

THE DIFFERENCE



NONPROFIT FEATURE

CHANGING BABIES CHANGES LIVES

Stark County Diaper Bank strives to ensure every baby has enough diapers to remain clean, dry and healthy.

For families living in poverty, diaper need has a negative ripple effect.

Without an adequate supply of diapers, babies can't participate in childcare. If parents don't have consistent childcare, they cannot work. Without a job, they can't afford to pay rent and provide for their family.

The unfortunate, costly diaper dilemma across the United States has parents turning to less-than-ideal approaches to stretching their diaper supply, like keeping their babies in diapers longer than they should. In some low-income households, a child may be in the same diaper all day or longer, which can cause reoccurring rashes, urinary tract infections and other illnesses.

Babies need an average of 8 to 10 diapers a day, costing families \$85 or more per month. And, if you're living paycheck to paycheck, it becomes more challenging to afford.

No state or federal safety-net program allocates dollars specifically for diapers, meaning diapers can't be purchased using WIC or Food Stamps. Often, families have to decide between purchasing diapers and buying food or paying rent.

Here in Stark County, these harsh realities of what local families face fuel the all-volunteer nonprofit Stark County Diaper Bank. The Diaper Bank collects, stores, repackages and distributes free diapers to families in times of need through a network of community partners, including food pantries, family service agencies and faith-based organizations.

HOW IT STARTED

What later became known as the Stark County Diaper Bank all started with one question in March 2018.

[continued on page 3]

4

A CARING AND FAITHFUL LEGACY

After BJ Murphy passed away in 2019, his friends were inspired to continue his legacy.

4

NEW FUNDS

Five new charitable funds were recently established through Stark Community Foundation.

5

NONPROFIT HOLIDAY GIVING GUIDE

A curated list of year-end needs of 10 local nonprofits serving our community.

6

YEAR-END GIVING

Five tips for making a meaningful impact with your year-end giving and deadlines to keep in mind.



[continued from cover]

Barb Weaver Schweier, owner of Once Upon A Child Canton, asked her community-minded friend Shannon Hexamer if there was a local diaper bank because she wanted to get her store involved. Hexamer wasn't aware of one but was determined to find out. She learned that while some local organizations distributed diapers to their clients, Stark County didn't have a dedicated diaper bank.

"Her one question was all I needed to spark a passion inside of me," said Hexamer, who founded the Stark County Diaper Bank and owns a full-service marketing company.

Hexamer gathered a group who shared her vision, met with area nonprofits to learn more about diaper need, networked with diaper banks across the United States and had countless conversations with community leaders about how to help families in our community.

With the assistance of Stark County THRIVE, a feasibility study was conducted. The survey revealed families need help with diapers, but no agency in Stark County was providing diaper assistance as an ongoing initiative.

By early 2019, a seven-member board and advisory committee had been established and the nonprofit was officially providing access to diapers through a network of local partnering organizations. The first diaper drive was in partnership with Faith Family Church and brought in more than 6,000 diapers. When 25,000 diapers were collected, they were then distributed through five community partners.

"We form partnerships with community organizations to eliminate unnecessary duplication of services, reduce expenses and help solve a basic human need at the community level for infants and young children," said Hexamer. "If a family needs diapers, they often have other needs as well. Local social service agencies that deal with a full continuum of care are best qualified to meet this need."

HOW IT'S GOING

For a year and a half, the Diaper Bank was run out of Hexamer's home. Diapers continued

to be stocked high in every bedroom until there were too many diapers and not enough space.

The demand for diapers forced the Diaper Bank to find a permanent home that would accommodate the nonprofit's continued growth. In September 2020, during the height of the pandemic, the Diaper Bank moved into Faith Family Church's undeveloped warehouse on Freedom Avenue NW in North Canton.

Currently, more than 30,000 diapers are distributed each month to community partners. Depending on the size needed, a child can receive 30-50 diapers per month, providing families in our community with emergency diaper support throughout the month.

Brandy, a mom short on diapers, expressed her gratitude by saying,

"It has helped my family so much, and been a blessing for my three boys. Thank you so much."

Another parent shared, "You don't understand how much this helps me."

In a few short years, the organization has grown from five community partners to 21 and has expanded its geographic footprint from Stark County to five additional counties: Carroll, Harrison, Medina, Tuscarawas and Wayne. To date, 629,000 diapers have been distributed.

"The Diaper Bank has been a great help for Tuscarawas County residents because there is no other program that assists with diapers on an ongoing basis," said Shelly Gomez, a caseworker for the Salvation Army of Dover-New Philadelphia. "This is something that parents can rely on. It will always be there if or when they need it."

The Diaper Bank is able to continue providing free diapers, pull-ups, wipes and adult diapers thanks to the generous support from community members, businesses, foundations and an ever-growing group of volunteers. Diapers are collected by diaper

drives, donated at diaper dropbox locations or purchased in bulk through local stores or the National Diaper Bank Network.

"Our greatest need right now is sizes 5 and 6 and pull-ups because children stay in them longer," said Hexamer. "Financial donations allow us to maximize our impact because we can buy in bulk at competitive prices and make sure we have diapers in our most needed sizes."

Every Tuesday, you'll find volunteers sorting, packing and wrapping diapers at the Diaper Bank to distribute to community partners. Most recently, students from Central Catholic High School spent the day wrapping diapers as part of the school's community outreach day, and a group of associates from Sam's Club in Canton spent their evening volunteering as part of the company's service day.

"We have one goal: to fill the shelves with diapers ready to distribute," said Nancy George, a dedicated Diaper Bank volunteer. "It brings us joy to see empty shelves when we arrive because it means that there are many more dry bottoms and happy parents!"

WHAT'S NEXT

The Diaper Bank plans to distribute period supplies starting in 2023 because just like diapers, menstrual hygiene products can't be purchased with WIC or Food Stamps. Hexamer shared there is a growing need by individuals served by the Diaper Bank's community distribution partners.

The Diaper Bank recently purchased a 2015 Workhouse P42 truck that will be used at events to distribute more diapers to families with emergency diaper need. The nonprofit also plans to launch a new website and continue to strengthen and grow its relationships with community partners.

While Hexamer finds great joy leading the Diaper Bank, she says her ultimate hope is that the organization won't exist one day. "Because that would mean there would be no more diaper need. That every baby has enough diapers to remain clean, dry and healthy."

If you're looking to help, you can donate diapers, donate money, volunteer or host a diaper drive. Learn more at www.starkcountydiaperbank.org

