

Threshold checks youngsters' development

By FELICIA THOMAS-LYNN

Posted: Jan. 2, 2010



Kristyna Wentz-Graff

The Weissenburger family includes (clockwise, starting top left) Jeff Winzenried, 27, mother Dawn, Hattie, 3, father Andrew, Ladina, 6, Jeremiah, 5, Brittany, 19, Sophia, 2, Bo, 15, and Gavin, 16 months.

The Threshold Inc.

- **Mission:** To create opportunities for individuals with disabilities to live fulfilling lives.
- **Address:** 600 Rolfs Ave., West Bend, WI 53090
- **Phone:** (262) 338-4430
- **Web site:** www.thresholdinc.org

Dawn Weissenburger couldn't quite put her finger on it, but her adopted daughter seemed to be missing one developmental milestone after another.

At 8 months old, her new daughter, Sophia, wasn't rolling over, sitting up or crawling.

"Because of my experience with my other children, I just knew as a mom that something wasn't right," said Weissenburger, of West Bend. "I was very concerned."

She took those concerns to Threshold Inc.

For nearly 50 years, the nonprofit organization has been the go-to place in Washington County for parents and physicians alike who believe a child, birth to age 3, may not be progressing at the same rate as other children their age.

Sometimes it's a case of a child developing at his or her own pace and only slightly or temporarily lagging behind, and there is no need to worry, said Michael Hoffman, the agency's director of early intervention services.

Other times, he said, it could point to a more significant issue that requires intervention.

"If caught early enough, some delays can be reversed. It is so much easier to address delays at a younger age than an older age," Hoffman said. "If you have a child that is not rolling, it could lead to them not sitting or crawling, and perhaps not walking."

Unlike Weissenburger, he said, few families are aware of the agency's services, which do not require a referral from medical personnel.

"A family member or even a neighbor can call," he said. "Anyone who is concerned about a child can refer."

The early intervention program is one of a wide spectrum of services the agency offers for people with cognitive, mental or physical disabilities, including vocational and employment services, adult day and senior services, recreational opportunities and respite care.

In recent years, the agency has expanded to serve those in Ozaukee, Fond du Lac and Milwaukee counties, particularly through its traumatic brain injury program.

"The majority of the clients are individuals who have been involved in car accidents with closed head injuries," said Thomas Bergerud, the agency's executive director.

He said the program, which now has 20 clients, is designed to meet the short- and long-term needs of those being released from a sub-acute brain injury setting and helps them relearn skills, as well as new techniques to effectively manage their lives as independently as possible.

The agency's Birth to 3 program, one of its oldest, serves up to 350 children a year by providing in-home evaluations in various development areas including gross and fine motor skills, language and social skills, as well as sensory and thinking skills.

"We see a lot of kids who are developing normally in all areas but one," said Hoffman, adding that the program serves only those children who have at least a 25% delay or more.

Children receive care in their natural environment, whether at home or a day care center, which allows parents and caregivers to participate more actively in the interventions, he said. Services include occupational, physical and speech therapy.

For Sophia Weissenburger, the early intervention made a huge difference, said Dawn Weissenburger. She and her husband, Andrew, adopted Sophia and four other children who were once in the foster care system.

"Soon after therapy began, Sophia began to crawl and she is now walking," Dawn Weissenburger said. "She has thrived unbelievably through the program. They are wonderful people."