

A graphic of a spotlight beam shining from the top left corner onto the text below.

# ***In the Spotlight***

## ***Help Me Grow Champion***

### **Jane Witowski**



***Program Manager  
Help Me Grow-South Carolina***

**Jane Witowski** is not one to seek attention for herself. With an extensive background in public relations and program management, as well as an abiding curiosity and zeal, she excels at providing the support needed to create Help Me Grow-South Carolina, one of the first replication states.

In addition to her role as the HMG program manager, Jane is also manager of the Healthy Child Development program within the Children's Advocacy department at Greenville Hospital System University Medical Center in Greenville, SC, and a newly selected ambassador for the Center for Disease Control's "Learn the Signs. Act Early." campaign.

Jane and her husband, Jerry, live in Greenville. They recently welcomed a new granddaughter, Ella Grace, to the family.

#### **How did you become involved with Help Me Grow?**

In 2005, I heard about an opportunity to work with a program called PRIDE (Promoting Resources in Developmental Education), led by Dr. Desmond Kelly, Medical Director of the Division of Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrics at the Children's Hospital. Dr. Kelly was instrumental in seeing that my skills were a good match for the project.

PRIDE incorporated many of the components of Help Me Grow, in that we promoted early identification of kids at risk for delays, worked to support families, and made connections across stakeholders. When the first RFP came out in 2008 for states to work with HMG replication, there was no doubt we would apply.

We have now spent the last three years building on the success of PRIDE to launch HMG, and plan to have our centralized information line operational by this summer.

#### **If you could talk to Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius about HMG-SC, what would you say?**

First of all, I would want Secretary Sebelius to know that 69 percent of South Carolina babies and toddlers have at least one risk factor known to increase their chances of a poor health or developmental outcome.

And then I would want her to see how South Carolina folks are rallying around this HMG opportunity to pull together and improve the work that is already being done to help our kids and families. All of our planning has allowed us to see how to be significantly more efficient with the money we are given, to see how we can be more effective in getting services to children and families. Would that crucial learning have happened without HMG? I don't know.

So do we need federal support for this work? Yes! Do we need HMG? Yes! I want her to know that this model has merit. I need the Secretary to know that we who work in early childhood services are passionate about wanting to help our kids.

#### **What is one thing that has made you laugh in your work — in a good way?**

One aspect of PRIDE was offering many workshops for parents of young children, because research tells us that when parents know what typical behavior looks like, their expectations for their children are more reasonable. That in turn is a factor in the reduction of child abuse and neglect.

So, one day, we received a phone message from a mother who'd heard about a workshop. She said, "I was told you could fix my kid! Could you call me back and tell me about this program that will fix my kid?"

Well, we laughed ourselves silly—if we could just fix kids, we'd bottle it and make a lot of money!

But in all seriousness, that phone call was tremendously valuable. We have learned that a lot of folks start out thinking, 'This is my child's issue, not mine.' If a workshop that we offer can help a parent understand that it's a family dynamic, that they have to learn about their child and change in order to respond appropriately to him or her, then we've accomplished something important. Maybe we even had a role to play in preventing a child from being abused or neglected, which is a real issue in South Carolina, particularly for kids at risk for or with undetected developmental delays.

This is the fuel that keeps me going. Because of the systems we're putting in place, some child, or children, or parents, or the professionals seeing them—they will all benefit. Everybody is better off.

**That's what I love about Help Me Grow!**