence behind practices we had felt were important but were not typically part of traditional therapy roles. It has helped us shift our focus toward supporting regulation in babies, parents, and staff, and toward encouraging children to problem solve. By addressing these areas early and building parents' confidence, we are seeing improved outcomes. Many children have surpassed their neonatologists' expectations, which has strengthened communication with hospital teams and led to earlier, more appropriate referrals."

*Physiotherapist NHS Trust*

# Case Study #1

## Baby Evan

Early intervention that changed what was possible



### Who

Baby Evan was born at 26 weeks and at 72 hours of life had difficulty with the blood supply to his brain - not uncommon in extremely preterm babies. This resulted in weakness to the left side of his body.

### How

During the 3 intensive days of the Ei SMART baby course Evan's mum learnt special techniques to encourage Evan to use his left hand side in every day fun activities which his parents then practiced at home.



### Evan's mum said:

Following the Ei SMART early intervention course the progress of his left hand and leg is incredible - he is now able to put both hands on his bottle, not just his right hand, he can also now reach out and feel our faces with his left hand too.

He can even try to turn a page with his left hand. Before the course he couldn't put his left leg up on the bar of his buggy and now he's done it a few times and just loves it!



The enhancements we've seen in his left hand side are down to the extremely valuable early intervention techniques we've learnt during the Ei SMART baby course and which we work hard to put into practise at home.

There was a time where we couldn't think too much about his future, what he was or wasn't going to be able to do but we are now very optimistic for his future and that is a wonderful feeling.

# Case Study #2

## Baby Poppy

### From uncertain prognosis to walking and talking

#### Who

Baby Poppy was born at term but suffered brain injury at birth and had to spend six weeks in a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit.

Poppy's dad said: The doctors told us that they cannot tell with certainty whether Poppy would be able to walk or talk, but they also explained about the effects of neuroplasticity. And that babies' brains are basically amazing.

With the Ei SMART resources available to us, our sense of hope was raised and we felt confident to be able to actively contribute to our baby's development. It gave us focus, something concrete to do, something to work towards.

#### How

At 4 months old, Baby Poppy and her family attended an Ei SMART baby course.

Poppy's parents learned how to incorporate activities into everyday life at home - making therapeutic interventions manageable rather than an extra, additional thing to do.

At 5 months Poppy attended a second baby course to consolidate what they had learned and also to start working on a new goal: rolling over. At nearly 12 months old Poppy came back for her third baby course to learn how to make steps.



#### Baby Poppy's dad

*The doctors told us that they cannot tell with certainty whether Poppy would be able to walk or talk, but they also explained about the effects of neuroplasticity. And that babies' brains are basically amazing.*

At 2.5 years old, Poppy is now walking around and talking, what was thought to be potentially impossible when she was born. Ei SMART guidance effectively supported her parents to support their baby's development.

#### Impact at a glance

- Walking and talking at 2.5
- Progress once thought potentially impossible
- Parents empowered with practical guidance
- Everyday routines turned into therapy at home



# Case Study #3

## Baby Dylan

Rapid progress in three days, skills that carry on at home.



### Who

Baby Dylan was born very prematurely at 24 weeks gestation, unexpectedly while his parents were on holiday. (Photo Left)

### How

Over three days on the Ei SMART baby course, Dylan's mum learned practical, play-based techniques she can use at home to support his development, building confidence as he works towards milestones like rolling, moving and sitting independently.



Dylan having fun practicing reaching & grasping for his toy.



### Dylan's mum said:

*"Over the 3 days of the Ei SMART baby course I noticed a massive improvement in Dylan's ability to grasp toys using both arms and he was happier trying out new positions and having different toys to keep him engaged. The course has given me the confidence and knowledge to be able to practice what I learnt to support Dylan at home and I will be able to implement this as he goes on to learn new skills such as rolling, moving and sitting independently in the future".*

# The lasting effect of early intervention



## Ei SMART:

- Promotes effective early intervention for high-risk infants, beginning in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). High-risk infants are those who may be vulnerable to developmental delay or difficulty due to biological factors such as preterm birth, brain injury, or other early medical complications.
- Advances understanding of holistic early intervention, emphasising the importance of working in partnership with parents. Ei SMART promotes co-production of early intervention plans, recognising that collaborative, family-centred approaches lead to better developmental outcomes for infants.
- Increases awareness of the critical importance of early intervention for later childhood development through training and research. Ei SMART actively disseminates evidence-based knowledge and examples of best practice among health professionals and others working in early childhood.

## We achieve this by:

- Delivering national and international study days and in-depth training programmes, including specialist training to increase the number of physiotherapists, occupational therapists and speech and language therapists who are skilled and confident in delivering hands-on Ei SMART interventions within their own local services.
- Developing the knowledge and skills of health professionals and early years practitioners in providing holistic, effective intervention for high-risk infants. Our training highlights the need to consider infants' sensory, motor, attention and regulation needs together, always within the context of early relationships.
- Raising awareness of the importance of co-production in early intervention, ensuring that parents are recognised as key partners in supporting their infant's development from the very beginning.



# How can you help?

## 1. Help us raise the National Profile of Ei SMART

Help us spread the word about what Ei SMART is and why it matters for children, families and public services. Ei SMART is an evidence-based, early intervention clinical reasoning framework designed for babies at increased risk of developmental difficulties following preterm birth or neonatal complexity.

The framework is distinctive in two key ways:

- Holistic integration: Ei SMART brings together Sensory, Motor, Attention & Regulation, and Relationships as interconnected developmental systems rather than treating them as separate therapeutic disciplines.
- Relationship-centred care: Ei SMART places the parent-infant relationship at the centre of intervention, recognising that responsive caregiving and early co-regulation are fundamental drivers of healthy neurodevelopment.

By supporting development from the earliest stages of life, Ei SMART strengthens the foundations for later learning, behaviour and emotional regulation. These are areas that often underpin later educational support needs.

## 2. Help us Build Strategic Partnerships

Help us build relationships with the policy leaders, clinicians and organisations who shape early childhood, education and public health practice in the UK.

You can do that by:

- Championing awareness of the Ei SMART framework within your professional and policy networks.
- Introduce Ei SMART to organisations working across neonatal services, community healthcare, early years and family support.
- Connect us with training providers, research collaborators and funders who share the ambition to improve early developmental outcomes.

We are particularly keen to work with partners who can help us embed the Ei SMART framework across the pathway of care, from NHS neonatal intensive care units through to community and early years services, creating a shared language and approach to early development across disciplines.

## 3. Help us make Ei SMART the leading approach for early intervention for high risk infants

Our long-term objective is to see the Ei SMART framework embedded into routine early intervention practice across the UK and beyond.

This includes:

- Supporting NHS NICU teams, community healthcare professionals and early years practitioners to work within a shared developmental framework.
- Ensuring parents and professionals are equipped with practical, relationship-centred strategies to support early development.
- Continuing to build the research and evidence base for early developmental support in infants at increased risk.

At a time when SEND services and EHCP systems are under increasing pressure, Ei SMART is an opportunity to strengthen developmental support earlier, helping children build stronger foundations before challenges are entrenched. By strengthening developmental environments across hospital, community and home, Ei SMART improves long-term outcomes for children while helping services to work more effectively together around families.

**If we want better outcomes for children and a sustainable SEND system, we must start earlier, supporting parents and infant development from NICU through the community.**

**Ways to support our work:**

- Support us financially - talk to our team.
- [To Donate - click here | or visit https://eismart.co.uk/support-us/](https://eismart.co.uk/support-us/)
- Consider organising fund raising activities and events.
- Follow us on social media.

# What your support can achieve

To date all of Ei SMART's achievements have been made by the work of a fantastic team of volunteers. The report shows that the Ei SMART framework has already provided better outcomes for hundreds of children and their families. However we can't achieve our mission of leading and transforming the face of early intervention unless we can scale our work.

## With your support we can:

- Expand our training so that we can reach professionals right across the UK and Ireland
- Develop more online teaching materials and resources to help parents together with professionals in other parts of the world
- Increase the number of Ei SMART clinics
- Fund research into early intervention
- Fund a small core team to lead our growth.

## What your support can achieve:

1.

Training for doctors, nurses and other health care professionals who work in Neonatal units across the UK. £7500 would fund a whole study day. We aim to offer our study days free to all 12 NHS neonatal networks covering the 4 nations. This would cost 90k. However ideally all networks would be offered the study day twice to allow up to 80 people to be trained in the Ei SMART approach and training nearly 1000 staff.

2.

Training for physiotherapists, occupational therapists and speech and language therapists via our week long baby courses. Each course costs between 10k - 12K to host. However with nearly 151 providers throughout the UK we propose starting with a pilot study and targeting around 10 community therapy services to start with. We have started this work with Sirona Health in Bristol who have found funding to train half their team this year and the other half next year. A pilot study with 10 teams would cost around 100K.

3.

Increase the number of Ei SMART baby clinics in the UK and Ireland through education, training and mentoring on running an Ei SMART baby clinic. £10k would allow us to run a pilot study in 10 different areas. Early evaluation and feedback from an Ei SMART clinic in Cornwall is showing beneficial outcomes.

4.

Research through strengthened partnerships and collaborations including academic research.

5.

Free Resources for more children and their parents to receive simple guidance via videos and brochures from experts.

6.

E-learning To develop e-learning modules via a dedicated platform that can be accessed by professionals across the world - funding received from Northwick Trust for this project to progress with MacKeith press.

7.

Developing SMART for parents This project has secured funding from the national lottery and is in its early stages of development.

8.

A core team to drive us forward. £150K will allow us to employ a CEO, an education lead and an impact and communications lead for one year.



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