



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.

OCTOBER'S HERO

Sharlene Agrusa
Director, Parents Helping Parents

Sharlene Agrusa is a Champion for Children, offering help, hope and heartfelt insight to families with children facing extra challenges in life.

For nearly three decades, Sharlene has worked with Parents Helping Parents (PHP), a local agency that provides information, referrals, training, mutual support and outreach for families of children with special needs. The team at PHP strives to give parents a sense of ease and empowerment—over fear—after they learn of a diagnosis and find themselves having to navigate often-complex and confusing systems of care. *This* is where Sharlene absolutely shines; it's a road that is very real for her.

Soon after Sharlene's second daughter was born, Sharlene noticed signs that her little girl was not developing at the typical rate for other children her age. Naturally, Sharlene was concerned, and sought out assessments and services from medical professionals. While doing so, she also received enormous encouragement from other parents raising little ones with similar needs. Sharlene's personal involvement with PHP evolved into a professional path. Now, her life's work includes helping parents process their worries and find valuable resources while sharing advice, experiences, and milestone moments.

After all these years, Sharlene's connections with some parents have turned into lifelong friendships. Such is the case for Jenell Allen and her husband Josh, who met Sharlene after moving to the area seeking support for their oldest daughter. To know Sharlene, the Allens say, is to know the true meaning of steadfast positivity, benevolence, gentleness and understanding. It was Sharlene's guidance and expertise that helped Jenell and Sarah Sullivan, founders of the group Parents for Joy, to establish *Joy Playground*, a universal-access play space in Atascadero that opened in April of 2019.

It's no surprise that Sharlene says her greatest reward is seeing parents grow along the journey and find their way from grief to joy—embracing support, building relationships, and learning from each other. She wants the community to know that tools and support are available: for more information on Parents Helping Parents, visit <http://www.phpslo.org/>.

**Thank you, Sharlene.
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 working in child growth and development. To learn more about "Help Me Grow" and "Hands-on Heroes," please visit slohelpmegrow.org and first5slo.org.