

Our Babies Can't Wait

(A Community Solutions Initiative)



Accomplishments And Challenges To-Date -- September 2009



“Our Babies Can’t Wait” (OBCW) was launched in January of 2009. It is the first Community Solutions initiative to be implemented from the region-wide health and human services plan that was developed in 2008. The vision and long-term outcome of OBCW is that, by the time today’s newborns are 20 years old, they will be successful in school and in life because of the foundation we are building for them now. The more immediate effects of the initiative will be seen in children who are healthy and ready for kindergarten. To achieve these short and long-term outcomes, OBCW will increase the skills of parents, caretakers and the community so that our children’s physical, social-emotional and cognitive potential can be maximized and lead to success in school and life.

Multi-level Strategies

OBCW is complex and is designed with several strategies to guide the initiative towards success. The initiative is focusing on the following key elements of childhood development: basic physical needs, nurturing and bonding, knowledge of physical development, effective problem solving, effective communication cues, non-punitive guidance, life management skills and stress management. In order to impart this information to parents, caretakers and the overall community, OBCW has implemented some key strategies.

Direct Service Strategies: Concentrated attention has been devoted to increasing coordination of services for new babies and their families. Many services have been expanded to serve people throughout the bi-county area. The following has occurred to-date:

- Close to 150 parents, from all walks of life, have directly benefited from direct services through OBCW.
- Benton Franklin Health District nurses provide personalized one-on-one visits to eligible families. They help parents weigh their babies; provide information on feeding, nutrition, sleep, basic infant care and safety tips; screen for risk factors; and make referrals to appropriate community services.
- Mid-Columbia Reading Foundation coordinates with other community organizations and subject-matter experts to provide relevant, bilingual curriculum that includes all of the major elements of skills development for new parents.
- Lutheran Community Services Northwest’s Family Partner staff member contacts families of newborns who are referred. The Family Partner builds rapport with families by attending parent workshop sessions and meeting with families at a location of their choice. Using the family voice as the guide, the Family Partner assists the families in exploring their needs, the strengths of parents are identified, and collaborative discussions are held leading to the development of a plan to guide them in accessing resources to meet current needs.
- “Community Cafés” project provided training to over 20 English and limited-English speaking parents on how to train other parents to discuss and share information about raising thriving children. These parents have assisted 33 other parents throughout Benton and Franklin Counties under the guidance of the BF Substance Abuse Coalition and Catholic Family and Child Service. Additional café series will be offered by the two organizations.

Community Information and Education Strategies: Broad-scale efforts have been focused on creating community awareness, throughout Benton and Franklin Counties, about the importance of supporting our youngest residents and mobilizing the community around OBCW. Information about the key elements of creating a nurturing environment for young children is also provided.

- OBCW materials were developed, printed and distributed by nearly 100 volunteers to over 350 locations throughout the community. Another massive wave of materials distribution and media coverage is currently underway.
- A Community Solutions and OBCW web site was developed and receives over 300 visits per month.
- Social networking strategies, such as MySpace, are also being utilized to attract young parents.
- OBCW presentations have been provided to over 35 local groups by 28 volunteers.
- KNDU TV produced 4 public service announcements featuring OBCW that have aired during prime time. Many other media partners have also provided regular coverage of OBCW.

Stakeholders and Partners

An impressive accomplishment is the diverse and vast number of stakeholders and partners who have joined the initiative and share the vision and passion for seeing today’s babies become successful and productive citizens in the future. Some of those partners are listed below:

Bechtel	Imbue/Northwest AgriProducts	Tri-City Area Journal of Business
BF Family Childcare Assn.	Kadlec Regional Medical Center	Tri-City Herald
BF Head Start	Kennewick General Hospital	United Way of Benton and Franklin Counties
BF Health and Safety Networks	KNDU Television	United Ways of Washington
BF Health District	La Clinica	Washington Closure
Benton PUD	Lourdes Health Network	Washington Div. of Children-Family Services
Brittney Kluse Photography	Lutheran Community Services	Washington State University-Extension Office
Catholic Family and Child Service	Mid-Columbia Libraries	Washington State University Tri-Cities
Columbia Basin College	Mid-Columbia Reading Foundation	Young Leaders Society
Education Services Dist. #123	Ready! for Kindergarten	Dr. Sara Zirkle
Family First of Mid-Columbia	Safe Harbor Crisis Nursery	2-1-1
Franklin PUD	The Salvation Army	
Dr. Walter Hales	Tri-City Area Chamber of Commerce	

Measures of Success

The following are examples of the types of information that will be collected and tracked and can be used as potential indicators of success:

- Child neglect and abuse rates;
- Kindergarten readiness scores;
- Immunization rates for children;
- High school graduation rates.

Definitive outcomes will not be clearly discernable for several years. The OBCW initiative is like a newborn baby; it takes many years, not months, to prepare a child for a successful future. There are, however, many accomplishments that have occurred over the past few months that are being tracked and celebrated and are referenced in this report. They are building the strong foundation for a high impact, lasting initiative.

Path Forward

A strong foundation is being developed in order that Our Babies Can’t Wait can have a positive impact on our entire community and especially on our youngest residents. Our babies need everything we can give them now: they can’t wait any longer. With any new initiative or extensive community collaborative effort, it takes time to build momentum. The initiative is benefitting from strong community support. However, a major challenge is to increase participation in order that short-term and long-term outcomes can be achieved. Many of the partners are actively exploring and implementing varied methods and strategies to insure that people throughout Benton and Franklin Counties can benefit from Our Babies Can’t Wait.

For more information, visit www.communitysolutions-bfco.com or call 2-1-1.