

00:00:14;28 A beautiful baby boy,
00:00:16;17 was born early and had an extensive
00:00:21;28 stay in a neonatal intensive care unit,
00:00:23;22 or NICU.
00:00:27;00 When his parents were finally
00:00:31;03 able to bring their little one home,
00:00:35;16 they were relieved but also
00:00:39;05 overwhelmed by the idea of having to care
00:00:44;02 for their child without highly
00:00:48;13 skilled medical staff nearby.
00:00:50;19 Because, you see, while
00:00:54;03 he had no diagnosed condition,
00:00:57;04 he'd spent so much time in the NICU
00:01:03;01 that he wasn't able to build a resilience
00:01:07;11 or tolerance for the outside
00:01:11;18 world and all that it demands.
00:01:16;28 Essential developmental milestones,
00:01:20;04 like laying on his tummy
00:01:23;04 for extended periods of time
00:01:27;27 to build his muscular
00:01:30;09 strength and stability,
00:01:32;10 reaching for a pacifier or bringing
00:01:35;09 his hands to his mouth to soothe himself,
studying a colorful mobile overhead,
noticing its patterns and shapes.
Or even just alerting without fear
to sounds like the doorbell ringing
or the dog barking. These are all
critical skills that build one on top
of the other into lifelong capabilities.
Facets of a home and family life.
So he was home, but he was crying
a lot and he wasn't trying to roll over
or help sit up or hold his bottle.
And he also wasn't responding consistently
to important things
like his mother's voice.
His parents knew
something wasn't quite right,

00:01:38;13 so they asked their pediatrician for help.
00:01:40;25 And help came.
00:01:43;00 It came in the form
of an early interventionist coming
00:01:46;18 to their home once a week
to work with them on simple
00:01:50;07 but consistent strategies that help
support their child and his development.
00:01:55;06 She sat with them on the floor every week,
00:01:57;18 and she watched as they interacted
together as a family.
00:02:01;06 She listened as they shared their worries,
00:02:04;15 their fears and what they wanted most
for their little one.
00:02:08;10 She helped them think about what small,
00:02:10;18 actionable steps they could take looking
00:02:13;05 to things like developmental milestones,
their genetic and health history,
00:02:18;00 and their nearby resources.
00:02:20;11 She asked them specifically
about their daily routine,
00:02:23;28 like a detective pinpointing those small
moments throughout their day in
00:02:29;09 which a new habit could be built
00:02:31;01 or expanded to weave in evidence
based strategies that would help
00:02:35;16 their child practice things like rolling
over to reach a highly preferred toy,
00:02:41;01 which could then be shaped
into pulling his knees under his hips,
00:02:44;10 rocking forward and reaching
for that same toy
00:02:47;15 which would eventually turn into him
crawling freely throughout the room
00:02:51;00 to reach any toy he liked,
one skill leading right into the next one,
00:02:56;06 then the next one, and then the next one,
00:02:58;22 but not without some intentional practice.

00:03:01;15 You see, the family knew
where they wanted to go,
00:03:04;03 but they didn't know how to get there.
00:03:06;08 So the early interventionists laid
out a path forward for them based
00:03:10;03 on their own priorities.
00:03:12;10 Then she overlaid it with their daily life
to ensure that it fit.
00:03:16;23 She helped build their confidence
00:03:18;24 and competence by asking them
about their own extended family support
00:03:23;16 and nearby resources,
00:03:25;11 showing them at every single visit that
00:03:27;28 while they have opportunities throughout
their day to help their child develop,
00:03:32;12 they also had the skills inherent
within themselves to parent a child
00:03:36;20 with a developmental disability.
00:03:39;13 Now, what you just heard is a common
story of family resilience
00:03:43;07 and brain building through
early intervention services, and
00:03:46;13 a key component of this work is bolstered
through community engagement.
00:03:52;08 Now, why does this matter so much to me?
00:03:54;28 To the extent that I would craft
and memorize the 17 minute speech
00:03:59;26 and then stand on a stage
00:04:01;07 and deliver that speech to about 100
of you folks watching from this audience.
00:04:05;11 And then, of course, there's all
those lovely people
00:04:07;27 listening and watching from that live feed
that I can't really think about right now.
00:04:12;12 But I am a speech language pathologist,
00:04:14;28 and I believe in the power
of community connection.
00:04:18;26 And that starts with family connection,

00:04:21;15 which is often strengthened through challenges.

00:04:24;29 So today I want to talk to you specifically about community resilience

00:04:29;03 and early intervention services for young children

00:04:31;28 with developmental disabilities right here in our Mississippi Gulf Coast.

00:04:36;18 Now, what is early intervention have to do with the blue economy?

00:04:42;02 And why should you listen to me talk about it?

00:04:45;01 Well, I don't love your tone.

00:04:47;18 These are fair questions.

00:04:49;26 Okay, so at the children's center,

00:04:51;25 I lead a pediatric team of experts that work collaboratively with families

00:04:56;04 to help support young children with disabilities ages birth to five.

00:05:00;05 They do this by providing services here on our campus classrooms.

00:05:04;01 And they also travel all over southeast Mississippi

00:05:07;06 to support families where they are, where brains need building,

00:05:11;11 where families need a detective.

00:05:14;11 So today, I'd like to answer three questions for you.

00:05:17;23 First, what is early intervention exactly?

00:05:21;14 Second, what are our state and our region's needs?

00:05:25;00 And how is the Children's Center at Southern Miss taking the lead

00:05:28;04 to help address those needs?

00:05:29;26 And lastly, why is all of this important for the blue economy?

00:05:34;27 Okay, let's break this down.

00:05:37;16 What is early intervention?

00:05:39;16 Well, in a nutshell, it's special
education and therapy for infants
00:05:43;09 and toddlers with developmental delays.
00:05:45;16 It can include things
like speech language therapy,
00:05:48;04 physical therapy or social work,
support for families, just to name a few.
00:05:53;12 When done well,
00:05:54;28 early intervention is incredibly
effective at reducing the need
00:05:58;02 for costly special education
when a child reaches school age.
00:06:02;25 In fact, it's conservatively
estimated that Mississippi could save
00:06:07;04 approximately \$3.5 million a year
if children were to enroll
00:06:11;25 in services before age three.
00:06:15;03 Now, how does it work?
00:06:16;25 Well, we, the early
interventionist or the detective,
00:06:20;29 work with the brain's architecture
to build strong neural connections
00:06:25;09 that form into lasting lifelong skills.
00:06:28;20 Meaning we use what's
motivating and meaningful to the child
00:06:32;08 and family to help work on big
skills like walking and communicating.
00:06:38;07 90% of a little one's
brain is developed by age five,
00:06:43;08 with the majority of this
happening before age three.
00:06:46;29 This means that neuroplasticity,
or the brain's capacity for change,
00:06:51;12 is that it's highest
during those early critical years.
00:06:55;09 So for those of us
in the business of building brains,
00:06:58;10 we're fighting against a clock.

00:07:00;20 Or perhaps more appropriately,
we're using the clock to our advantage,
00:07:04;28 and we're intervening
when it matters most.
00:07:08;04 The historic way of viewing
disability is that it should be treated
00:07:11;24 by an expert, by isolating specialists,
00:07:14;09 isolating deficits and then working
intensively to correct those deficits.
00:07:18;29 You see a specialist to find out
what's wrong and how to fix it, right.
00:07:23;16 So the little boy would see a speech
therapist in a clinic, for instance,
00:07:27;03 and she would work on building
his language skills by maybe teaching him
00:07:30;17 to sign cookie, to request a cookie.
00:07:33;25 Then the expectation
would be that he signed cookie, please,
00:07:37;13 to get that same cookie.
00:07:39;07 And then eventually the goal would be
that he'd just say, cookie, please.
00:07:43;18 After each and every session,
00:07:45;02 that therapist would walk
the little boy back to the lobby
00:07:47;27 where his parents are waiting,
00:07:49;13 and there she would provide
strategies for them to work on at home
00:07:52;23 homework, so to speak.
00:07:55;20 Now, this can be an effective
model of intervention,
00:07:58;27 but when we're working from a tight
window with brain building,
00:08:03;27 remember the birth to three time frame.
00:08:06;10 And there's more
00:08:07;28 that needs to be addressed
beyond language delays alone,
00:08:11;06 like with that little
boy from our story earlier,

00:08:13;20 with a complex health history,
00:08:16;03 that early interventionist
must be strategic and thoughtful.
00:08:19;20 With her limited time,
00:08:21;28 she must be willing to release
the responsibility the work from herself,
00:08:26;22 the deficit expert, back to the family,
the individual child expert.
00:08:32;00 And in doing this, she empowers them
to take ownership of the plan
00:08:36;07 and all the wins as their child
continues to grow and develop.
00:08:41;06 Keeping them connected and thriving
within their own community.
00:08:45;16 This is all important for the success
of the blue economy in this region.
00:08:49;18 You may not be thinking about
the blue economy in this way,
00:08:52;24 but the skill building
that we do with young children
00:08:55;13 and families helps support our current
00:08:58;12 and future workforce locally.
00:09:02;25 It's estimated that there are about
600 babies in the six coastal counties
00:09:07;05 of Mississippi needing
early intervention services,
00:09:11;05 but Mississippi as a state
ranks first in premature births
00:09:17;01 and first in low birth weights.
00:09:19;23 Both of those are high
indicators for developmental delays
00:09:23;03 and a need for early
intervention services.
00:09:26;07 So while the need for services is
estimated to be around 600 babies
00:09:30;09 in this area, that's strictly based
on national averages,
00:09:34;29 based on our state's specific statistics,
00:09:37;28 it would be more accurate

00:09:39;10 to estimate that over 1400 babies are
needing early intervention services

00:09:45;05 in this region alone.

00:09:46;29 That's right. More than double.

00:09:49;22 But with high need comes high opportunity.

00:09:54;09 This region can be a beacon
for change in early intervention,

00:09:57;29 and the blue economy
would reap the benefits.

00:10:02;08 So what is a university based program's
role in supporting this region's needs?

00:10:07;08 Well, at the Children's Center,

00:10:08;27 we are leveraging our 50 year
old legacy as a high quality,

00:10:12;23 evidence based program that supports
young children with disabilities

00:10:16;16 and their families at no cost to them.

00:10:19;10 We're building a model,

00:10:20;29 a beacon of hope for families
and community members all over our state.

00:10:26;07 In fact, right outside this very room,

00:10:29;02 you've seen the collective efforts
of community, state,

00:10:32;25 federal and university leaders who,

00:10:35;18 together with donors across the state

00:10:37;15 and further have agreed
to invest in the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

00:10:42;03 They've prioritized brain
building when it matters most,

00:10:45;10 because they know the remarkable impact
that can have on a region's success.

00:10:51;10 So in looking to early intervention
as a tool to support the blue economy,

00:10:57;03 we must move away from the old
medical model of intervention

00:11:01;02 and instead focus on the meaningful
exchanges between the child

00:11:06;05 and the individuals who have the most significant impact on that child

00:11:10;02 in the location in which that child must be able to participate.

00:11:14;08 This is how we build community based support systems.

00:11:18;07 In fact, in my example of that little boy

00:11:21;13 who was in the clinic with a speech therapist

00:11:23;19 while working on requesting cookies.

00:11:25;28 As it turns out, that family doesn't eat cookies.

00:11:29;23 Yeah. That's right. Crazy, huh?

00:11:32;22 Believe it or not, some families prefer other snacks.

00:11:36;11 So while that little boy mastered a new vocabulary word in the clinic

00:11:40;07 with his therapist, that skill has no use in his home.

00:11:44;11 But more importantly,

00:11:45;23 those parents are no closer to understanding why it's important

00:11:49;10 to work together to build opportunities for their child,

00:11:52;08 to increase his skills in his home with the people he knows.

00:12:00;17 So have you heard of the Mississippi Miracle?

00:12:05;07 No, it's not that. We're all finally wearing shoes.

00:12:10;15 The miracle, rather, is that our state's academic scores are steadily

00:12:15;01 ticking up, moving us from the bottom in the nation to ninth

00:12:19;03 in important areas like reading.

00:12:21;14 Guess where all that started?

00:12:23;14 Preschool services. That's right, with three and four year olds.

00:12:28;25 So our state over ten years ago invested in high quality preschool for families

00:12:35;25 to access at affordable rates to no costs at all.

00:12:39;16 We leveled the playing field

00:12:40;29 and we prioritized the importance of enrolling in school before age five.

00:12:46;01 Now imagine if we started that work even earlier.

00:12:51;00 Remember when that little brain is building those strong neural pathways

00:12:55;01 before age three? What would our academic scores look like

00:12:59;11 if we rolled up our sleeves and got to work?

00:13:01;23 When toddlers were showing signs of delay at age two?

00:13:06;02 What would the health of our children look like if we invested

00:13:09;09 in early intervention and reduced the need for costly,

00:13:12;06 specialized services down the road?

00:13:15;04 would more families be able to work instead of leaving our dwindling workforce

00:13:19;23 to help care for their child, taking him to multiple therapy appointments,

00:13:23;20 or just be available for those behavior calls from the school?

00:13:28;09 What would more businesses be looking at the Mississippi Gulf Coast

00:13:31;27 as a viable option for future plants, branches, or even headquarters?

00:13:36;22 Because of our innovative, inclusive approach to early child care programming,

00:13:42;07 empowering early intervention is empowering the blue economy.

00:13:47;06 Now, hopefully you're feeling inspired and thinking, how can I help?

00:13:52;28 I like your tone. Thank you for asking.

00:13:56;24 The next time you encounter a family
with a little one with a disability

00:14:01;06 and they're sharing feelings
of frustration and fear,

00:14:04;20 tell them about comprehensive
early intervention

00:14:06;28 that can be provided to them at no cost.

00:14:10;02 Help them find their detective.

00:14:13;02 Pay attention to the positive
momentum in our state

00:14:16;29 and specifically in this region.

00:14:19;21 Get involved. Ask those of us
in the business of brain building,

00:14:24;16 what do you need to be able
to help more families serve more babies?

00:14:29;13 See the face of a nonprofit
community leader.

00:14:31;24 Light up with that question.

00:14:33;25 Why? Because it means you get it.

00:14:37;00 You get the importance of helping families

00:14:39;25 and children of all abilities
reach their highest potential for them,

00:14:45;02 for their family,
but really for all of us.

00:14:48;12 Most importantly, you believe in the
capacity of your Mississippi neighbors

00:14:54;02 and our children. Children like
that beautiful little boy who,

00:14:59;26 because his detective came to his home

00:15:01;29 and helped his family work

00:15:03;08 on strategies that were meaningful
to them. He's flourishing.

00:15:07;11 They're flourishing.
But not only are they flourishing,

00:15:10;25 but they're invested in the success
of their neighbors. Thank you.