



In the Spotlight

Help Me Grow Champion

Ann Monroe



Community Champion

President, Health Foundation for Western and Central New York

“These are very tight economic times. Every dollar spent duplicating services means one dollar less to help our kids, and the duplication almost always results from a lack of collaboration and coordination across services and agencies.

*The **Help Me Grow** system makes sense given our belief in and need for collaboration across the systems we already have. As a funder in the community, we can give money to single agencies to increase their services, or we can invest in a wholesale strategy that will make it easier for many organizations to do the work they do.*

*Supporting system change and quality improvement is our sweet spot, and we see **Help Me Grow** as a way to achieve that.”*

As a community leader and President of the Health Foundation for Western and Central New York, why have you embraced *Help Me Grow*-Western New York?

As Buffalo is the third poorest city in the country, we have been interested for quite a while in supporting children birth to 5 who are living in communities of poverty. Our connection to *Help Me Grow* started when we noticed the high number of kids who were suspended from pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten for behavior problems.

We examined the situation, concentrating on what was happening in pediatric practices. We learned that pediatricians didn't know where to refer kids for behavioral concerns; no one had the time to go through the whole list of services; and even if they did refer a child, they never received any follow-up information at all. Doctors didn't have the tools and were therefore not motivated to address the issue.

How could we address this? How could we help the kids in our community? The expert we brought in knew about *Help Me Grow* in Connecticut, what they had done in response to barriers to screening and referrals, and how the *Help Me Grow* system might be useful in solving our region's problems.

How do you envision *Help Me Grow* making a difference for children and families in your region?

We envision a coordinated approach to early childhood care, in which families get the assistance they need to get the help their kids need. We also want to track the effectiveness of services so that families and children can be confident that these referrals will truly help. We want to build quality improvement capacity for providers to make sure services are as strong as they can be.

Using the umbrella of the *Help Me Grow* system, we want to build greater recognition for the importance of early childhood as a critical formative period. We see high rates of absenteeism in Kindergarten, and when we ask parents what's going on, the answer is often, “It's just Kindergarten.” There is a lack of understanding here of how important early education is for their kids' success in later years.

We also want to draw more public attention in general to the importance of early childhood in order to benefit all kids and families in Western and Central New York.

If you were to talk to other community leaders and funders, what key points would you make for their support of *Help Me Grow* within their communities and states?

First I would emphasize the importance of early childhood health for positive outcomes in a number of areas, including education. Then, if a community or state is committed to improving early childhood health, I would urge leaders to use programs or systems that have been proven to work.

By affiliating with *Help Me Grow*, leaders and funders are utilizing a system that has been tested in many locations. Its basic structure is solid but the system also has the flexibility to be adapted to different circumstances. Rather than start from scratch, affiliate with *Help Me Grow* and build on the experience and knowledge that already exist.

Ann Monroe has served as President of the Health Foundation for Western and Central New York since it began operation in 2003. With more than 30 years of experience in health and human services, she has held leadership positions in both the public and private sectors in the fields of mental health, community health, managed care and philanthropy. Ann lives in the city of Buffalo and is a proud parent and grandmother, as well as a faithful servant to two dogs.