

Starting Off Right

A Quarterly Newsletter from
Healthy Start Coalition of Jefferson,
Madison & Taylor Counties, Inc.

SUMMER 2014



In this Issue

*State of the Infant Meetings
Held in Madison and
Taylor Counties*

Page 2

*Tonya Bell Recognized
as Community Partner
Champion*

Page 2

*Going Door to Door in
Jefferson County*

Page 3

*Steinhatchee Human
Services Fair a Great
Success*

Page 3

*Florida KidCare Partners
to Ensure Medical Coverage
for All Youth*

Page 4



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Preconception Health: Building Blocks that Last a Lifetime

Preconception health in the Healthy Start realm is a relatively new term, first appearing in 2003 after rigorous studies confirmed what we all suspected: Healthy women generally have healthy babies. The term, “preconception health,” refers to the health of women and men during their reproductive years; it focuses on taking steps now to protect the health of a baby they might have sometime in the future (CDC, Show Your Love Campaign, 2014).

According to the local data, over half of all pregnancies in Jefferson, Madison and Taylor counties are unplanned, so preconception concepts are irrelevant to this population. This is where quality Healthy Start programming addresses the interventions required for healthy birth outcomes for these already-pregnant women.

For the rest of the childbearing population, the Coalition, in its community work to promote preconception health, focuses on creating resilience for non-pregnant women by linking them to community services through the Whole Child Connection and counseling them on the importance of medical homes. This is an ongoing strategy of the Coalition and was recently measured in the minority population where 141 women were linked to medical homes between November 2012 and June 2014.

Promoting preconception health can potentially improve women’s health and pregnancy

outcomes. Ideally, an intentional pregnancy is best.

Preconception health covers many topics, including lifestyle (e.g., healthy weight, physical activity, smoking, drinking, and substance use), screenings and vaccination (e.g., sexually transmitted infections, human immunodeficiency virus, and rubella), and chronic disease management (e.g., diabetes and hypertension), along with family planning and exposure to environmental hazards. “Community awareness about preconception health is challenging because of the volume of health topics within this issue and in light of the fact that half of all pregnancies are unplanned.”¹

As part of the Coalition’s campaign to tackle this complex communication, we will focus on one of the 12 components of preconception health each quarter through our newsletter as well as align that topic with our community activities for greatest impact.

Please stay tuned for more information about the importance of mental health services, both utilization and access, in our next newsletter and our local activities. Mental health is a chronic disease that has a significant impact on birth outcomes in our communities.



¹Elizabeth W. Mitchell, Sarah Verbiest, (2013) “Effective Strategies for Promoting Preconception Health—From Research to Practice.” *American Journal of Health Promotion*: January/February 2013, Vol. 27, No. sp3, pp. S1-S3



State of the Infant Meetings Held in Madison and Taylor Counties

The annual Healthy Start State of the Infant meetings were held this summer in Madison and Taylor counties. Healthy Start of Jefferson, Madison & Taylor Counties Executive Director Donna Hagan addressed service providers, community volunteers, officials, and local leadership who had assembled to review key data regarding birth outcomes and prenatal health in their respective communities.

The audience was impressed with the number of new clients served, as well as improvements in several critical measures, including infant mortality and client referrals to a “medical home.” Other concerns, such as breastfeeding, obesity and

education challenges were also highlighted.

The presentation concluded with a closer look at two health issues that Mrs. Hagan noted would be among her team’s top priorities going forward: Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and health disparities in general. FASD is a leading contributor to poor early childhood development, and regarding health disparities, both Madison and Taylor Counties rank among the worst in the state in overall minority health. Health Equities Commissions were recently launched in both counties and are dedicated to reversing these trends through the implementation of a strategic plan currently underway.



Tonya Bell Recognized as Community Partner Champion

As Community Health Educator and Whole Child Advisor, Tonya Bell champions and consults a wide variety of health issues and provides key resources designed to result in positive lifestyle changes. Recently, Kristie Lutz, Human Services Program Manager at the Florida Department of Health in Taylor County, recognized Tonya’s efforts by nominating her for a website spotlight at the Florida Chronic Disease Prevention Coalition. Nomination was for “doing fantastic work in the areas of Tobacco Use Prevention and Cessation.” Tonya will be highlighted on the FCDP Coalition’s website, www.preventchronicdiseasefl.org.

Serving the Tri-County area, Tonya partners with local service providers, encouraging families to phone her at (850) 253-5355 to set up a convenient, one-on-one interview that is both free and confidential. Clients will receive assistance in “finding and engaging the vital resources that they deserve,” Tonya noted. Tonya can also be emailed at tbell@healthystartjmt.org.



Tonya Bell stands ready to serve at Jefferson County Back to School Day.



Tonya Bell standing in front of the Whole Child mobile unit during a community health fair.



Tonya serves as both role model and instructor during “Girls’ Nite In,” reminding young ladies, “You don’t know someone until you walk in her shoes.” Boyz to Kings, a proud partner of Healthy Start and Whole Child, sponsored the inaugural event.

Going Door to Door in Jefferson County

Healthy Start staff from Madison and Jefferson counties set out on an important mission to increase the breastfeeding rates throughout the area. Going door to door in Jefferson County was in honor of August being National Breastfeeding Month. The benefits of breastfeeding are noteworthy and remain a top priority for Healthy Start Coalitions throughout the state of Florida.

Please visit

www.womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding or www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding for a list of wonderful resources dedicated to this worthwhile cause. Locally, please contact Tonya Bell at (850) 253-5355, or email her at tbell@healthystartjmt.org for more information.



Healthy Start staff went door to door in Jefferson County in recognition of National Breastfeeding Month. Pictured left to right: Cumi Allen, Jennifer Brown, Michele Stout, Tangela Knight and Shanetha Mitchell.

Steinhatchee Human Services Fair a Great Success

Sponsored by the Healthy Start Coalition, the inaugural Steinhatchee Human Services Fair was a great success. Held Sept. 17 at Steinhatchee School, the event offered free developmental screenings for children ages six months to three years, and school readiness screenings for children ages three to five years. Referrals to local service providers were offered as well.

School officials and event volunteers thanked Healthy Start Coalition members, as well as the 13 agencies that

participated. Over two dozen individuals received services and service referrals, with several incredible success stories emerging. One female head of household, for instance, received information and referral assistance to at least six service providers!

The school principal, Julie Hurst, and the Coalition are committed to a strategy that will make the fair a successful annual event.

▼ *Mental health services is often a critical component to the healthy development of youth. Sadatryl Smith from the Apalachee Center was in attendance to provide assistance to parents and staff.*



▲ *The diverse services needed to ensure successful early childhood development and school readiness were featured at the inaugural Steinhatchee Human Services Fair.*



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 Tomica King

Madison County Members:
 Lucile Day
 Bonnie Webb

Taylor County Members:
 Dawn Taylor
 Corrie Willis

Florida KidCare Partners to Ensure Medical Coverage for All Youth

Through Florida KidCare, the state of Florida offers health insurance from birth through age 18, even if one or both parents are working, as follows:

MediKids: For children ages 1 through 4.

Healthy Kids: For children ages 5 through 18.

Children's Medical Services Network: For children birth through 18 who have special health care needs.

Medicaid: For children birth through 18. A child who has other health insurance may still qualify for Medicaid.

Some of the services Florida KidCare covers are:

- Doctor visits
- Check-ups and shots
- Hospital
- Surgery
- Prescriptions
- Emergencies
- Vision and hearing
- Dental
- Mental health



The Healthy Start Coalition of Jefferson, Madison & Taylor Counties is a proud partner of Florida KidCare. Dedicated to ensuring all children ages birth to 18 receive this vital service, knowledgeable staff is available to assist you with the application process. Simply phone Tonya Bell at (850) 253-5355 for more details.

