

Diaper bank helps babies stay clean and dry

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Having a baby?

It's common knowledge that bringing that bundle of joy into the world costs a bundle.

It might be fun to buy toys and tiny, cute outfits, but the indispensable items alone rack up thousands of dollars a year. For families that are already struggling to pay the bills, feeding, sheltering and keeping a baby clean and healthy can create a distressing dilemma.

Diapers pose a particular challenge for the careworn parent who might not be able to afford the \$100 per month cost for eight to 10 diapers a day plus \$20 per month for baby wipes. Add it all

up, and families are forced to choose between feeding their children or keeping them clean and dry, said Pat Kennedy, a Richboro resident who took action to supply disposable diapers to underprivileged families.

Her diaper bank organization is one of 10 exceptional charities the newspaper is highlighting this holiday season that are doing good deeds daily for the people of Bucks and Montgomery counties.

Kennedy, a kindergarten teacher, read about a New Haven, Conn., woman collecting diapers to help people who couldn't afford them. Deeply moved, she tucked the 2009 Time magazine article about the Diaper Bank into the back of her plan book.

About the same time, Kennedy's daughter announced that she was about to have another baby, prompting her grandmotherly instincts. Also, Kennedy's aunt passed away, leaving her a savings bond for \$2,000.

Kennedy was struck by the sequence of events. "You felt you had to do something special with the money. It all seemed to come together to say, time to make a change and do this thing I'd been thinking about."

So, although she was saddened by the thought of leaving her young pupils, she left teaching and devoted herself full time to start the Greater Philadelphia Diaper Bank. The nonprofit organization holds community diaper drives that, together with

See DIAPERB, Page A4



Diapers

Continued from Page A3

donations, have distributed about 300,000 diapers via social service organizations and agencies since 2011. The diaper bank supplies adult diapers as well as baby diapers.

"You can imagine if you were living below the poverty line and living on food stamps," said Kennedy. "Good moms keep babies in the same diaper for a day, not from neglect but because they don't have resources to provide an adequate supply of diapers. Some even let diapers dry and reuse them, which is not good for the babies."

A multitude of obstacles stand in the way of parents who can't afford disposable diapers. Among them:

- Food assistance programs such as food stamps and WIC don't cover diapers.
- Day care centers require that parents provide disposable diapers. Without day care, many low-income moms and dads can't work or further their education.
- Using cloth diapers requires access to laundry facilities, but a federal mandate prevents laundromats from allowing cloth diapers in their machines.
- Medicare covers disposable incontinence supplies for those in hospice only.

There are 147 diaper banks in the nation. Kennedy's is the only one in the Greater Philadelphia area.

"In November of last year, we got a call from National Diaper Bank Network and they asked if we would be able to use 100,000 diapers. I thought, what does that even look like?" said Kennedy.

Her fledgling organization was operating out of her basement and garage. Volunteers quickly rented a storage unit, and a local company donated a forklift.

"We got as many volunteers as we could and stored the diapers somehow. That really gave us a kick start," she said.

Volunteers as well as word of mouth fuel the diaper bank's work.

If you want to help

Website: philadelphiadiaperbank.org

To contribute or get involved in a drive, call founder Pat Kennedy at 215-919-8500 or email pat@philadelphiadiaperbank.org. Donors can use Paypal to contribute on the website.

Pat and other volunteers have loaded up their cars with thousands of diapers to deliver to partner organizations such as homeless shelters and food banks. Recently, the family of JoAnn Leigh of Newtown, an active diaper bank volunteer, collected 2,893 baby diapers and 844 wipes at their annual Christmas Open House.

The organization recently provided almost 3,000 diapers to a Lakewood, N.J., distribution center after Hurricane Sandy hit New Jersey.

The diaper bank is getting some corporate attention, too.

Walmart's 12 Days of Giving gifted a \$5,000 grant last year. And it has benefited from contributions by Huggies, which has donated millions of diapers through the National Diaper Bank Network.

The diaper bank will take opened and partially full packages of diapers, as long as the diapers inside are unused. There is a great need for donations of adult pull-up diapers, especially in large and extra-large sizes.

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