

**FOCUS ON: Paul Dworkin, MD**

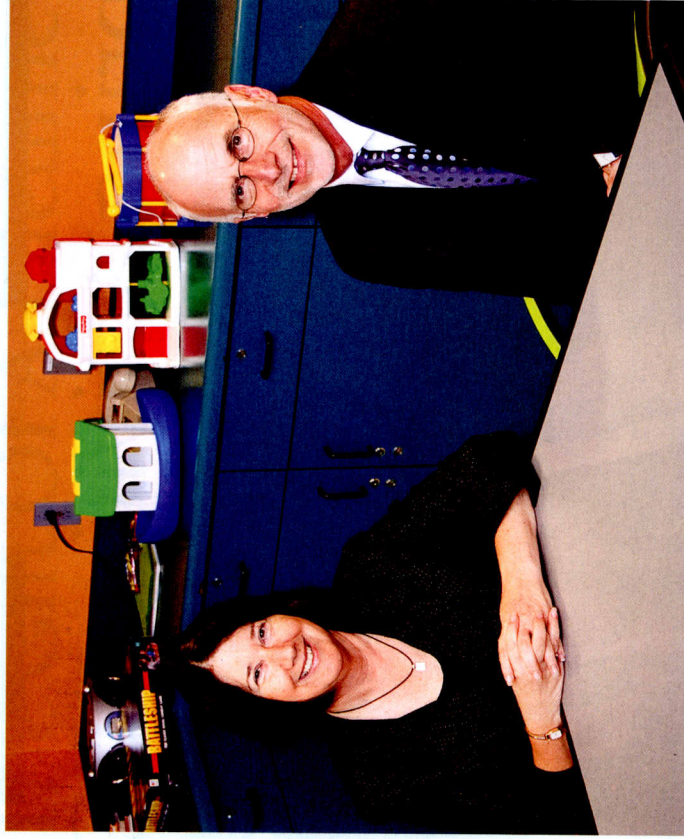
# Helping Children Find the Programs and Services They Need – When They Need Them

Connecting children with developmental or behavioral issues to appropriate, existing services and programs is an ongoing and complex problem. A problem that Dr. Paul Dworkin, Physician-in-Chief at Connecticut Children's, has been making steady progress against for many years. "Children with developmental and behavioral problems are too often eluding early detection. Quality programs exist to help them, but we need to remove barriers that keep kids from connecting with the resources they need. In a nutshell, that is the idea behind the Help Me Grow model." The program addresses these issues so well that it has grown from a Hartford based program, to a Connecticut wide program, to an eight-state model — and growing. And yes, there is international interest as well.

While the Help Me Grow model is gaining momentum across the country, it has its roots here in Hartford and in the passion of Dr. Dworkin. "I practiced primary care medicine within the University

committee and other constituents across Hartford. We asked ourselves what were the needs of Hartford's children?" The group started with four assumptions: 1) children at risk are escaping early detection; 2) there are a variety of existing services designed to address child and family needs; 3) despite the availability of programs there is a disconnect which prevents children from being linked to appropriate services; and 4) Hartford's children and families would benefit from a coordinated, comprehensive approach to early identification of at risk children and linking them to appropriate, existing services.

Working from these assumptions the group designed a program for Hartford, which eventually expanded to the statewide program. Connecticut Help Me Grow, operating under the auspices of the Connecticut Children's Trust Fund, is a universal system providing cost effective, efficient, and user-friendly mechanisms for identifying children from birth to age eight who are at risk and



Leading the Help Me Grow program is Paul Dworkin, MD, Physician-in-Chief at Connecticut Children's and founder of the program, and Joanna Bogin, MS, project manager.

is done by Child Health and Development Institute via a module in the Educating Practices in the Community (EPIC) curriculum.

This increase is a direct consequence of increased pediatrician outreach and training.

While Help Me Grow is in its



Dr. Dworkin, I practiced primary care medicine within the University of Connecticut's system for a number of years, and I was one of the earliest group of pediatricians who were trained in what would become Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics. My interests have always been centered in promoting children's optimal healthy development through the delivery of exemplary child health services. That has really been the theme of my training and clinical work for the last thirty years." Cooperation and coordination has always been the root of successfully delivering early intervention programs. And cooperation was key to the successful launch of the program here just over a decade ago. "With the help of the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, we engaged parents, child health providers, the Medicaid managed care oversight

to age eight who are at risk and connecting them to appropriate community resources. The Help Me Grow system is an elegant, simple design that harnesses the power of just a handful of interrelated components and existing community services yet has far-reaching impact upon delivery of services to at risk children.

### **The Help Me Grow model.**

Training – Targeted at child health providers to enhance the practice of developmental surveillance and screening (early detection). Grand rounds presentations are delivered through hospital based pediatric departments and large pediatric clinics across Connecticut. Trainers visit community-based pediatric practices and present guides and protocols for developmental screening and referrals to Child Development Infoline. Training

Community (EPIC) curriculum. Single, confidential, telephone access point – The Child Development Infoline (CDI), a specialized call center of the United Way 2-1-1, links families with young children to existing services and supports. When calling this number, families may choose to participate in the Ages and Stages Questionnaire which helps parents and providers monitor a child's development.

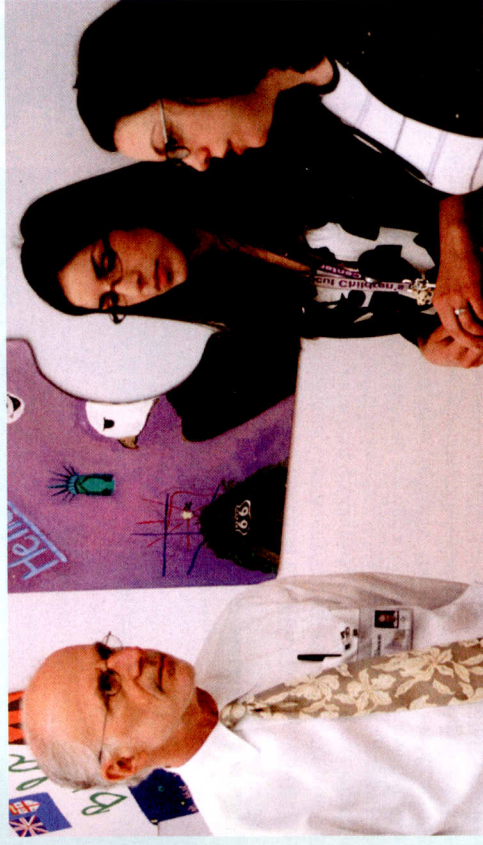
Infoline is staffed with trained child development coordinators who work directly with the family. It takes an average of seven contacts with a family to make the correct referral.

Current inventory of community-based programs – Infoline can only be effective if its information and referrals are accurate and timely. Information is kept current through a cooperative venture between Community Liaisons and the United Way 2-1-1 Information Department.

Results-base accountability – Annual outcome evaluation is conducted by the University of Hartford's Center for Social Research. The review tests the programs effectiveness in matching family needs with program services, tracks the nature of incoming calls, and assesses Help Me Grow's progress toward established goals. For instance, Help Me Grow received 2,522 calls during the fiscal 2007-2008 year. Most of the calls were from parents or guardians, however there was a substantial increase in calls from pediatricians (up 14%).

While Help Me Grow is in its infancy, it has already emerged as a model program of national significance. Many states have some of the necessary components for a comprehensive, coordinated system. However, few have been able to create a model that is integrated, comprehensive, and effectively connects families with the most appropriate services. Based on the success of the Connecticut program, there's been growing interest in other states and communities. Help Me Grow has been successfully replicated in Polk County, Iowa, and Orange County, California. With support from The Commonwealth Fund of New York City, the program is now being developed in Kentucky, New York, Oregon, South Carolina and Colorado.

"We have a six-member team that now assists in the selection of states to replicate the Help Me Grow model. The team builds on existing systems to create efficiencies and promote collaboration among agencies and state government," explains Dr. Dworkin. "The political side of this has been fascinating to me. But we have found a genuine interest among lawmakers, state and private agencies, to build more cooperative and integrated systems to link children with optimal services. We are very optimistic about the future of the program and its impact on the health and well-being of at risk children everywhere."



Shown with pediatric residents from the University of Connecticut School of Medicine, Paul Dworkin, MD, says cooperation and coordination has always been the root of successfully delivering early intervention programs for children with developmental and behavioral issues.