



# Help Her Realize Her Wildest Dreams

Understanding your child's development  
is the first step in securing their dreams.

Providing your child with the best is what parents do. Start by giving them the best in development. Help Me Grow connects families to services that will enhance development, behavior and learning for children birth to 6 years.

Call toll free **866.GROW.025** | **866.476.9025**  
[helpmegrowoc.org](http://helpmegrowoc.org)



**Help Me Grow**  
ORANGE COUNTY



**CHOC** Children's





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## **Parents make a wrenching, critical call**

**By TERYL ZARNOW**  
COLUMNIST  
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

The pediatrician said not to worry, but I was having none of it. He could diagnose an ear infection with pinpoint accuracy, but my Mother's Early Alert System was blaring out a warning that he was not hearing. I became concerned early on that my third child was not talking, but the doctor wasn't worried: boys are slower, younger children rely on older siblings. I remained worried. By the time my son was evaluated, at age 3, he lagged more than a year behind normal speech development.

He entered an intense preschool speech therapy program speaking 25 one-syllable words that only his family could understand. Yet he was mainstreamed into regular kindergarten and graduated therapy in third grade. Early intervention made all the difference.

The American Academy of Pediatrics says early identification of developmental disorders is absolutely critical in the first five years – before the brain is 90 percent developed. Yet studies show that half of all children with disabilities are not identified before they start school. Doctors know their medicine, but parents know their child. This is a hymn in praise of early intervention and a group that can help you get it.

Gabriela Velasco, 37, couldn't help but compare. She teaches Mommy and Me classes in Santa Ana and realized that her son, Jair, did not come close to what the other kids were doing. Nowhere near. "I always treated him like a normal child, but I always knew something was not right." Jair, born in 2006, was her second child in a new marriage to Pedro Velasco, 30. She fought to have him and then she fought to help him.

It was a high-risk pregnancy after three that failed. Velasco spent eight months on bed rest to have this child. Now, something wasn't right. At 6 months, Jair was not sitting or standing. His eyes were not focusing; at 15 months he began to lose his language. At first they thought he might be deaf, but then realized he didn't listen. She asked the doctor about intervention, but he said all kids are different. Wait and see. When he was 18 months old, Velasco tired of waiting. One of the flyers she passed out to mothers at her classes was from a group called Help Me Grow. "I didn't really know what they did until they started helping me." Help Me Grow (HMG) Orange County is a free phone line (1-

866-476-9025) to call if you think your child might need developmental services or if you don't know where to get them.

Funded since 2007 largely through the Children and Families Commission of Orange County, the phone line matches families to resources. It's a collaboration between Children's Hospital of Orange County and UC Irvine. Think of it as a concierge service for parents with children from newborn through age 5. It directs them to support services and follows them through the process of getting help. "Lots of times parents don't know where to turn," says Rebecca Hernandez, program manager for Help Me Grow. "Having a common entry point ... is a solution." HMG served nearly 3,000 callers in 2010. Most were families, but 30 percent were doctors calling about patients.

HMG also offers screening tools, questionnaires for parents that reliably measure the validity of their concerns. These products produce results you can take to the doctor. Hernandez explains: This is a place where they take mother's intuition seriously. "A mother can't diagnose an auditory processing issue, but a mother knows if a child doesn't understand when she talks to them. If we can address these delays with early intervention, it can keep them from turning into full-blown problems."

When Velasco called, she talked to Carol Montoya, a community liaison for HMG. "Mothers can feel very frustrated if they have been concerned for quite some time and feel their concerns have not been validated," Montoya notes. "They don't know where to turn." Navigating service agencies can be chutes and ladders if you don't know which programs you qualify for that can help you. Montoya began to guide Jair's family through the system. You can measure progress by his stack of paperwork. It started with a screening assessment at the Family Support Network. By 22 months old, Jair was diagnosed on the mild autism spectrum. His development was about half his age. "The day I got the diagnosis, I went with Jair to meet Carol. I told her: I have a diagnosis, thanks to you." Once she knew, Velasco was fierce on behalf of her cub. "I started taking more control, to get him helped," she says in understatement. Jair's father quit school to focus on their son. Jair received therapy at the Regional Center. When the therapist finished, they did more themselves. "If he was hiding under the table, we were under the table." Then came the Rehabilitation Institute of Southern California, the applied behavioral analysis, and then a blended group preschool. Jair was in half-day classes and therapies five days a week. It was full-throttle intervention. Suddenly, around 3 years old, progress. "He started doing things on his own. He had fewer meltdowns; his speech was better. He just started shining." Jair received his first school achievement award last year; his teacher said he was "a helper." Today he smiles and talks and shows off his slide. Jair starts mainstream kindergarten in the fall. "All the hard work and tears are worth it," Velasco says. Intervention is like the morning – half the day is gone if you don't start early.



# Help Them Achieve Their Wildest Dreams!

Your support can make their dreams a reality! **Join us today!**

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**Help Me Grow**  
ORANGE COUNTY

## THE 2012 GIVING GUIDE



## Help Me Grow

ORANGE COUNTY

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### MISSION STATEMENT

Help Me Grow improves developmental outcomes for children by connecting young children and their families to developmental and behavioral services and promoting developmental surveillance and screening.

### GOALS FOR 2012

- ◆ Increase awareness of Help Me Grow's availability to all young children and families in Orange County
- ◆ Continue to promote the importance of developmental surveillance and screening and connection to programs and services
- ◆ Encourage the business community to support Help Me Grow with the goal of early identification of children at risk for delay and connection to early intervention services

### SERVICE AREA

All Orange County young children and their families



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## Help Me Grow Orange County

### ABOUT US

Our care coordinators provide intake, referral and connection to developmental services. By calling the toll-free number 1.866.GROW.025 (1.866.476.9025) or using our online link at [www.helpmegrowoc.org](http://www.helpmegrowoc.org), parents, caregivers, child-care providers, early educators and health care providers have a point of access to developmental services for all young children who live in Orange County. After the initial contact, families will receive follow-up care coordination to ensure they are connected to a program or service to address their needs. Reasons to contact Help Me Grow include:

- ◆ Concern about a child's development, behavior or learning
- ◆ Learn more about what programs and services are available
- ◆ Assist a client, family member or friend seek information and connection

### VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Help Me Grow Orange County appreciates the time and dedication of our outstanding volunteers. Opportunities include:

- ◆ **Developmental screening volunteer:** Helps process, enter and convey results from completed developmental screenings to parents and physicians
- ◆ **Community outreach volunteer:** Supports our community activities by helping to represent Help Me Grow at health fairs and community events

### GIVING OPPORTUNITIES/BUSINESS COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITIES

Help Me Grow Orange County is a collaborative effort of CHOC Children's and the University of California, Irvine Healthcare receiving initial start-up funding from the Children and Families Commission of Orange County in 2005.

There are numerous ways to contribute toward our Help Me Grow efforts in Orange County. Individual donors and corporate sponsors can:

- ◆ Make a charitable donation online at [www.helpmegrowoc.org](http://www.helpmegrowoc.org)
- ◆ Sponsor a local networking event, Connection Café, reaching professionals in your community
- ◆ Provide funding for access to universal developmental screening
- ◆ Contribute to our volunteer appreciation program
- ◆ Purchase technology for community use of Help Me Grow Online
- ◆ Bring Help Me Grow as a no-cost service to your employees

Many businesses are striving to find low cost and innovative approaches to provide value to employees. By sharing information about Help Me Grow as part of an employee benefits package, companies can help facilitate access to this community service, and add value to their benefits offerings. Help Me Grow provides support for employees with families, especially at a time like this when many of them are looking for budget-friendly ways to ensure their child's optimal development.

### PRIMARY PARTNERS INCLUDE

- ◆ 2-1-1 Orange County
- ◆ CHOC Children's
- ◆ University of California, Irvine Healthcare
- ◆ Children and Families Commission of Orange County

### ADVISORY BOARD INCLUDES MEMBERS FROM

Regional Center of Orange County  
American Academy of Pediatrics, Ch. 4  
Families and Communities Together (FaCT)  
Family Support Network  
CHOC/UCI Neurodevelopmental Programs  
Orange County Health Care Agency  
CalOptima

United Cerebral Palsy  
Orange County Department of Education  
2-1-1 Orange County  
Orange County Head Start  
Children and Families Commission of OC  
Parents from the community