

Help Me Grow National Replication Project

Undetected behavioral and developmental problems in children can have a profound impact not only on the lives of children and families involved, but also on our society in terms of costs related to mental health, education, and juvenile justice.

Nationwide, it is estimated that approximately 12 - 16% of American children experience developmental, behavioral and/or emotional disorders. Child health providers agree that early detection of developmental delays offers the best hope for optimal long-term outcomes. Even when children's developmental needs are recognized, however, connecting children to services often proves difficult. Linking children to services requires knowledge about community-based programs and eligibility requirements, and persistence in overcoming barriers.

The Connecticut Help Me Grow (HMG) System

Connecticut HMG, under the auspices of the Connecticut Children's Trust Fund, is a universal system that provides a cost effective, efficient, and user friendly mechanism for **identifying** children from birth to the age of eight for developmental or behavioral problems and **connecting** them to appropriate community resources in a timely manner. For more information on the Connecticut Children's Trust Fund: www.take5parenting.com

The Help Me Grow System has five interrelated components that work collaboratively to:

- **Ensure that child health providers are trained in effective developmental surveillance and screening**, including how to contact HMG if a concern is identified

- This is done by the Child Health and Development Institute via a

training module in the Educating Practices in the Community (EPIC) curriculum. For more information: www.chdi.org

- **Offer a free and confidential telephone access point** that links young children and families to existing services and supports and offers families the opportunity to participate in the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ). The ASQ is a tracking system that helps parents and child health providers monitor a child's development.

- The Child Development Infoline (CDI), a specialized call center of the United Way 2-1-1, serves as the HMG access point. For more information: www.ctunitedway.org/cdi.html

- **Maintain an inventory of community-based programs** used by the telephone care coordinators to serve children, families and providers

- Resource information is maintained by the United Way 2-1-1 Information Department

- **Maximize the use of resources available to those who contact the call center**

- Community Liaisons from the Children's Trust Fund serve as a conduit between local programs and the call center. In this capacity they contribute information to the resource inventory used by the call center and support providers by facilitating local networking opportunities.

- **Conduct an annual Outcome Evaluation** of who calls *Help Me Grow*, the nature of the calls, and the effectiveness of matching family need with program services. The evaluation also assesses the program's effectiveness in meeting annual goals and fulfilling State criteria for results-based accountability.

- Evaluation is conducted by the Center for Social Research, a research entity of the University of Hartford. For more information: www.centerforsocialresearch.org

Evaluation results:

Who calls Help Me Grow. During the 2007-2008 program year, *Help Me Grow* received 2,522 calls from parents, pediatricians and other providers, who were concerned about a child's behavior, learning, or development. The majority of the callers were parents or guardians; however, there was an increase in calls from pediatricians (14% increase over 2006-2007), due to the increase in pediatrician outreach and trainings.

Nature of the phone calls. Similar to former years, the majority of calls have been inquiries about specific child development programs, questions related to general developmental concerns, and families seeking evaluations for their children. Families also call with questions or concerns regarding their children's social or emotional behavior, their child's health, special health care needs, or their child's disability.

Program implementation: care coordination. Both quantitative and



qualitative data indicate that program implementation has improved as the program has evolved and stabilized, particularly with regard to assessment of the child and care coordination for the family. For example, the number of presenting issues that are identified (per family) at time of intake has increased over the past two years, and the number of successful *Help Me Grow* referrals to service programs has also significantly increased (a 26% increase from the previous year).

Program implementation:

community outreach. There was a dramatic (43%) increase in the number of families entering the Ages and Stages program in the past year, from 840 to 1,203 families. This increase is explained by the outreach and training provided to pediatricians, including the promotion of *universal monitoring of development* from an early age.

Outcomes. Similar to previous years, the rate of successful outcomes (i.e., families who are successfully connected to a service) is high: 80% of service needs were addressed for the 2007-2008 year.

However, these figures do not illuminate all the efforts of the care coordinators and families who are typically confronted with gaps and barriers to services. Persistent follow through and coordination, a great deal of problem solving, and sometimes a modification in expectations (i.e., finding the next best program) enable care coordinators to eventually link families to needed services.

Annual Costs:

The annual cost for Connecticut HMG is \$650,000. This includes a contract with United Way/211 to maintain

the call center, salaries for three Community Development Liaisons, a project supervisor, and materials. Funding for the program is facilitated by blending administrative and financial resources across departments and agencies, including the Children's Trust Fund, the Department of Education, the Department of Developmental Services, the Department of Public Health, and United Way of Connecticut.

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Many states have some of the necessary components for a comprehensive, coordinated system of early identification and referral of children for developmental and behavioral problems. However, few have been able to create a system that is integrated, comprehensive, and effectively connects families to services.

Based on lessons learned in Connecticut, there has been an interest in the replication of *Help Me Grow* in other states and communities. The *Help Me Grow* program has previously been replicated in Polk County, Iowa and Orange County, California. To assist those states interested in creating a comprehensive HMG system, Connecticut Children's Medical Center (Connecticut Children's) has received a \$340,049 two-year grant (2008 – 2010) from The Commonwealth Fund to provide technical assistance for replicating the CT *Help Me Grow* model in other states. The current project provides technical assistance and guidance to five states selected through a competitive application process to replicate *Help Me Grow*.

At present, replication sites are

Kentucky, New York, Oregon, South Carolina and Colorado. Individuals who have been involved in creating and delivering the CT *Help Me Grow* system serve as the national replication team. The six-member team assists the selected states in replicating a HMG system that is reflective of the strengths and infrastructure within their counties and states. They build on existing systems, demonstrating efficiencies and promoting collaboration among branches of government and state agencies.

Effective programs such as *Help Me Grow* are best viewed as components within comprehensive state systems in support of young children's healthy development. The success of *Help Me Grow* has encouraged the development of a framework for child health services in Connecticut, within which child health services are conceptualized as a series of building blocks encompassing universal, selective and indicated services. *Help Me Grow* is the prototype of an indicated service-available to all children and their families and most likely to be accessed by those in need and at risk. *Help Me Grow* has also emphasized the critical importance of the framework linking child health services to early care and education programs and family support services through effective care coordination. Programs such as *Help Me Grow* are critical to enable child health services to fulfill their mission of promoting children's optimal, healthy development.

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