



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.

MARCH'S HERO

Sheri Mortola,
*OTR/L, SWC Pediatric Occupational
Therapist/Feeding Therapist*

Sheri Mortola is a champion for children, helping them develop the skills needed to be as independent as possible to perform purposeful activities that make up everyday life.

For 30+ years, Sheri has worked as a pediatric occupational therapist alongside families with little ones— particularly those who require special assistance in feeding and swallowing. For babies born prematurely, of a difficult birth, or with underlying health issues, it is paramount to discern red flags that could hinder basic nutrition— a fundamental building block for children to thrive. Sheri believes strongly in child-centered care that cultivates functional skills. This includes improving strength, grasp and coordination of hand movements for play and self-feeding; building mouth muscle control for safe eating; and fine motor, feeding and sensory skills to eat within the social context of an early learning setting or at the family table.

Sheri provides occupational and feeding therapy to infants and young children in a variety of capacities: at an out-patient clinic through the Public Health Department (California Children's Services), in homes as a Feeding Therapist through Tri-Counties Regional Center (Early Start), in the High-Risk Infant Development Clinic at Sierra Vista Regional Medical Center, and in private practice (Eat Play Grow Slo).

Like many others, Sheri's work has become more complex due to COVID; however, she says the challenge has brought new insight and opportunity. Being online with families as they are in their homes and holding sessions at the actual time activities are taking place (eating breakfast, getting ready for the day, playing in the backyard) has opened new windows to building skills.

Colleagues say Sheri leaves no stone unturned in her work; she truly listens to parents and believes they know their children best. By meeting kids and families where they are, Sheri is able to empower them with the right tools to succeed. This is Sheri's greatest reward. She is humbled by the strength of her families and realizes that the earlier we identify children with needs and connect them to services that can help— the better path we set them on to meeting their full potential!

**Thank you, Sheri.
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.