

IMPACT 2020 2021



Community

Support



Families



Introduction

Help Me Grow Vermont has continued to support Vermont families through the COVID-19 pandemic. This annual report represents work that was done from 2020-2021 encompassing two years of extraordinary disruption in our routines including a dramatic shift from in-person to remote school and work, social isolation, economic hardship for many and increased overall anxiety. This report differs from what we expected to see over the time period. It illustrates the pandemic's effect on key factors that influence the wellbeing of young children and families, and underscores *Help Me Grow's* agile response to the needs of Vermonters.



Key themes:

- Expanded the State's developmental screening system at a time when we might expect to see a decrease in screening due to pandemic precautions.
- Built strong community engagement to support families through an Act Early Response to COVID-19 grant opportunity.
- Leveraged policy changes that were made to help families through economic hardship like a moratorium on evictions, keeping utilities running when bills were not paid, and schools providing free meals to all children.





Community Outreach



Priority

Help Me Grow works with community partners to educate and strengthen families so all Vermont children can reach their full potential.

Help Me Grow's outreach activities engage families through interactive events and trainings that build supportive relationships and teach coping skills to counterbalance things like poverty, toxic stress, and trauma, which can negatively impact child wellbeing. The goal of this work is to help children develop resilience, which is the ability to bounce back when faced with adversity, and consequently improve family wellbeing.

Why is this Important?

- Outreach events bring communities together with early education professionals for social, play, learning, and screening opportunities.
- Activities promote children's social and emotional skills, which helps to better prepare them for kindergarten.



The *Help Me Grow* system is grounded in a framework called Strengthening Families, which uses evidence-based strategies to increase protective factors, enhance child development, and reduce 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 is lower, and children can adapt to adversity.

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





Strategies

- Provide training and activities that increase parents and caregiver's knowledge of early childhood development and encourage positive parenting.
- Create networking opportunities for families and professionals from different sectors to align efforts and better support children and families.



Key findings

Help Me Grow shifted to use virtual platforms and held 47 community outreach events during 2020 and 2021, reaching almost 38,000 families.

***Help Me Grow* trained 902 participants in the following topics:**

- Trauma-informed practices
- Social and emotional development
- Improved access to resources
- Preparing young children for school
- Equity, anti-racism, and gender inclusive teaching strategies

In 2020 and 2021, almost all families:

- Reported getting their needs met
- Indicated having a better understanding and ability to access services for self-and/or child
- Indicated having a better understanding of, and information about, their child's development





The *Help Me Grow* Resource Hub

Priority

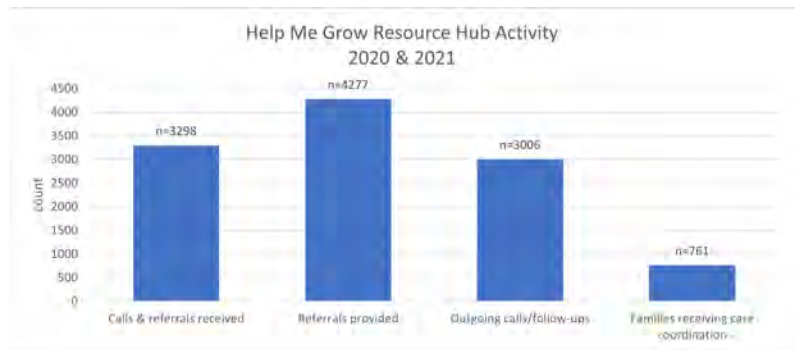
Help Me Grow has built a reliable resource hub so families and children from all communities in Vermont can access the services they need to thrive. To improve family wellbeing, *Help Me Grow* maintains an up-to-date database of available services, including quality learning opportunities, health care, nutrition and recreation, social opportunities, and specialized services.

Why is this important?

- The resource hub helps families and professionals navigate and connect to services through a centralized system.
- Child development specialists educate callers about developmental milestones and positive parenting.

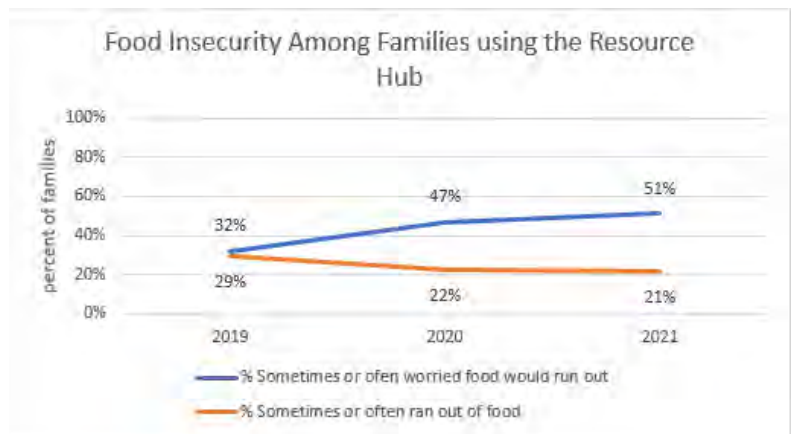
Strategies

- Build and maintain a comprehensive database including mental health services.
- Connect families to helpful resources and provide care coordination to ensure successful connection.
- Educate families about early child development.



Key Findings

- We saw significant activity with 3,298 incoming calls and referrals to *Help Me Grow* and staff provided 4,277 referrals to services.
- Referrals for perinatal mood and anxiety disorders (PMADs) increased when a new media campaign to raise awareness launched in 2020. *Help Me Grow* staff made over 230 referrals for 57 individuals in 2020 and 2021.



- All callers are screened for food security using the Hunger Vital Sign™ tool. The 2020-2021 screening results indicate an increased concern about food access, but a decrease in reports of families running out of food than in the previous year.





Developmental Screening

Priority

Help Me Grow promotes developmental screening to help families better understand their child's early development, celebrate milestones, and identify concerns so that young children get connected to the services they need at an early age when the benefit is greatest.

Help Me Grow engages families in completing developmental and behavioral screening tools to assess a child's development in four areas: communication, social and emotional skills, motor skills, and problem-solving skills. Screening helps parents identify their child's strengths and uncover areas that need support. Routine screening closes gaps in kindergarten readiness by helping to ensure all children develop social and emotional skills such as: getting along with others, persisting with tasks, following directions, and playing cooperatively.

Why is this important?

- Ensures all children have their developmental progress monitored through a coordinated, statewide system.
- Helps to close gaps in kindergarten readiness among children living in poverty.
- Promotes family wellbeing and positive outcomes even when children experience negative things, like poverty, violence and trauma.

Strategies

- Train health, education, and human service providers to conduct developmental monitoring and screening.
- Align screening efforts across settings to improve early identification, timely follow up and referral for further assessment and/or needed services.
- Increase use of *Help Me Grow's* Ages and Stages (ASQ) Online system, which will be integrated with Vermont's developmental screening registry, to improve communication and coordination among providers and reduce screening duplication.

² Hager, E. R., Quigg, A. M., Black, M. M., Coleman, S. M., Heeren, T., Rose-Jacobs, R., Cook, J. T., Ettinger de Cuba, S. E., Casey, P. H., Chilton, M., Cutts, D. B., Meyers A. F., Frank, D. A. (2010). Development and Validity of a 2-Item Screen to Identify Families at Risk for Food Insecurity. *Pediatrics*, 126(1), 26-32. doi:10.1542/peds.2009-3146.

³ 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).





Key Findings

- Between 2020 to 2021 *Help Me Grow* trained 423 health care and human service providers, early childhood educators, and others to conduct developmental and social/emotional screening and to refer families for further evaluation and services.
- Over 9,000 children are currently enrolled in childcare programs that have received *Help Me Grow* training. This includes well over 2,000 preschoolers that are better prepared to learn and succeed as they enter kindergarten. This is enough children to fill almost half of Vermont's kindergarten classrooms.



- The proportion of young children receiving at least one developmental screening in the first three years of life increased from 46.6% in 2015 to 57.5% in 2020.
- With the need for telehealth, tele-home visiting, and virtual classrooms during the pandemic, use of *Help Me Grow's* ASQ Online system increased exponentially. By the end of 2021, 6,260 developmental screenings had been completed online with over 778 focused on social-emotional development.

4 Our data source was the Vermont Health Care Uniform Reporting and Evaluation System (VHCURES), Vermont's all-payer medical claims database. VHCURES contained an estimated 90% of Vermonters' medical and pharmaceutical claims, from 2008 to 2016. Mid-2016, because of the Gobeille v. Liberty Mutual Insurance Company decision, VHCURES no longer included approximately half of all the individuals with Commercial Self-Pay insurance. Since mid-2016, VHCURES contained an estimated 75% of Vermonters' claims.

5 The analyses, conclusions, and recommendations from VHCURES data are solely those of the study authors and are not necessarily those of the Green Mountain Care Board (GMCB).





Goals for 2022

Next steps include:

- Support family wellbeing by offering community activities and events that help families learn about and nurture their child's development.
- Strengthen the resource hub database to include more mental health services.
- Raise awareness and increase use of the resource hub.
- Increase use of *Help Me Grow's* ASQ Online platform among health, education, and human service providers to ensure earlier identification of developmental concerns and increase kindergarten readiness.

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

One Connection Many Resources.

