

Blankets of Love

“Baby Tara”



Baby Tara was slowly starving to death.

What chance did she have when her well-intentioned, 14-year-old mother answered her cries of hunger with watered-down formula? Baby Tara seemed doomed to become one more Milwaukee infant mortality statistic—that is, until Julia Means, R.N., came to her rescue in Columbia St. Mary's Blanket of Love program.

Funded through a March of Dimes grant secured by Columbia St. Mary's Foundation, Blanket of Love surrounds young central city, African American mothers-to-be with childbirth education, parenting skills, problem-solving skills, mentoring and education about family communication. After the birth of her child, the young woman is welcomed back to the group along with her infant to learn more about infant care and parenting skills. Since family members are welcome to attend Blanket of Love meetings; the baby's father and the young woman's mother or sisters frequently attend.

Julia has found that misunderstanding about aspects of infant care is not uncommon among Blanket of Love participants. Tara's mother is a typical example. She was purchasing premixed formula for her baby because it seemed cheaper to her. Then she decided to “water it down” to have enough for feedings between her visits to the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) food support program. Because Tara's mother had seen other mothers add water to powdered formula, she believed she also needed to add water to the liquid formula.

The mother could not understand an explanation of why the watered-down formula was inadequate for her baby nor why powdered milk was more cost effective than premixed formula. She was convinced that one can of powdered milk was more expensive than, for example, three bottles of premixed milk. Julia had to demonstrate the “how to” and the benefits of powdered formula to the young mother by actually mixing several bottles of formula while the girl watched.

Not surprisingly, Baby Tara is thriving now that mom understands how to prepare her formula.

The Blanket of Love Program meets weekly from 5:30 p.m.-7:00 p.m. each Tuesday night.
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