



Help Me Grow[®]
Vermont
2018 Annual Report



The goal of *Help Me Grow* Vermont is to create strong families, which helps promote healthy child development, and ensure that all children reach their greatest potential.

Help Me Grow is an integrated system that helps communities identify vulnerable children through routine developmental monitoring and screening for all young children. The impact on a child's long-term success is greatest when developmental concerns are discovered and addressed as early as possible. *Help Me Grow* Vermont provides parents and caregivers with information about child development, trains professionals to conduct developmental screening, and links families with children ages eight and younger to community resources.



Engaging Family and Community

Priority: *Help Me Grow* works with families and communities to build five protective factors that are the foundation of the Strengthening Families Approach:¹

- **Support Parental Resilience**
Managing stress and functioning well when faced with challenges, adversity, and trauma
- **Create Social Connections**
Feeling connected with constructive, supportive people, and institutions
- **Improve Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development**
Understanding parenting best practices and developmentally appropriate child skills and behaviors
- **Provide Concrete Support in Times of Need**
Identifying, accessing and receiving needed adult, child, and family services
- **Increase the Social and Emotional Competence of Children**
Forming secure adult and peer relationships; experiencing, managing, and expressing emotions in healthy ways

Ninety percent of brain development happens in the first five years of life, which makes early childhood the best time to positively influence the path of a child's life. *Help Me Grow* uses outreach strategies that engage parents/caregivers and promote healthy child development.

Why is this important?

- Increases family stability
- Addresses toxic (long-term persistent) stress
- Enhances child development
- Reduces the risk of child abuse and neglect

When the protective factors are well established in a family, parental stress is lower and, as a result, family stability increases,

the likelihood of child abuse and neglect diminishes, and the child's emotional and physical health is protected. The *Help Me Grow* system encourages parents/caregivers to support children's learning and the development of social and emotional skills which better prepare children for kindergarten and lifelong success.

Strategies

- Provide opportunities for families to build skills related to the five protective factors.
- Train a cross-sector workforce to boost parent/caregivers' capacity to promote their child's optimal development.

Key findings

- *Help Me Grow* held 71 community outreach events to engage families in fun activities, learn about child development, encourage positive parenting skills, and teach parents/caregivers how to connect with community resources.
- *Help Me Grow* trained 625 early care and learning, health care and community service providers, and educators to use developmental and behavioral screening tools and to refer families for further evaluation and services.²
- As a result of training and outreach in 2018, there was an 89% increase in calls and referrals to the *Help Me Grow* contact center from early care and learning, health care and community service providers, and educators.

¹ Strengthening Families is a research-informed, cost-effective strategy to increase family stability, enhance child development and reduce child abuse and neglect.

² Vermont's preferred standardized screening tools are the Ages & Stages Questionnaires®, Third Edition (ASQ®-3) and the Ages & Stages Questionnaires®: Social-Emotional, Second Edition (ASQ®:SE-2).

Linkage to Information and Resources

Priority: Create an effective system with a centralized contact center to increase access to resources for both professionals working with children and families in Vermont.

Early detection of developmental and behavioral concerns is critical for the success of all children. However, children must also be linked to the services they need at an early age when the benefit of those services is greatest. While there are many initiatives in Vermont that provide services to young children, families and providers need help connecting to these resources.

Why is this important?

- Helps both families and professionals navigate resources and referrals through a centralized system.
- Connects families with information, developmental resources and social supports.
- Improves parents' knowledge of child development, milestones to expect, and healthy caregiving practices.

Research shows that it takes an average of seven calls to connect one family to one service; therefore, the *Help Me Grow* contact center staff help families and providers navigate these connections through an efficient, centralized system. In addition, staff provide information, coaching, and support.

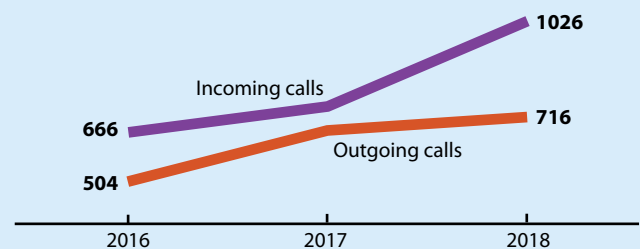
Strategies

- Ensure the contact center has a comprehensive database with accurate information about resources and community services.
- Contact center staff provide ongoing care coordination for families to ensure connection to services.
- Contact center staff promote protective factors in conversations with parents and caregivers.

Key findings

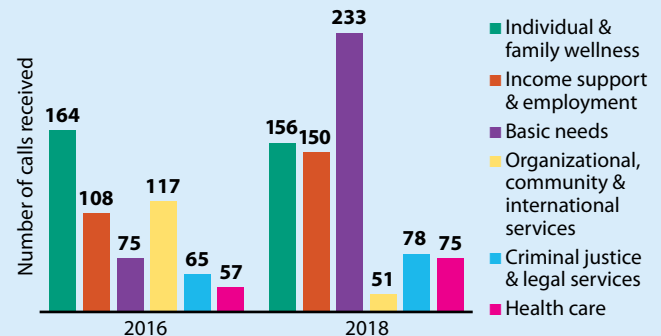
- The number of incoming calls and outgoing/follow-up calls continues to increase. *Help Me Grow* staff offer a follow-up call to provide a general check in and to confirm that the family has successfully connected to services.

Help Me Grow Vermont contact center call volume



- 1,755 referrals were made in 2018. Basic needs like food, housing and utilities, and individual and family wellness were the most frequent reasons that people called in 2018. The latter category includes referrals to child abuse protection and hotlines, pregnancy support and parenting education, parenting skills and support groups, and child care.

Most common reasons families contact Help Me Grow



Communication System

Priority: Populate Vermont's Universal Developmental Screening (UDS) registry to create an effective communication tool for tracking and sharing developmental screening information.

Developmental screening is a public health strategy to improve child health outcomes. The registry provides a communication system that ensures all Vermont children's development is monitored over time and across settings. The registry enhances collaboration among health care providers, early educators and community service providers for earlier identification of developmental concerns.

Why is this important?

- Aligns community efforts to identify children with developmental and behavioral concerns and ensures timely follow-up and further evaluation
- Reduces screening duplication
- Informs policy and improves service provision in communities

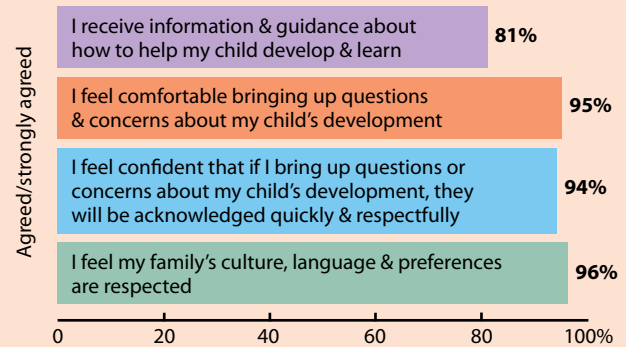
Strategies

- Train a cross-sector workforce to use the registry.
- Build relationships and capacity across early care and learning, health care, and education settings to optimize child development.

Key findings

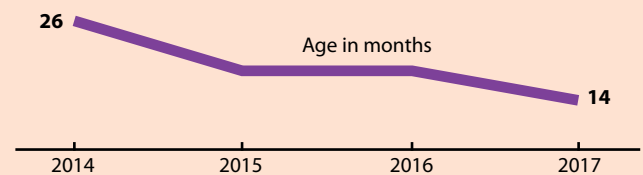
- To date, over 200 providers are using the developmental screening registry, including early care and learning, health care and community service providers, public school districts, and Head Start and Early Head Start programs.
- *Help Me Grow* supported a quality improvement training project for over 603 early care and learning providers and reached 5,270 children between 2014–2018. These providers surveyed 768 parents about their experience with the screening and the results are detailed in the following graph.

Family's experiences with early care & learning providers trained in developmental screening & monitoring



- The percentage of children screened in the first three years of life using a standardized screening tool increased from 48% in 2013 to 60% in 2017. These children are among the 65–70,000 who are attributed to primary care practices participating in the Vermont Blueprint for Health.
- Since launching *Help Me Grow* in 2014 we have made significant progress in identifying children with behavioral and developmental concerns and referring them for specialized services. In the past four years the trend line moved toward a significantly younger age of referral to early intervention.

Child age at referral to early intervention (IDEA Part C)



Goals for 2019

Help Me Grow Vermont is dedicated to ensuring that all children benefit from intentional, coordinated, early attention to their growth and development.

Next steps include:

- Build partnerships to strengthen the *Help Me Grow* system.
- Increase use of the registry among among early care and learning, health care, and community service providers.
- Standardize training on developmental monitoring and screening, including use of the registry, and referral and linkage to services, as a foundational component of the professional development system for all early care and learning providers.

The *Help Me Grow* system works to ensure that *all* children reach their greatest potential.

Optimizing the health and well-being of children is the thread that brings *Help Me Grow* partners together ... We all need to work together to ensure that children and families have what they need for a healthy start.

– TANYA LACHAPELLE

Pediatricians always like to be able to give something to their families in need. *Help Me Grow* is a gift ... It really expands my ability to provide families with connections to resources and/or services.

– JILL RINEHART, MD, FAAP

Help Me Grow will become the glue for community and stakeholder relationships; it will help people see themselves as part of a larger early childhood system that has many different interconnections.

– JULIE CADWALLADER STAUB



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