



FY 2024-2025 Annual Report





OUR MISSION

To promote healthy development for every child in our state and for every child to receive routine developmental screenings

OUR VISION





For Florida to have a comprehensive system to support the optimal health, development, and well-being of all children in Florida

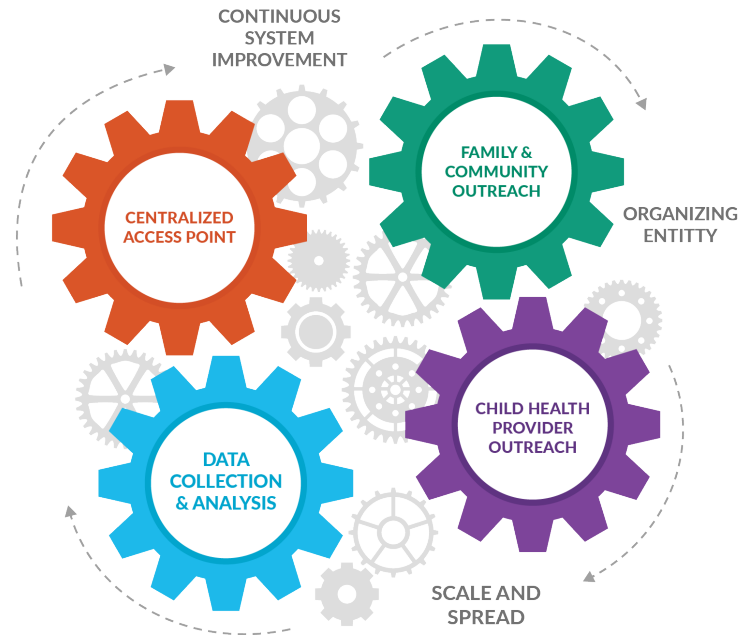
OUR VALUES

-  Building collaboration among community programs
-  Providing a centralized access point for information and referral
 -  Promoting surveillance and screenings
 -  Educating and informing the community

WHAT IS HELP ME GROW?

Help Me Grow® Florida (HMGF) is a coordinated system of support that empowers families with young children by providing information on child development, conducting developmental and behavioral screenings, connecting families to community-based services and supports, and offering parenting tips and activities that promote healthy development. HMGF is designed to support families and their children's healthy development through the implementation of four core components:

-  **Centralized Access Point** – offers care coordination and developmental information to families seeking support or guidance.
-  **Family & Community Outreach** - promotes awareness of HMGF to families and community partners.
-  **Child Healthcare Provider Outreach** - engages medical providers to collaborate with HMGF, enhancing the services available to their patients.
-  **Data Collection and Analysis** - informs evaluation efforts and drives continuous quality improvement across the system.



AUTHORITY & FUNDING



The Help Me Grow® Florida (HMGF) system is administered by the Children's Forum, Inc. and funded under contract #C1032 by the State of Florida, Division of Early Learning. For fiscal year 2024-2025, the Florida Legislature allocated \$1,808,957 recurring funds from the General Revenue Fund and \$2,691,043 nonrecurring funds from the Child Care and Development Block Grant Trust Fund to support the HMGF system. During this period, the HMGF State Coordinating Office maintained contracts with thirteen affiliate sites and had a memorandum of understanding with two additional affiliate sites that independently secured funding to implement HMGF within their service areas.

STATE COORDINATING OFFICE

The HMGF State Coordinating Office (SCO) is located at the Children's Forum, Inc. in Tallahassee, which serves as the central hub for the strategic leadership and coordination of the HMGF system across the state. The SCO is responsible for overseeing all administrative, programmatic, and fiscal activities, ensuring that affiliate sites implement the model with fidelity and consistency.

To support affiliates in their local efforts, the SCO provides comprehensive technical assistance, ongoing training, and professional development. It also manages statewide database systems, conducts data analysis, and uses findings to guide program evaluation and continuous improvement. In addition to operational oversight, the SCO leads all statewide marketing and outreach efforts. This includes the development and distribution of outreach materials and promotional campaigns to raise awareness of HMGF among families, healthcare providers, and community organizations.

The SCO also plays a key role in fostering collaboration across sectors by building and maintaining partnerships, encouraging shared learning, and supporting a strong statewide network of affiliates. Through these combined efforts, the SCO ensures that families throughout Florida have access to high-quality resources and support that promote healthy child development.

HELP ME GROW® FLORIDA Organizational Chart



Erin Smeltzer
President and CEO
Children's Forum



Denise Bishop
Executive Chief of Staff
Children's Forum



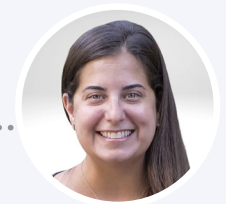
Liz Randall
Senior Director
Help Me Grow® Florida
Children's Forum



Ashley Houk
Data Coordinator
Help Me Grow® Florida
Children's Forum



Brenda Romuald
Program Coordinator
Help Me Grow® Florida
Children's Forum



Jacqueline Gilliam
Outreach Specialist
Help Me Grow® Florida
Children's Forum

HELP ME GROW TESTIMONIALS

THE MERRITT FAMILY

"I just could not believe how difficult it was to find help for our kids during such a critical time in their early learning development. Help Me Grow has been a bright light for two parents who felt completely lost in the dark trying to navigate a system that was falling short." - [The Merritt Family](#)



THANK YOU

"Thank you so much Ana for doing a great job at explaining the screening, also how thorough you were towards the next steps to take with my son. Speaking with you gave me a piece of mind that I was needing, I appreciate your professionalism so very much." - [a family assisted by Ana Roman, Care Coordinator, at Heart of Florida United Way](#)

"I'm so thankful for Help Me Grow Pinellas and their Books, Balls, and Blocks program! When I had concerns about my youngest son's development, they guided me to the right resources. With their help, we discovered he needed glasses, which made a huge difference. Thanks to their support, I'm filled with hope for his future!" - [the Rice Family helped by the Help Me Grow team at the Early Learning Coalition of Pinellas County](#)

PHYSICIAN CHAMPION

"Help Me Grow is a great, much needed program here in Bay and surrounding counties."

- [Dr. Allison Davis, M.D. F.A.A.P., Emerald Coast Pediatrics](#)



"Help Me Grow has been an institution that's been a great resource for the pediatric population. I really want to thank Help Me Grow for helping all of the children in my community." - [Dr. Miguel Pereira, MD, SuraMed Health Center](#)

OUR IMPACT

The early detection and intervention services provided through HMGF are critical for optimal outcomes for children.



5,046
new children served

56%

of children served did not attend an early learning program and might not have otherwise received supports

3,934

referrals to community services and programs made



4,670
new families served

4

average number of care coordination follow-ups per family

65%

of children reached were Medicaid enrollees helping to reduce future dependency

46

physician champions advocated for HMG across the state



149

community-based screening events to bring our services to families and community partners

90%

of children were successfully connected to at least one service



9,526
developmental and behavioral screenings completed



**Data does not include our locally funded affiliates, The Arc Gateway and Partnership for Strong Families, Inc.*

OUR AFFILIATES

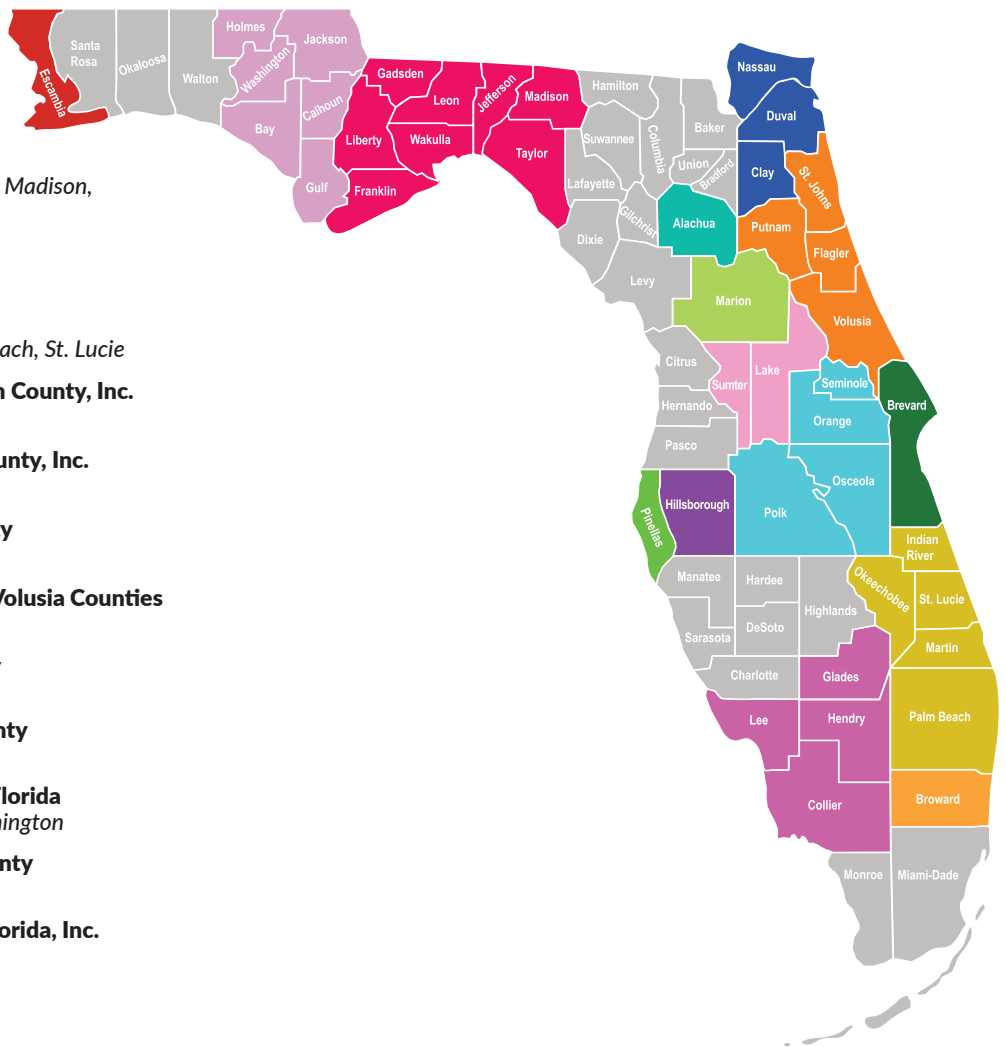
Local Help Me Grow® Florida (HMGF) affiliates play a vital role in the system by fostering collaboration across key sectors including early care and education, healthcare, and family support services. Their efforts ensure a coordinated, community-based approach to supporting families and young children.

Care coordinators embedded within each affiliate site provide personalized support by remaining in close contact with families until successful connections to appropriate services are made. This family-centered follow-through is a hallmark of the HMGF model and a key driver of positive outcomes.

In addition to direct family support, affiliates lead targeted outreach efforts at the local level. They engage with healthcare providers, early childhood educators, and community service agencies to raise awareness about HMGF, strengthen referral networks, and promote early identification and intervention. Together, these efforts help build a more responsive and integrated system of care.

FY2024-2025 Affiliates

-  **2-1-1 Big Bend**
Franklin, Gadsden, Jefferson, Leon, Liberty, Madison, Taylor, Wakulla
-  **2-1-1 Brevard**
Brevard
-  **2-1-1 Palm Beach/Treasure Coast**
Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee, Palm Beach, St. Lucie
-  **Early Childhood Council of Hillsborough County, Inc.**
Hillsborough
-  **Early Learning Coalition of Broward County, Inc.**
Broward
-  **Early Learning Coalition of Duval County**
Duval, Clay, Nassau
-  **Early Learning Coalition of Flagler and Volusia Counties**
Volusia, Flagler, Putnam, St. Johns
-  **Early Learning Coalition of Lake County**
Lake, Sumter
-  **Early Learning Coalition of Marion County**
Marion
-  **Early Learning Coalition of Northwest Florida**
Bay, Calhoun, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Washington
-  **Early Learning Coalition of Pinellas County**
Pinellas
-  **Healthy Start Coalition of Southwest Florida, Inc.**
Lee, Hendry, Glades, Collier
-  **Heart of Florida United Way**
Orange, Osceola, Seminole, Polk
-  **HMG Alachua at Partnership for Strong Families, Inc.; funded by the Children's Trust of Alachua County**
Alachua
-  **The Arc Gateway; funded by Escambia Children's Trust**
Escambia



BOOKS, BALLS, & BLOCKS EVENTS

Books, Balls, & Blocks!

Books, Balls, & Blocks (BBB) events are engaging, family-friendly community events designed to support early childhood development through play-based learning and developmental screenings. Offered at no cost to families, these events feature a variety of interactive stations where children participate in fun, age-appropriate activities that promote motor, cognitive, and social-emotional skills.

While children play, parents and caregivers complete a screening tool to help assess their child's developmental milestones. Afterward, a care coordinator meets one-on-one with the caregiver to review the results, answer questions, and offer guidance on any needed support or referrals to local services.

BBB events provide a welcoming and informative environment that empowers families, promotes early identification of developmental concerns, and connects children to resources that support their growth and success.



129

**Books, Balls, & Blocks
events were held**



2,346

**screenings were completed through
Books, Balls, & Blocks events**



**Data does not include our locally funded affiliates,
The Arc Gateway and Partnership for Strong Families, Inc.*

OUR ACTIVITIES

2025 Help Me Grow® Florida Annual Meeting

This year's annual meeting, held in Orlando from April 30th to May 1st, brought together staff from all fifteen of our affiliate sites for a meaningful gathering focused on collaboration, professional development, and the celebration of shared accomplishments. The event provided a valuable opportunity for affiliates to reconnect, exchange ideas, and strengthen the relationships that are foundational to our collective success.

The meeting began with an inspiring keynote by Cindy Krosky of Achieving Corporate Excellence, Inc., whose heartfelt message deeply resonated with attendees and set the tone for a thoughtful and connected experience. Katie White from the Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies introduced participants to *The A to Z's of Early Childhood*, a comprehensive resource designed to support early development and engagement. Robin Hart from The Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida delivered four impactful sessions that focused on motivational interviewing, strategies for engaging and re-engaging families, understanding risk factors related to child abuse and neglect, and building resilience during times of change. Her sessions provided attendees with actionable tools and insights to take back to their local communities.

The agenda also included two dedicated networking opportunities, giving staff time to connect informally and strengthen partnerships. In addition, each affiliate created a poster highlighting their site's structure and annual accomplishments. These posters were displayed throughout the meeting space, serving as a visual celebration of the dedication and innovation happening across the network.

SCO and Cindy Krosky, Keynote Speaker



Networking



Networking



Group photo



OUR ACTIVITIES

Storybook Garden at Children's Day

This year, we were proud to debut the new *Storybook Garden* during Children's Day at the Capitol, a sensory-friendly space designed as a quiet retreat for children with unique abilities. With generous sponsorship from Molina Healthcare, the garden offered a welcoming and inclusive environment that complemented the excitement of the day's events.

To ensure accessibility and inclusion, we provided sign language interpreters for both the ribbon-cutting ceremony and the reading area. The space also featured live music therapy sessions, which were especially popular with children and families alike.

We were thrilled to be joined by affiliate staff from The Arc Gateway, 2-1-1 Big Bend, and Early Learning Coalition of Flagler Volusia, whose support helped make the event a success. The *Storybook Garden* was made possible through the collaboration of many dedicated partners, including Positive Behavior Supports Corp., Healing Hearts Music Therapy, The Therapy Place, FSU Center for Autism and Related Disabilities, The Lucy Project, Florida Center for Reading Research, The Learning Pavilion, Rebound & Recovery, Leon County Schools, WFSU Public Media, Step Up For Students, and the Family Network on Disabilities.

Ribbon Cutting Ceremony



HMGF Booth

Help Me Grow National Forum

The State Coordinating Office participated in the virtual Help Me Grow National Forum held on December 10, 2024. Centered around the theme *Building and Sustaining Early Childhood Systems*, the forum provided a valuable platform for sharing strategies, innovations, and best practices from across the national network.

Florida was proudly represented through two featured presentations. Liz Randall, Senior Director, delivered a session titled *Florida's Structure and Strategic Goals*, highlighting our statewide coordination model and long-term vision. Ashley Houk, Data Coordinator, presented *Data Collection That Works*, offering practical insights into building effective and sustainable data systems to support continuous improvement.

OUR ACTIVITIES



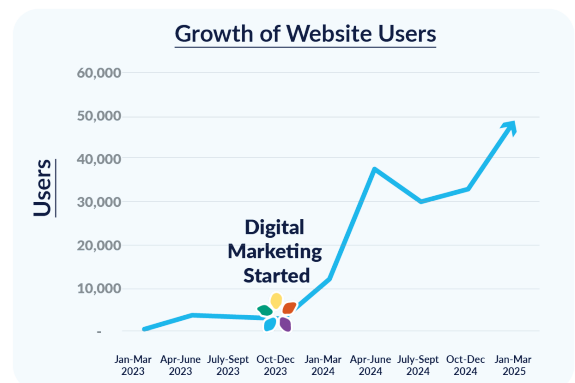
Expanding Awareness Through Strategic Digital Marketing

Help Me Grow® Florida (HMGF) continued its partnership with RB Oppenheim Associates to elevate statewide awareness and engagement through targeted digital marketing efforts. This year, the agency conducted a dedicated photoshoot featuring HMGF's core educational tools, including the growth chart, developmental wheel, and social-emotional booklet. The shoot also captured authentic moments of parents interacting with these resources like speaking with our care coordinators, navigating our website, and engaging in everyday parenting activities. Short video clips were developed to visually demonstrate how families benefit from Help Me Grow and to illustrate the ease and value of accessing our services.

The campaign strategy included geofencing, retargeting, Spotify audio ads, and streaming placements across all counties served by HMGF. RB Oppenheim Associates continued producing user-generated-style content in both English and Spanish.

These short, direct-to-camera videos are designed to quickly capture attention and connect emotionally with viewers. Another major focus was rural outreach, using customized messaging that positions Help Me Grow as approachable, relevant, and supportive to families in seventeen rural counties.

From January 2024 to May 2025, we observed a 15% increase in completed developmental screenings, a 328% increase in "Connect with a Care Coordinator" form submissions, and a remarkable 340% average growth in website users. These outcomes reflect the growing reach and impact of HMGF, driven by intentional storytelling, culturally responsive messaging, and a commitment to meeting families where they are.



OUR ACTIVITIES

Expanding Resources to Strengthen Engagement and Onboarding

Building on the success of last year's *Affiliate Toolkit*, we expanded our resource offerings this year by developing two additional toolkits: the *Partner Toolkit* and the *Physician Toolkit*. These new materials are designed to support organizations, service providers, and healthcare professionals in promoting and advocating for the Help Me Grow model within their communities.

Each toolkit includes practical, easy-to-use resources such as downloadable rack cards, social media graphics and captions, web banners, referral guidance, and frequently asked questions. These tools help ensure consistent messaging and make it easier for professionals to connect families with Help Me Grow services.

Additionally, we launched a *Welcome Packet* for new staff joining our affiliate sites. This packet provides a comprehensive introduction to Help Me Grow, details on how to connect with the State Coordinating Office, and a list of required and recommended training courses to ensure a smooth and informed onboarding experience.

These resources reflect our ongoing commitment to supporting affiliates, building strong community partnerships, and ensuring every staff member is equipped to deliver high-quality, coordinated care to families across Florida.

HMG National Affiliate Advisory Board

This year, Help Me Grow National established the Affiliate Advisory Board, and we are honored that Help Me Grow® Florida was invited to serve as a representative voice on this important leadership body. Our participation includes representatives from the State Coordinating Office, Early Learning Coalition of Lake County, and Early Learning Coalition of Flagler and Volusia Counties.

The Affiliate Advisory Board was created to serve as a standing body that represents the goals, needs, challenges, and perspectives of the National Affiliate Network. Its purpose is to ensure that affiliate voices are actively involved in shaping national priorities and advancing the Help Me Grow model.

Through this board, members contribute affiliate-level insights to inform key discussions with the National Center, collaborate on evaluating the effectiveness of the model, and explore innovative strategies to enhance its implementation and overall impact. We are proud to help elevate Florida's voice in this national dialogue and contribute to the continuous growth of the Help Me Grow system.



HMGF GOVERNING TEAM MEMBERS

Erin Smeltzer, MS - President and CEO
Children's Forum, Inc.

Denise Bishop, EdD - Executive Chief of Staff
Children's Forum, Inc.

Melissa Clements, PhD - Chief Strategy Officer
Children's Forum, Inc.

Andrea Ward - Child Care Resource and Referral Program Manager
Division of Early Learning/ Department of Education

Joanna Dyer - Child Care Resource and Referral, Family Engagement and Consumer Education Coordinator
Division of Early Learning/ Department of Education

Lesha Buchbinder - Executive Director
Early Learning Coalition of Lake County

Linda Hafner - Program Manager
Healthy Start Coalition of Southwest Florida, Inc.

Lisa Maddocks - Court Operations Consultant
Office of the State Courts Administrator

Lisette Levy - Early Learning Program Specialist
Division of Early Learning, Florida Department of Education

MaryAnn Bickerstaff - Children's Services Director
The Arc Gateway, Inc.

Sharon L'Herrou - President and CEO
2-1-1 Palm Beach/Treasure Coast

Rachel Ludwig - Vice President, Talent Development for the Future of Work
Florida Chamber Foundation

Rocio Velazquez - Vice President of Statewide Engagement
The Children's Movement of Florida



For more information and program data, please visit www.helpmegrowfl.org.



Sponsored by the Children's Forum and the State of Florida, Division of Early Learning.