

IMPACT

University of Idaho
Extension

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BabySteps Clients Make Strides in Improving Their Nutrition

The Situation

In 2003 a small group of parishioners at Saint Michael's Episcopal Cathedral in Boise, ID began the ministry of BabySteps. Their mission was to welcome all denominations of low-income pregnant and parenting women with community support and education. Their ultimate goal was to assist the mothers in delivering healthy babies and to strengthen these vulnerable families with mentors.

BabySteps is a prenatal and parenting education program. It cooperates with community organizations to focus their efforts on high-risk pregnant women, new parents, and children. Mothers and fathers are encouraged to participate in BabySteps during the first 15 months of their infant's life.

Parents earn points by participating in educational classes such as prenatal care, making healthy choices (i.e. stop smoking), healthy growth and development, exercise during pregnancy, maternal/infant mental health, and positive family interactions. The points can later be redeemed at the BabySteps Boutique for maternity clothing, diapers, infant wear, and baby furniture.

Our Response

A key objective of the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) is to teach low-income families, especially those with young children, how to improve their families' diets and make the most of their food resources. Partnering with BabySteps

provided Saint Michael's clients with a free practical nutrition education program, while EFNEP reached a vulnerable population of young families in a pre-formed group.

Since 2004, 160 first time parents have participated in BabySteps. EFNEP became a partner in 2006, teaching its six core lessons every quarter.



Photo by Brad Beckman

A new BabySteps mom and her infant.

Program Outcomes

Seventy BabySteps clients enrolled in the EFNEP during fiscal year 2006-07. Sixty-four of the clients were female; six were male. Sixty-two percent of the moms were either pregnant or had delivered their first child. Seventy-four percent of the families had incomes at or below the poverty level. Education levels for this group were low; 4 clients indicated

they had less than a 6th grade education. Fifteen had completed 11th grade or less, and 24 others indicated they had completed grade 12 or had a GED.

The completion rate of BabySteps clients was low due to the unsettled nature of this population. Some lacked housing; others had little or no income, while others had no family support system. Those with stable housing allowed the nutrition advisor to come to their home and conduct the lessons after the baby arrived. To date, eight completed the program while ten others are continuing their EFNEP lessons.

Clients who did not complete the EFNEP benefitted from BabySteps in other ways by attending some of the other classes. They learned about taking care of themselves during pregnancy, and how to care for and nurture a baby. They met caring parishioners who offered them assistance, and they redeemed their points for items that would clothe the mothers and infants.

Those who completed the EFNEP showed marked eating improvements at the end of the classes in all of the food groups (see table):

Food Group	Entry	Exit
Grains 6-9 oz.	38%	75%
Fruits 3+ cups	0%	50%
Vegetables 2 cups	13%	38%
Dairy 3+cups	25%	63%
Meat & beans 3-4 oz	38%	50%

While the EFNEP reaches its target audience at BabySteps with practical nutrition, food budgeting, and food safety information, it also supports and augments this fledgling community program. Low-income young families are a difficult audience to identify and reach with educational programs. The EFNEP will continue to partner with BabySteps in order to reach this vulnerable population.

For More Information

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