



In the Spotlight

Help Me Grow Champion

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“All of us have a role to play in creating a future where families really feel supported and valued. We are all involved in creating a collaborative, consistent support system that makes sure more kids with developmental delays get what they need, and that families get what they need to help their children. Strengthening Families and the Help Me Grow National Center have formed an exciting partnership in order to help states utilize the ideas, tools, and techniques of each model. It’s a pleasure to work with HMG in this process.”

How do Strengthening Families and Help Me Grow complement each other?

Help Me Grow and Strengthening Families have long shared an important perspective about families. Rather than looking at them as a bundle of problems, we see families as key partners in children’s optimal health.

From this philosophical common ground, SF and HMG complement each other organizationally and programmatically. Strengthening Families has been around a little longer, so we have a lot of experience in both expanding state by state and in forming strong cross-system leadership teams within states. For affiliates currently implementing the Help Me Grow model, connecting to these SF leadership teams provides an opportunity to work in the context of broad cross-disciplinary thinking about how to use and improve existing systems to support families and prevent abuse and neglect.

On the other side, the HMG philosophy and model align well with the Strengthening Families mission and protective factors of Parental Resilience; Social Connections; Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development; Concrete Support in Times of Need; and Social and Emotional Competence of Children.

How can current HMG affiliates build relationships with Strengthening Families?

A good first place to look is a state’s Strengthening Families leadership team. The team is almost always connected to other key leadership groups in the state, such as the Early Learning Advisory Council. Another entry point is with Children’s Trust Funds or child abuse prevention agencies, which tend to be strong SF advocates.

Home visiting is a newer opportunity to build relationships, as all states have new federal grants to promote and improve home visiting services for families with young children. In many states, Strengthening Families is becoming sort of the overarching framework for all the home visiting programs.

Finally, over the last few years all states have received Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems planning grants that require cross-system collaboration. Everybody connected to these early childhood services is at the table, working to organize leadership teams.

What inspires you in this work?

It’s inspiring to see how people take the ideas and practices of HMG and Strengthening Families and then adapt them to the population, geography, circumstances and context that they’re in. Then their work is available to share with the next state or organization, which makes the whole process a really collaborative one.

But the most inspiring experience over the years has been seeing people work all day long, all night long, to make these systems work better, to help people become the parents they want to be.

Judy Langford was the founding Project Director for the Strengthening Families Initiative, which is a multidisciplinary approach to preventing child abuse and promoting healthy child development that is now used in more than 30 states. It is based at the Center for the Study of Social Policy. Judy is also a member of the leadership team for the federal Quality Improvement Center on Early Childhood. She is the former executive director of the Family Resource Coalition and previously headed the Ounce of Prevention Fund in Chicago. She lives with her husband in Atlanta, Georgia, near four of her six grandchildren.