

THEIR VOICE

## Their Voice: Understanding early intervention programs in Utah Valley

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Brenda Winegar and Karen Hahne probably didn't set out to change the world, but in 1983, they did just that. Each a mother of a young child with a developmental disability, they were looking for resources that would help them create an environment to help their children be successful.

What resulted was far beyond what either expected -- the creation of "Kids on the Move Early Intervention."

Winegar recalled, "It was about potential, determination, experience and the willpower to build something that seemed impossible. It was also about heavenly help when we became discouraged."

Some of that help came from other parents in the same situation, grants from USU, help from Provo School District and many others.

Kristen Mancuso, Executive Director of RISE Early Intervention in Arizona, explains that Early Intervention is part of the federal "Individual's with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)" Part C.

"Part C covers children from birth to three," she said. "The time before a child turns three is the critical time for their development." Mancuso's program in Arizona works with over 400 children under Part C.

In Utah County there are three Early Intervention programs including "Kids on the Move" working with children in the Alpine School District, "Provo Early Intervention (Easter Seals)" serving the Provo School District and "Kids Who Count," supporting children in Nebo School District.

Mancuso and Kelsey Lewis, MSW, and Executive Director of Kids Who Count in Salem emphasize that Early Intervention is not a drop-off program. Instead, as a special education program for infants and toddlers, Early Intervention is conducted in the child's natural environment, their home.

"In the home, we are not only teaching the child but also the parent. We know that learning takes place in everyday activities. We teach the parents how to look for opportunities in the daily routines that they can use to teach a variety of skills," Lewis said. "This process not only teaches the child but also helps the entire family build the capacity to be as functional as possible."

When asked how children get into Early Intervention, Lewis said, "In some cases, medical providers will refer immediately if the child is diagnosed with a condition that impairs or will

impair their development. Others are diagnosed later when it is noted that they are not meeting their developmental milestones.”

Sometimes it is the parents who first recognize those delays in their children and are not aware of the resources available to them.

“It is expensive to get a diagnosis and many parents can’t afford it,” Lewis said. “They should know that they can contact the Family Support and Treatment Center in Orem. This resource, founded by Karen Fairchild, LCSW, works on a sliding scale determined by the families resources.”

Further emphasizing the value of Early Intervention, Mancuso said, “With Early Intervention, there is faster progress. Children meet their milestones sooner and there is less delay.”

Lewis added that “Early Intervention is not meant to label children with disabilities or delays. Getting help early sets them up for success long term.”

Lewis also mentioned two other valuable programs in Utah County: Baby Watch Early Intervention ([www.utahbabywatch.org](http://www.utahbabywatch.org)) — a division of the Department of Human Services and oversees all Early Intervention programs in Utah — and United Way "Help Me Grow" ([www.helpmegrowutah.org](http://www.helpmegrowutah.org)).

“They have all information on parenting and early child development,” she said. “They can also provide screening and monitoring through the process.”

Winegar remembers being told that parents can’t build a program.

“We had more faith than money. We just believed that if we built it, they would come,” Winegar said.

It turns out she was right, they did come and they continue to come. They are fortunate because now when they come they have a variety of resources and caring professionals like Lewis, Mancuso and countless others who have made it their business to provide them with the support they need to succeed.

“Kids Who Count” is located in Salem and can be reached at (801)423-3000. “Provo Early Intervention-Easter Seals” is located in Provo and can be reached at (801) 852-4525. “Kids on the Move” is located in Orem and can be reached at (801) 221-9930.