

The Stepan Family Story

A child's early years often bring wonder and excitement for families! Children grow and change rapidly from birth to kindergarten entrance, and are learning every day.

Some babies and young children need extra help to learn and grow.

As parents watch their child grow and develop, they might notice when their child smiles, rolls over, sits up, walks, plays, coos, cries and talks. While all young children grow and change at their own rate, some children experience delays in their development. Special health conditions may affect children's development also. Because parents know their child best, they may be the first to notice that their child is developing differently than other babies or young children.

When Jennifer Stepan of Victoria was pregnant, she was on bed rest at 26 weeks and had complications with the medications. At 38 weeks, Jennifer went through a fast delivery and delivered Kyle with a normal Apgar score. Before her son Kyle was released from the hospital, he stopped breathing while he was being fed and his oxygen levels were low.

The Stepan family brought Kyle home and he was only there for 45 minutes before he was brought to the ER and the pediatric nursery for a week. After undergoing swallow studies, x-rays and lab work, it was determined that Kyle needed reflux medicine and needed to coordinate the suck, swallow and breathe techniques.

Jennifer Stepan became connected with Help Me Grow Carver County (previously known as First Step) when Kyle was 4 months old. Kyle was enrolled in the Follow Along program and Jennifer noticed he was not fulfilling the developmental milestones. Help Me Grow and early intervention helped the Stepan family by meeting with them at home, giving suggestions and finding the positives. Jennifer Stepan said, "We were constantly learning what to do. The intervention personnel give you extra information, little things to problem solve and help you celebrate achievements. They are lifesavers and amazing. They re-affirm that it's okay to go with the mom instinct to ask everyone, not only pediatricians, if you suspect anything out of the norm for your child. Fill out the Ages and Stages questionnaires. If you aren't an advocate for your kids, they won't get what they need. Don't be afraid to get help now and you will be better off in the long run!"

Free help is available

Minnesota children from birth to five years old, who are eligible for Help Me Grow, can receive services in their home, child care setting or preschool. These services are free to eligible families regardless of income or immigrant status.

Assistance from experts

Early childhood specialists will work with eligible children and families to plan the services and supports they need. These may include: special instruction and other services, including speech, physical and occupational therapy; ways that a family can support their child's development at home; and connections to community services and programs. Early childhood specialists can help find other community resources and early childhood programs for those children not eligible for Help Me Grow.

Visit www.MNParentsKnow.info for more information about how young children develop plus ideas to help your child learn and grow.

Call 952-368-0160 in Carver County or 1-866-693-4769 statewide if you have questions or concerns about your child's development. Families interested in enrolling their child in the Follow Along program can call Carver County Public Health at 952-361-1329.