

Preschool Development Grant Three Year Collaboration

November 18, 2025

Children's Cabinet Meeting

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Children's Cabinet Plan for Young Children: All Maine Children Enter Kindergarten Prepared to Succeed

Access



Increase access to affordable early care & education, preventive and early intervention services for young children and their families.

Quality



Raise the quality of our early care and education system and support families to access quality programming.

Workforce



Recruit, prepare and retain a diverse early childhood workforce.



Preschool Development Goal

January 1, 2023 – December 30, 2025

All Maine's children and their families will receive the services they need through an efficient, data-driven, and evidenced-based system to ensure that children enter Kindergarten prepared to succeed in the early elementary years.



Key Learnings and Takeaways from PDG

- Navigators and Cultural Brokers Play a Key Role in Helping Families Access Services
- Coordination and Collaboration Across ECE system is Needed at State and Local Level
- Sustainability of the Work and Collaboration Is On-going and Needed

Elevating Parent Voices Through Shared Space Cafés – Summer 2023



Key Themes from Conversations in Brunswick, Portland & Lewiston:

- ❖ Affordable and accessible child care and after school programming is hard to find in all communities.
- ❖ Parents with school age children raised concerns about lack of communication and miscommunication with school administrators and teachers as well as different cultural norms and expectations.
- ❖ Challenges accessing and understanding services and supports through DHHS, General Assistance, etc. Concerns about access to basic needs. Lack of transportation.

Partnership with Portland Empowered who recruited parent facilitators, translators and parent participants.

These conversations were led and facilitated by parents in their own languages with translators available for DHHS and GOPIF staff.

Parent Leadership Training – Spring 2024

Partnership with Portland Empowered and Educare:

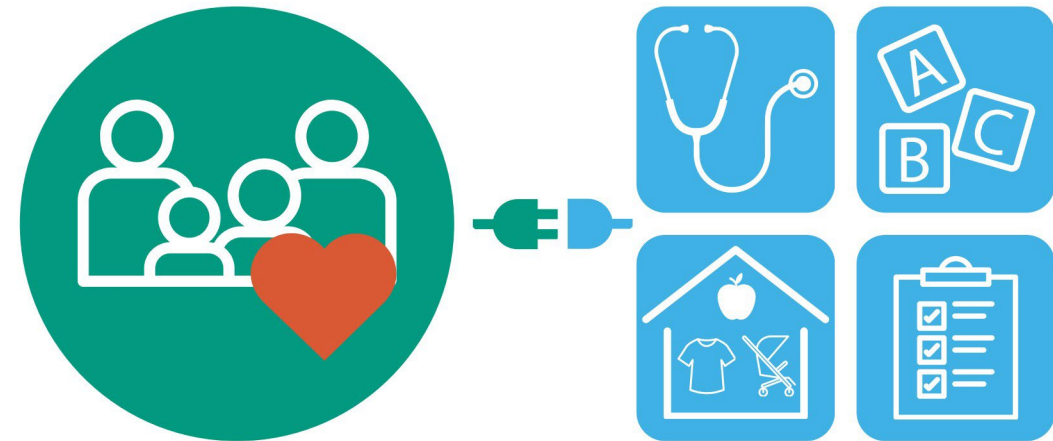
- Parent Leadership Training over a 6-week period in Portland.
- All 12 participants were all immigrant mothers with young children.
- Supported by parent leaders, many of whom were former Parent Ambassadors or Portland Empowered Leaders.



- Presentations and discussions to develop leadership skills, understanding of child development milestones and early childhood programs.
- Participants led community workshops following the trainings on public programs and benefits.
- Tremendous learnings regarding concerns and needs of families. Much of the discussion revolved around child welfare, developmental screenings and early intervention services.

Throughout the State of Maine,
there is an **existing grid of resources**
that works to keep children healthy.

Help Me Grow Maine is a way
for all families of children birth to eight,
as well as expecting parents, to reach out
and be linked with information,
resources, and connections
to the already-existing services in Maine.

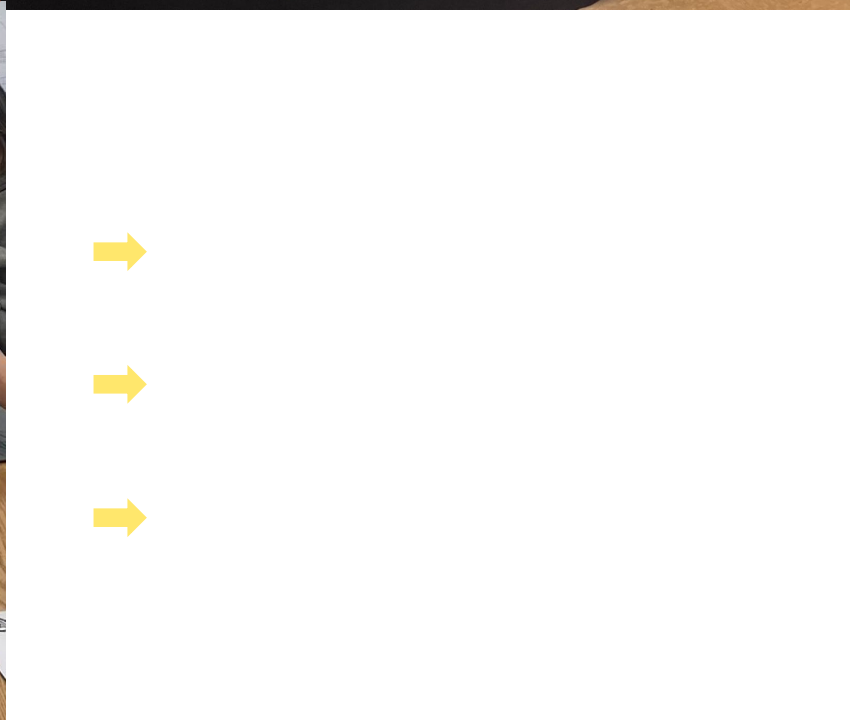




Help Me Grow Maine
is a **free resource** that connects families
with children up to 8 years of age,
as well as expecting parents,
with **information and services**
related to child development
and other family needs.



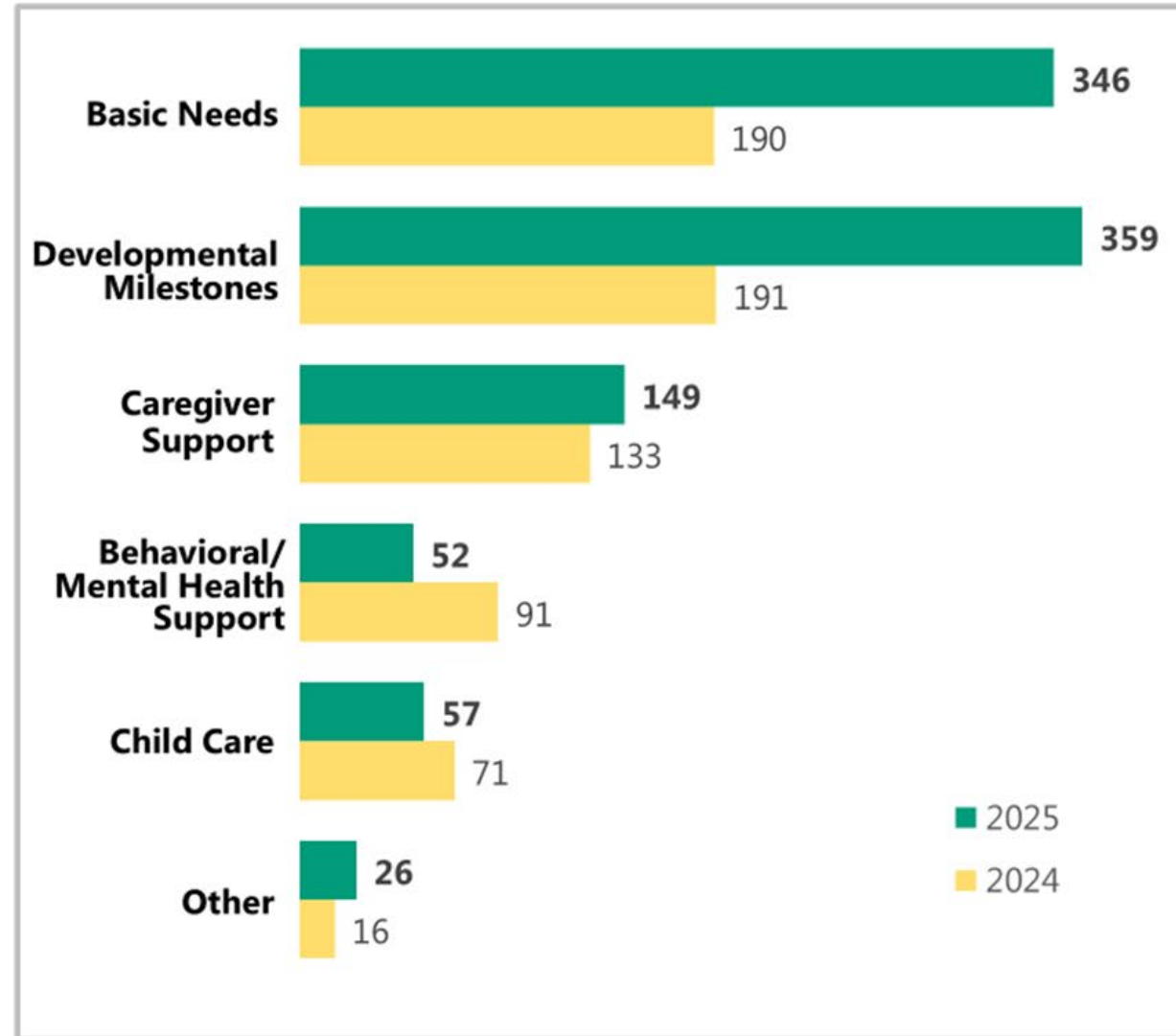

2,359 children
were served by Help Me Grow Maine
over the past three years.





The most common **reasons for contacting** Help Me Grow have changed over time

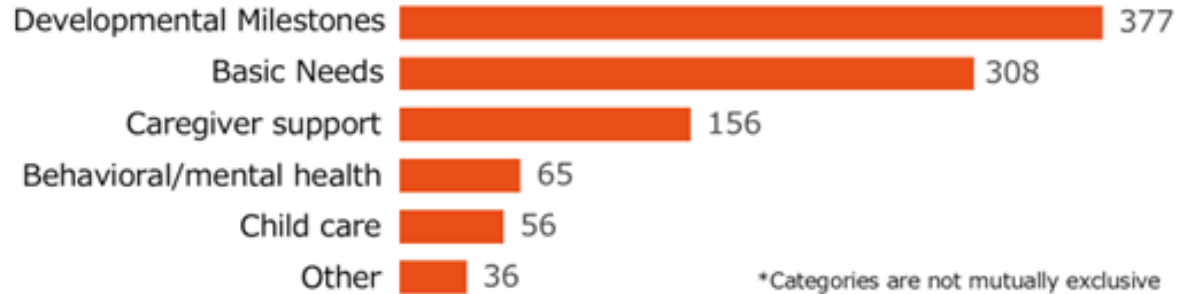
- **Basic Needs** and **Developmental Milestones** rose sharply in 2025, compared to the same timeframe in 2024.
- The need for **Caregiver Support** grew modestly, while the reported need for **Behavioral/Mental Health Support** and **Childcare** declined.



*Categories are not mutually exclusive



Number of HMG Cases by Concern*



Resources Provided

1,604

total
resources
provided

470

different
resources
provided

6 resources
represented
32% of all
resources
provided

Resource	Count
Car seats	202
CAP agencies	74
DHHS	67
Child Development Services	60
Educational Advocacy	56
Case Management	51



Developmental Screenings

569

total developmental screenings
(among 326 unique children)

ASQ -3

- ▶ 323 screens
- ▶ 51% screens indicated a concern/need for monitoring

ASQ:SE-2

- ▶ 246 screens
- ▶ 32% screens indicated a concern/need for monitoring



Connections



80%
connected

For the 351 Help Me Grow intake cases that have closed in FY25 and have known outcomes, **80% of families have been connected to at least one service** with the support of a Help Me Grow Family Support Specialist.



Barriers

35 cases
experienced
barriers
(4% of all cases)

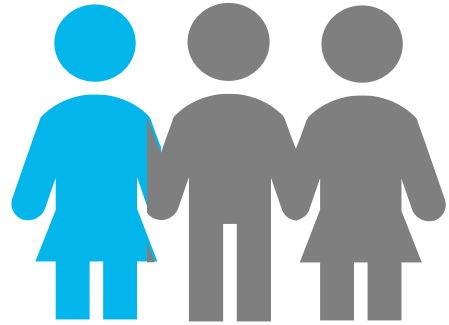
- ▶ 57% of cases with barriers were connected to at least one service
- ▶ Top barriers were eligibility, language barriers, and waitlists



Outreach

- ▶ **150 car seats** have been distributed by Help Me Grow Maine.
- ▶ HMG Maine is partnering with HealthReach to provide training to all Federally Qualified Health Centers, ensuring staff are informed and up to date about the Ages and Stages Questionnaires®

Who is Help Me Grow Maine reaching?



In nearly 1 in 3 of Help Me Grow Maine cases, the primary home language was a language other than English for cases with available language data in 2024 (n=738).

Language	# served	% of Total (n=738)
English	504	68%
Lingala	114	15%
French	32	4%
Portuguese	30	4%
Spanish	16	2%
Kinyarwanda	12	2%
Arabic	<10	<1%
Swahili	<10	<1%
Other	25	3%

How does Help Me Grow Maine engage partners?

In 2024, Help Me Grow Maine convened **Maine's Community Leader Taskforce**. This taskforce, led by a System Navigator/FSS for Help Me Grow Maine, aims to bridge communication gaps, minimize misunderstandings, and enhance support for New Mainers, particularly during the prenatal and birth stages. By connecting immigrant communities with service providers, the taskforce seeks to improve overall experiences and outcomes for these communities.



The taskforce identified ethnic community-based leaders with historical and emotional bonds. It has **20 representatives**, including trusted leaders, agency CEOs, presidents of communities, school cultural brokers, and medical cultural brokers.

Taskforce representatives are from various ethnic groups from Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, Congo Kinshasa, Eritrea, Gabon, Iraq, Latino communities, Mauritania, Rwanda, Somalia, and South Sudan.

The Community Leader Taskforce has created [informational videos](#) explaining topics of prenatal care, postnatal care, and child development (available in **10 languages**). The taskforce also worked with providers and social services on the most effective outreach locations and channels of communication.



Grants to Community Based Organizations



Grants to Four Community Based Organizations with funding from Preschool Development Grant

Lewiston area

- Maine Community Integration
- New Mainers Public Health Initiative

Greater Portland Area

- Greater Portland Community Health Clinic

York County – Sanford/Biddeford

- York County Community Action Agency

Key Takeaways and Learnings

- Cultural brokers are critical for helping to breakdown cultural and language barriers.
- There are a variety of trusted partners at the community level:
 - Staff at Ethnic Community Based Organizations
 - Community Leaders (there is overlap in these two)
 - Community Health Workers and Cultural Brokers at community organizations
- New Mainer communities are diverse.
- Miscommunication and cultural barriers can lead to significant obstacles for New Mainer families. Programs need to continue to work to culturally competent and sensitive.
- Cultural brokers are important partners for state agencies as well as families.

ECE Mixed Delivery System

- **Multiple state agencies working on coordinating and aligning programming and policies for young children and their families.**
 - **DHHS:** Commissioner's Office, Office of Child and Family Services, Maine CDC
 - **DOE:** Early Learning Team, Child Development Services, Office of Special Services and Inclusive Education
- **Strengthening the Mixed Delivery System:**
 - Maine's Early Childhood Education mixed delivery system includes multiple entities providing care and education to children birth to age 5.
 - Head Start, Child Care Programs (family and center-based), Elementary Schools (Public Pre-K and Special Education Services), Child Development Services



Aligning ECE System and Early Elementary Years



PDG ECE Mixed Delivery Systems Initiatives:

- Expanding public pre-K through pilot projects to test new designs that will increase access to public Pre-K through partnership models
 - Pre-K advisory group
- Leading Early Learning to increase knowledge of early childhood development and programming for School Administrators.
- Joint professional development for ECE and elementary school teachers including inclusionary practices, adverse childhood experiences/positive childhood experiences, regulated classroom, AIM K-3 Literacy Modules and Emergent Literacy Modules (Pre-K to K).

Aligning ECE System and Early Elementary Years

Aligned Standards and Instructional Program Development

- Revising Maine's Early Learning and Developmental Standards to align with the Infant Toddler MELDS and Maine Learning Results. Developing standards aligned, interdisciplinary instructional programs for Pre-K through grade 2.

Improving Transitions into Public Schools:

- On-going work to build materials for schools and communities to support transitions. Improved website and modules for early elementary educators and community partners.

Development of a Kindergarten Inventory:

- Support kindergarten teachers to understand the needs of incoming kindergarten students and measure kindergarten readiness through the development of a kindergarten inventory informed by Maine teachers.

- **Limestone and Caswell:** The First 10 team is leaning into the existing culture of these events to share resources, provide caregiver education through The Basics parenting campaign, hosting playful learning opportunities at events, and providing grab and go bags to support development and learning at home.
- **RSU 71 (Greater Belfast):** Joint professional development has supported educators to implement strategies to shift their approach to challenging behaviors, engaging families and supporting access to comprehensive services.
- **Sanford:** Joint professional development and building of relationships between child care and early elementary school teachers. Led to focus on smoothing transitions into kindergarten for families. Play and Learns continue to grow in participation of families with young children. Families are using the online resource guide (over 800 unique visitors).
- **MSAD 54 (Skowhegan):** Play & Learns are growing and efforts to support transitions into pre-k and kindergarten have already begun in three elementary schools for the 2026/27 school year.
- **Wiscasset:** A new First 10 Hub at the central office, which adjoins a community playground, serves as a family resource center and a space for Play & Learns. The First 10 coordinator also offers weekly “Office Hours” when families can visit for free play and to access any needed resources.
- **Cape Cod Elementary School (New Sharon):** The First 10 team partnered with the library to sponsor a table at the Farmington Fair to reach families. The table included playful activities and the First 10 coordinator talked with families, shared information on The Basics, and was able to provide resources families needed. Over just one week, the team interacted with over 150 families.

Key Learnings from Collaborative Work



- DHHS and DOE are serving a lot of the same families and working with organizations that do the same.
- State agencies must lead in modeling partnerships
- Relationships are critical to successful collaborations
- Important to understand each other's initiatives and work as well as roles and responsibilities
- Celebrating the small victories is important.

On-going Collaboration and Coordination

Cross agency collaboration will continue at the state level:

- Children's Cabinet staff (regular meetings)
- Mixed delivery group (Early Learning Team, OSSIE, Early Care and Education Division at OCFS)
- Statewide early childhood meetings (twice per year with PDG funding)
- Early Childhood Children's Cabinet Advisory Council
- Family Engagement Efforts Across DHHS and DOE
- Whole Student & Community Collaborative
- All of these efforts will focus on support for local and regional work