



SLO County Help Me Grow is a county-wide system that supports children and their families by providing free developmental screenings and linkages with community services to promote healthy growth and development for all children from birth to age five. Help Me Grow brings together families, pediatricians, early care and education, and human service providers to ensure that San Luis Obispo County's children reach their optimal potential.

APRIL'S HERO

Elena Chavez,
*Early Childhood Family Advocate, The Link
Family Resource Center*

Elena Chavez is a champion for children, dedicating her life to strengthening families by helping them build resiliency— protective factors in their lives that are of added importance during the pandemic.

As a bilingual Early Childhood Family Advocate for The Link Family Resource Center in Paso Robles/North County, Elena helps pregnant moms, new parents, and families with young children to get connected with community support services. This often means addressing and overcoming challenges and barriers to receiving assistance. Elena closely assists her families with agency referrals, program information, case management, parent education, translation/interpretation, home health visits, and basic needs like housing, food, clothing, and essential baby items. Social workers at Twin Cities Hospital frequently call on Elena to lend support when Spanish- and Mixtec-speaking mothers are being discharged with their newborns.

Elena's whole heart is in her work. It started as a young child when, having spent her early years in Mexico, Elena says she and her father loaded a truck full of donations for a local orphanage so that the infants and children there would have proper food and nutrition. After moving to California, a teenage Elena volunteered her time at a convalescent hospital— later becoming its Activities Director and an advocate for those who could not help themselves.

Elena's impact extends even further. Prior to joining The Link, Elena was a Family Advocate for the Paso Robles Joint

Unified School District and, before that, she was an aide in rehabilitating incarcerated clients. She tells the story of one man who once asked her, "Hey Teach, why don't you go out and help people like me to prevent them from coming in here?" That comment changed Elena's trajectory— leading her into the early childhood arena, where she is now focused on putting little ones on the path to be successful in school and life. This includes empowering homeless families/ children and working with local churches and private donors to gather Thanksgiving meals for Link families. She also takes a similar approach to ensure that more than 100 kiddos receive wrapped gifts for Christmas each year.

In Elena's words, "If we help give families the power to change their situation, their children will strive for a better life." Well, Elena, we absolutely agree. That's why no one is more fitting than you to represent "April 2021: Month of the Child & Child Abuse Prevention Month."

**Thank you, Elena.
You are a true Hands-On Hero.**



"Hands-on Heroes is a recognition program, coordinated with partner agencies, that honors individuals making a difference in the lives of young children and families. The year 2021 highlights Heroes in working in child growth and development. To learn more about "Help Me Grow" and "Hands-on Heroes," please visit slohelpmegrow.org and first5slo.org.