

Tampa Bay Times

New diaper bank aims to help families with 'diaper need'

Friday, March 15, 2013 4:30am

DUNEDIN — Clearwater residents Tiffany Hall, 28, and her fiancé, Nik Taylor, 39, are the parents of six children ages 1 to 10. With so many mouths to feed, and the couple struggling to find gainful employment, the cost of diapers — about \$100 a month — can be a real strain on the family budget.

"We've had to divert funds needed for other things to buy diapers," Nik said.

Enter the Here We Grow Foundation, an organization that wants to make sure no bottom is left behind.

The nonprofit has established a "diaper bank" for Pinellas. Located within the Here We Grow Learning Center, a day care in Dunedin, it's the first of its kind in the county, said program director Meredith Scott.

The foundation, itself in its infancy, began operations Jan. 7. Since then, Scott said, it has provided more than 900 diapers and other supplies such as baby wipes and diaper cream to almost 30 low-income families struggling with "diaper need."

The families come from all over Pinellas and are referred by the Pinellas County Health Department and various social service agencies. Families aren't required to have a referral, but if they don't, they must provide proof of income, the child's birth certificate and a state-issued ID.

It was a rash of red derrieres that led the day care center's director, Yvonne Pierre, to establish the foundation, Scott said.

"We had some babies coming in with soaking wet diapers from the night before," Scott said. "Some cases of diaper rash were so severe they could only be cleared up with prescription medicine from a doctor."

Diaper dearth can be a source of plenty of other serious problems too. Soiled diapers can transmit diseases like hepatitis A, viral meningitis and bacterial diarrheas.

Little ones who marinate in dirty diapers for hours tend to be irritable, putting them at higher risk of abuse, Scott noted.

"You have a child that cries a lot because they are in a dirty diaper and you may have a parent dealing with the stress of not being able to provide for that child. They may hit the child or shake the child to make it be quiet."

Then there are the social setbacks for this vulnerable population — peers and others may shun a child with wet or malodorous diapers.

Diaper need is a widespread problem. A 2010 study commissioned by the diaper company Huggies (www.huggies.com/en-US/promotions/everlittlbottom) concluded that one in three American moms have to choose between diapers and



Bonnie Solorzano, right, picks up supplies from Meredith Scott at the diaper bank in the Here We Grow Foundation.

other basic needs like food. Some even resort to cleaning and reusing soiled disposable diapers, the study said.

And public assistance programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (food stamps) and Women, Infants and Children (WIC) don't cover diapers.

Why not use cloth diapers, the staple of many generations before?

They aren't usually an option for the very poor, said Scott.

"Day care centers don't accept cloth diapers, and most families with diaper need don't own a washer and dryer. Public Laundromats discourage the washing of cloth diapers in their machines for health and sanitation reasons," she said.

To have a child in the Here We Grow Learning Center, a family must be able to furnish at least five disposable diapers a day, Scott noted. Most day cares have similar requirements.

"That's hard for a lot of parents who have to choose between buying food, paying rent and utilities or paying for child care," she said.

And when parents — often young, single mothers — can't supply the required number of diapers, they may skip the day care, miss work and jeopardize their jobs, income and future.

As parents visit the diaper bank, Scott researches employment and job-training opportunities to help them elevate their standing in life.

"We don't want to just give out free diapers but want to help families that are unemployed and struggling to become stable and self-sufficient," she said.

Tiffany Hall was hunting for a job and day care center when she learned about the diaper bank.

"When I came to the diaper bank, they were so wonderful and nice I decided to use them for day care," she said.

Now she's working at a cafe.

Terri Bryce Reeves can be reached at treeves@tampabay.rr.com.

The Here We Grow Foundation, 1171 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave. in Dunedin, is seeking help from individuals, businesses and organizations that can donate diapering supplies, sponsor a diaper drive, or serve as a drop-off location for donations. Call Meredith Scott at (888) 958-2788 or visit www.herewegrowfoundation.com. Diapers may be dropped off Monday through Friday, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

>>Fast facts

How to help

The Here We Grow Foundation, 1171 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave. in Dunedin, is seeking help from individuals, businesses and organizations that can donate diapering supplies, sponsor a diaper drive, or serve as a drop-off location for donations. Call Meredith Scott at (888) 958-2788 or visit www.herewegrowfoundation.com. Diapers may be dropped off Monday through Friday, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.