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Sharon Keeler

*UNH Media Relations*

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## **UNH's Institute on Disability Awarded \$720,000 Federal Grant To Help Identify Young Children Who Need Support**

By [Sharon Keeler](#)  
UNH News Bureau

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DURHAM, N.H. -- The U.S. Department of Education has awarded the Institute on Disability at the University of New Hampshire a \$720,000 grant to assist state and local communities in identifying young children and their families eligible for early intervention and support services. Only four state universities were chosen for the competitive grant, the others being the universities of Connecticut, Colorado and Montana.

Called "The Early Connections Project," the new program is a four-year collaboration among key agencies and individuals concerned with young children and their families, including the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services' Family-Centered Early Supports and Services, Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center, UNH, parents and local agency providers.

Its aim is to locate children from birth through 3 years of age and their families who can benefit from support services like physical therapy, information and referral, and nutritional counseling. Some of these children may have established conditions, such as cerebral palsy or Down syndrome. Others may have developmental disabilities, like motor skill delays or hearing impairment, while others may be at risk due to such factors as poverty or premature birth.

"This project falls into a service area we refer to as 'child find,'" says Debra Nelson, project director at the Institute on Disability. "Basically, we're looking to find kids who may not be getting the services they need to reach their full potential."

According to Nelson, "child find teams" will be established in six regions throughout the state. Their efforts will be further supported by an additional \$20,000 per year from the N.H. Division of Mental Health and Developmental Services. These teams will be comprised of health care professionals, parents and teachers. Littleton/Berlin, Dover and Portsmouth are the first three regions targeted by the Early Connection Project.

"We're pulling together people in the local communities and at the state level who are normally involved in screening and outreach," says Nelson. "We want to find out what is working, what is not and what are the barriers. Then we will create solutions."

Early Connection will also include a statewide policy and practice review committee, which will promote the coordination of efforts and resources among these state agencies and organizations engaged in child find activities.

For information about the Early Connections project, contact Debra Nelson at the Institute on Disability/UAP, University of New Hampshire, 7 Leavitt Lane, Suite 101, Durham, NH, 03824-3522, or call 603-862-0560.

*September 27, 1999*

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