

## Caring for a premature child, part 6: All about Premies Today

August 18, 6:01 PM · Valerie Powers - Orlando Early Childhood Parenting Examiner

This article is **part 6** of a several part series (see [part 1](#), [part 2](#), [part 3](#), [part 4](#) and [part 5](#)) detailing the intricacies of parenting premature children.



This installment focuses on the tremendous outreach and advocacy efforts of [Premies Today](#). As mentioned in [Caring for a premature child, part 5: Profile of a growing premie](#), Mary Beth Hazelgrove is the Executive Director of Premies Today, as well as Madison and Lexi's mom, former elementary school teacher and Peace Corps volunteer...wow!

Founded in March 2003 by Kathy Mingleorff (fellow mom of a premie; Alex, born at 25 weeks gestation), Premies Today is a non-profit, which serves the Alexandria, Virginia (DC Metro) community with an army of dedicated volunteers. Mary Beth came to the organization in October 2003, after delivering her daughter, Madison, prematurely. Ironically, both Ms. Mingleorff's and Mary Beth's children were in the NICU together, and born just a week apart; however, the two parents never met at that time, due to the lack of opportunity to connect with other parents. And that is something that Premies Today strives to remedy with their community support of "preemie parents" and their children.

I recently had the opportunity to connect with Mary Beth regarding the initiatives, goals and mission of Premies Today:

*Valerie: Please tell me how you became involved with Premies Today,*

*and in what capacity.*

**Mary Beth: I joined the original board (of Premies Today) in October 2003, as Vice President. Since then, I have planned family gatherings and fundraisers. I initiated and organized the first two lecture series we offered. Additionally, I took over as Editor of the Newsletter in 2007 - 2009.**

*Valerie: How many families does Premies Today serve within the community; for outreach, support or intervention services?*

**Mary Beth: We distribute more than 11,000 [newsletters](#) a year to families within the community (and this does not count our online distribution and web views). We also support over 900 families online, as well as families *in person* in the DC Metro Area.**

*Valerie: Aside from the DC Metro Area, who else do you reach? My family for example, here in Orlando, receives online support from your organization.*

**Mary Beth: We have members in 40 of the 50 US States. And our newsletters go to 18 [NICUs](#) in the DC Metro region. Currently, we have requests from 10 additional NICUs in 10 different states for our newsletter.**

*Valerie: Tell me about your wonderful volunteers - the backbone of any non-profit.*

**Mary Beth: We have more than 100 volunteers, which are an integral part of our support programs. It is a great way to give back to the Premies Today community, and their help enables us to grow and expand.**

### Volunteers can actually help online or in person.

*Valerie: As the Executive Director of Preemies Today, how much of your time is dedicated to the organization? You must be awfully busy!*

**Mary Beth:** I work as much as I can on Preemies Today. I am passionate and I believe in its mission, and I find the work both fun and rewarding. So I spend more than 30 hours per week on Preemies Today and related business. I communicate daily with families either by telephone or email. I actually wish I had *more* time, because I know that the need is there, and there is more that we can do to reach families more effectively. You can usually find me on the computer until at least 11:00 PM many nights, and then back on again first thing in the morning.

*Valerie: It suffices to say that your daughter Madison inspires your work. So what kind of an influence does she have on your interactions with new preemie parents?*

**Mary Beth:** Madison truly is my inspiration, and I wish that I had an organization like Preemies Today when I gave birth to Madison. Since I became involved with Preemies Today, I have learned so much from other parents; and it has been extremely rewarding working with so many families. I am always inspired to give back to other parents and share knowledge, programs and resources which might be helpful to them.

*Valerie: Your family must have some involvement with Preemies Today - do they help with activities, socialize or participate in and fund raising?*

**Mary Beth:** My girls (Madison, as featured in [part 5](#) of this series, and younger sister Lexi) are definitely proud of Preemies Today, and have always been involved. My youngest, who is now almost five, attended her first fundraiser as a baby. The girls have grown up with the newsletter and Preemies Today. I can remember Madison putting address labels on the newsletters as a preschooler. Lexi has also attended conferences with me. I really enjoy involving my girls at the holiday time when we deliver packages and cookies to the different NICUs. I think it instills in them a sense of giving back to the community.



*Valerie: How about fund raising for your efforts? This is something folks interested in starting a local preemie support organization should know. How do you drive traffic and families to Preemies Today?*

**Mary Beth:** Most of our funding comes from grants, but we know that we cannot rely solely on grants for funding purposes; and we also continuously diversify how we raise funds, without trying to ask too much from the families we are trying to help and support. We are very grateful to the [March of Dimes](#), [Maryland National Capital area](#). They have believed in us and awarded us [Community Grants](#) over the past 4 years to support many of our programs, including our newsletter and most recently, they made the Executive Director position possible. Additionally, we have been generously supported by Exxon Mobil Favorite Charities Campaign, and we also recently acquired our United Way and Combined Federal Campaign numbers - to support our fundraising efforts. We also sell White House ornaments during the Fall and holiday season, and we are planning a silent auction in 2010.

**Families tend to find us by word of mouth and Internet searches. Many families are referred to us by friends or health care professionals. We even had one person who was actually referred to us by her health insurance company!**

*Valerie: Preemies Today is doing substantive and amazing work, that should be available everywhere; what are the plans for*

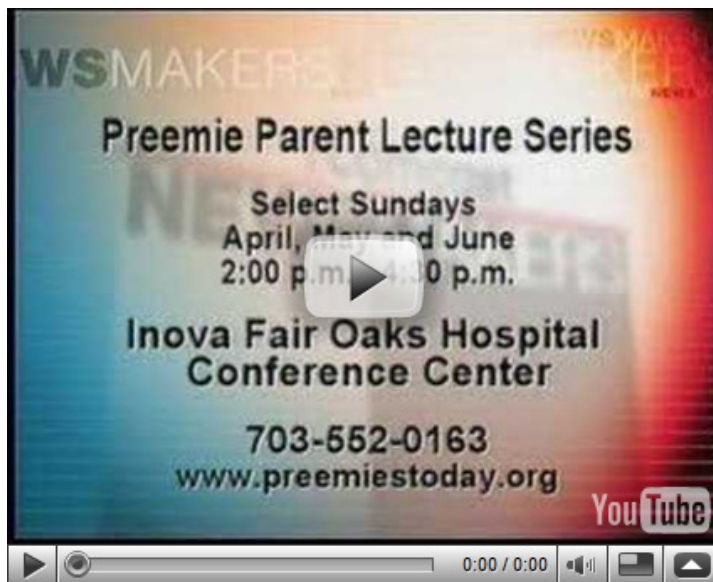
*future expansion?*

**Mary Beth:** We are continuously asked, "Why is there not a Premies Today where I live?" and how people can start a new chapter. We would like to see our local programs expand to other localities. We know that it is much easier if we offer guidance and support as Chapters begin in different areas. And we are more than willing to assist families expand our local programs, and bring them where they live.

To reach Mary Beth Hazelgrove, or Premies Today for resources, support or guidance on developing a preemie-oriented support group, you can email her, [HERE](#).

Premies Today can be contacted online [HERE](#), via phone: 888.712.3208, via email at: [info@premiestoday.org](mailto:info@premiestoday.org), and their mailing address is: PO Box 523525, Springfield, VA 22152.

Here is an example of the Lecture Series, that Mary Beth mentioned:



Also see:

- Health care reform and premature babies, [HERE](#).
- March of Dimes Florida Chapter, [HERE](#).
- Premature Parenting series, [HERE](#).
- Prematurity.org resource, [HERE](#).

Connect with Val (mama of a preemie) with any questions, feedback or tips, [HERE](#) or via [Facebook](#). You can also **SUBSCRIBE** to receive free email updates!

*Photo credits:* Hazelgrove girls/Mary Beth Hazelgrove

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**Author**



Valerie Powers is an Examiner from Orlando. You can see Valerie's articles at:

["http://www.Examiner.com/x-15109-Orlando-Early-Childhood-Parenting-Examiner"](http://www.Examiner.com/x-15109-Orlando-Early-Childhood-Parenting-Examiner)