

Diaper Bank provides struggling families with basic necessity

Story by Susan Wilinski

Photos by Karen Fucito

As the mom of a 3-year-old and an 18-month-old, Dolores Ali knows all too well how expensive it can be to buy diapers. And with her own health issues and her husband having just lost his job due to a site closure, the Ali family has enough stress in their lives without having to worry about how they will keep their little ones clean and dry.

Thankfully, Dolores and her husband, David, have found some relief through the Diaper Bank at Child & Family Resources in Mount Arlington.

"The program is excellent," Ali said. "If it ever stopped, a lot of people would be heartbroken."

According to CFR Executive Director Rebekka Zydell, the Diaper Bank is a completely volunteer-driven program supported solely by donations of money and diapers. The program, which began 13 years ago, is guided and overseen by a board of trustees.

The Diaper Bank uses a specific list of partners for distribution. That list includes: Birthright of Dover, Children on the Green, Family Promise of Morris County, Homeless Solutions, John Corr Family Resources, Little



Rebekka Zydell in the room at the Child & Family Resources location where donated diapers are stored.

People's Academy, NORWESCAP Early Head Start Morris County, the Salvation Army Dover Corps, Street Smart Outreach Program and Zufall Health Center.

"Some people have to choose between buying diapers or buying food. They can't go to work if they have no diapers," Zydell said, explaining

that in order to drop off children at day care, parents have to provide diapers. "One in three families in New Jersey has a need for diapers. Our goal is to provide a healthy diaper change for every child."

The CFR Diaper Bank, which is the only one in Morris County and one of nine in New



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David and Dolores Ali with their children, Jordan and Abigail.

Jersey, has distributed approximately 350,000 diapers to date, averaging between 27,000 and 28,000 per year. Since the program does not have any administrative costs—everyone who participates is a volunteer—every penny donated goes toward the purchase of diapers.

Zydel also pointed out cloth diapers are not an option for those in need of this service.

"They can't use them in day care centers, and in shelters there are no laundry facilities," she explained. "Use of disposable diapers is mandatory."

Zydel pointed out that people who use these services often feel as if they are being judged, but that a shift in focus and perception has to happen so that the children are assured of receiving the supplies that they need.

"We need more civic-mindedness. We should get away from judgment," said Zydel. "At the end of the day, we need to be talking about the child. If we invest early on in the children, it helps society later on."

Ali understands that fear of judgment, but knows she has to put that aside to do what is best for her kids.

"I don't want to ask for help, but I did it for my children," said Ali, who received diapers from one of CFR's distribution partners. "The people at the Salvation Army don't make me

feel like garbage."

The stigma that people feel when asking for help is one of the biggest factors preventing them from utilizing the Diaper Bank.

"People who are not coming in commonly are reluctant to reach out," said Zydel.

Those who are in need of diapers can call CFR, where they will be referred to the distribution center that is nearest to them. Typically, distribution is done on a monthly basis as CFR partners make their requests once per month based on the needs of their families.

Zydel said they receive a lot of newborn diapers in donations, but the biggest need is for diapers in sizes 4, 5 and 6 because children who are homeless or in day care programs tend to toilet train at a later age.

In addition to donations of money and supplies, anyone can get involved in supporting the Diaper Bank by holding a diaper drive. People who are interested in running a

drive in their neighborhood or workplace can contact CFR to begin the process. According to Zydel, there are also alternative options for collecting diapers for donation.

"Scouts can do drives and high school students looking to do community service can do drives," she said. "There are email campaigns, Facebook campaigns and online drives. People who have just had babies have donated their unused newborn diapers. One of our board members asked for donations in lieu of first birthday gifts."

It's the dedication of volunteers and donors that keep the Diaper Bank running. And for families like Ali's, it's a much-needed lifeline.

"It's been such a big help," Ali said. "If you need it, you come. They (the volunteers) are very pleasant and nice. You talk to them and they ask you how the kids are."

"My hope is that the program is a help for someone else, too."

For more information:

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