

Community Assistantship Program

Baby Steps Program Evaluation

Prepared in partnership with
Baby Steps

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Evaluation done by Kristen Cici

Sponsored by the Center for Urban and
Regional Affairs, University of Minnesota

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Introduction

Baby Steps was founded in 2001, and has grown exponentially in its eight short years of existence. The mission of Baby Steps is: To improve the health and well being of families, pregnant women and young children by motivating individuals to use services that benefit their families. To fulfill its mission, Baby Steps aims to:

- Educate parents and caregivers about services that strengthen families in the communities that are served by the coupon partners.
- Motivate parents, caregivers, and grandparents to actively participate and utilize partner services to strengthen families.
- Increase and/or maintain the number of partners who provide services to families with children.
- Develop Baby Steps Closets in outlying locations.

To fulfill these goals, Baby Steps collaborates with social, medical, dental and educational services (approximately 200 individual service providers) that serve and strengthen families. This provides a strong base of support from the community. The network that has developed out of these professional partnerships provides a strong support for families and ensures that Baby Steps is a centralized clearinghouse that provides a wealth of information to parents and caregivers about partners' programs in the area.

The collaboration provides opportunities for parents and caregivers to attend and use a range of programs and services, and in exchange for their participation, they receive Baby Steps coupons. The coupons are used at Baby Steps Closets and Store, which look and operates like retail stores – but no money is exchanged, only coupons. The coupons are used to “purchase” new merchandise for children ages 0 – 5.

Additionally, Baby Step's staff strives to know each family over the approximately five years that they utilize the program. Networking and building relationships with parents is key to establishing a trusting relationship that allows the staff to make informal referrals and suggestions to caregivers. This is accomplished in an inviting environment with an emphasis on families working to earn coupons while promoting a sense of self-esteem and dignity among caregivers.

Evaluation

The key objective of the evaluation was to try to determine families' satisfaction with the Baby Steps program, and to identify possible facets for program improvement. To seek information to answer this question, Baby Steps sent out 947 surveys to program participants, and had a 26.8% response rate with 254 responses (Appendix A). The response rate was extremely high, and was in large part due to the incentive Baby Steps offered those that completed the survey. Additionally, 15 of the survey respondents were selected at random for an interview (Appendix B).

Findings

Who were the survey respondents?

The respondents were overwhelmingly Caucasian or white females. The vast majority, 92.9% (236), of respondents were white or Caucasian. There was only one Hispanic/Latino respondent, only one African American respondent, and twelve (4.7%) American Indian respondents. Additionally, females made up 94.8% (241) of the respondents, with two men, and two couples (indicated on survey that both female and male filled it out). Additionally, 8.7% (22) of respondents indicated that they are pregnant. The average age of respondents is 30.9, with the youngest being 20 and the oldest 52.

By and large, respondents were parents (97.6%) with only one indicating that they were a legal guardian. When asked about their current living situation, 80.7% (205) indicated that their current situation was two parents, living together with children. 13.4% (34) were single parents, with 8.3% (21) being a single parent living alone with child(ren) and 5.1% (13) being a single parent living with children and family, friends, and/or significant other.

If Baby Steps did not exist...
"our community would be
lacking a great resource for
parents in this area."

The respondents had a great deal of variety with their highest level of educational attainment: 28.7% (73) technical or community college, 24% (61) four year college, 19.7% (50) high school, 16.9% (43) some college credits, 5.1% (13) less than high school, and 3.5% (9) masters degree or higher. Surprisingly, the most common approximate household income among respondents was \$50,001 or higher with 27% (69) of respondents. Second highest was \$40,001 - \$50,000 with 16.9% (43) of respondents, with the remaining respondents approximate household income breaking down to: 13.8% (35) \$20,001 - \$30,000, 12.6% (32) \$10,001 - \$20,000, 12.2% (31) \$30,001 - \$40,000, and 11.8% (30) making \$0 - \$10,001. With most (84.3%) of homes having at least one employed adult, these numbers may not be as surprising. The survey revealed that 38.6% (98) had one employed adult in the home, and 43.7% (111) had two employed adults in the home. Additionally, several respondents indicated they had anywhere from three to six employed adults in their homes.

Baby Steps Logistics

Most (81.9%) survey respondents indicated that the hours of Baby Steps works for them. For the 15.4% (39) respondents that the hours are not currently good for them, a variety of alternate days and times were offered. The most commonly suggested days for additional hours were: Monday, Wednesday, and a weekend day. Additionally, respondents suggested a variety of additional hours they would like to see the Baby Steps store open, particularly; day time hours on Monday and Wednesdays, and having one week night were common suggestions.

Length respondents have been using Baby Steps:

- Less than 1 year – 14.2% (36)
- 1 year – 7.1% (18)
- 2 years – 9.1% (23)
- 3 years – 9.8% (25)
- 4 years or more – 59.8% (152)

Additionally, only 10.6% (27) indicated “yes” or “sometimes” when asked whether transportation is a big problem for them.

Respondents were asked what merchandise they would like to see added to the store’s inventory. Many explained that nothing needs to be added, “I think they have a good variety” and “you pretty much have a nice selection and do special orders” were common answers. Although, some people did want to see things added. One of the most popular additions indicated were “packs” or “boxes” of diapers. Both survey and interview participants indicated this as something they would like to see added. Additional items

suggested were: “more things for toddlers,” “more cognitive learning toys, puzzles, games, etc and pull ups,” “More outdoor type toys! Sandbox toys, garden type toys, etc.,” “gift cards - so that we could use the gift card toward higher cost items at the store and pay the rest with our own cash,” “more discount clothes and cute pacifiers,” and “more toddler size toys and clothes.”

Most heard about Baby Steps through WIC or from the Clinic or Doctor’s Office. Which isn’t too surprising, 85.8% of respondents had received coupons from well child visits and immunizations, and 68.1% had received coupons from WIC. These were the top two sources that participants had participated in to receive Baby Steps coupons. When asked for input about how to better advertise Baby Steps, many respondents indicated there was no need, “I feel you are going a great job on getting the word out,” “I think you advertise very well,” “seen your brochures almost everywhere child centered. You’re doing great!” Some respondents did offer up some ideas for Baby Steps advertising, with many suggesting that Baby Steps use newspapers or radio. A particularly good suggestion was that Baby Steps should “put fliers in restrooms by baby changing stations.” Additionally, it was suggested that Baby Steps have a website.

Most, at 92.5% (235), respondents do not use the Baby Steps Closets. When asked why they did or did not use the Baby Steps Closets, most indicated proximity or convenience as the key reasons. Respondents suggested: Pine River, Remer, Duluth, Virginia, Longville, Bovey, Deer River, Hibbing,

What programs have respondents attended?

Advocates for Family Peace (45)
American Indian Services Program (4)
AEOA (20)
Breastfeeding Support Groups (56)
Car Seat Safety (111)
Children's Mental Health (20)
Prenatal Care (151)
Labor and Delivery Classes (119)
Well Child Visits & Immunizations (218)
Lead testing at well child visits (81)
Breastfeeding class (44)
Infant class (24)
Cherish Our Children or R.O.C.K. (2)
Crisis Nursery (7)
Deer River Health Care Center - early childhood screening or packet pick-up (17)
Dental visits (108)
Eagleview Community Foundation (1)
Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) (100)
Early Childhood Screening (108)
Family Development/Crisis Housing (2)
Head Start or Early Head Start (46)
ISD 318 Community Education (26)
Parenting classes (30)
Invest Early (39)
Public health (74)
Special needs children & parent support group (IEIC & ECSE) (7)
Itasca Alliance Against Sexual Assault (12)
Itasca County Health and Human Services (39)
Libraries (63)
Northland Area Family Services Center (2)
Project Clean Start (5)
Step Ahead (95)
Teenage Parent Program (TAPP) (5)
University of Minnesota Extension Services (4)
WIC (173)

Marcell, Bemidji, Nashwauk, Hill City, Cohasset, Coleraine, and Warba. Deer River was most frequently mentioned as a location that is in need of a Baby Steps Closet.

Interviewee responses were mixed when asked if the library was not next door to Baby Steps, would they go to another place for those resources. There was a good mix of those that said they would go somewhere, some that were sure, and those that would not go somewhere else. One interviewee explained, "I don't know if I would. I use the library a lot. I really like the library. To be able to, actually bring the kids into and let them play, and also, yeah, talk to somebody there and use the resources." Another interviewee explained they wouldn't go somewhere else, and said "Probably not because a lot of times I will, I'll check books out for a couple weeks, and then I'll take them in, and then I'll get two baby steps coupons, and I'll go next door and I'll use them right away, so I probably would not use another location."

Finally, most (85.8%) respondents indicated that they do read the Baby Steps newsletter, and of those that read it, 98% find it helpful. Some indicated that they do not receive the newsletter.

The Value of Baby Steps

Baby Steps is not just a store, it is a clearinghouse of information. Most people like to learn about what is available for them and their family, 93.3% of respondents agreed that they like learning about services and activities for children and families in the area. Baby Steps fills that information need, and 84.3% of respondents indicated that they became more informed about services and activities for children and families as a result of going to Baby Steps.

Baby Steps not only provides people with the information, but takes the extra step to connect them to the resources by providing coupons. At 96.5%, almost every survey respondent agreed, or strongly agreed that the activities they did in order to get Baby Steps coupons were worth doing. Not only were they worth doing to get coupons, they were worth doing regardless with 78.3% of respondents

agreeing that they would still do the activities even if they did not get coupons. These respondents would likely have never realized the value of these services and classes without having the incentive to go because of the Baby Steps Coupon Program. One interviewee explained, “When you attend those classes, and when you know that you’re going to get the coupon, it helps you save them up for something really important that you want for your baby, so it’s like an added bonus... I don’t know if I would have attended all of the classes if I wouldn’t have gotten baby steps, I just have to be honest.” Particularly, many fathers would not have gone. While some interviewees indicated they still would go to some of the services, several explained that their husband or the child’s father would not have gone without the coupon. One interviewee said, “I probably still would have went, Seth probably wouldn’t have, he goes because you can get two coupons.” Although, a very small percentage (2.4%) did indicate that they wished they did not have to do activities to receive coupons, but the majority (63.4%) of respondents disagreed and were glad to do the activities for coupons. In fact, 86.6% (220) respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they liked the activities they participated in to receive coupons.

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“When we went to the birthing classes, we learned tons of new stuff, and it helps me feel better prepared for when I gave birth to my daughter, even though I had a C-section, it was, they went over a lot of stuff about the C-section, and it really helped me be better prepared and feel more confident.”

● ● ●

Not only do participants like going to the services, 80.3% also agreed or strongly agreed that they have benefited personally from being involved with the activities. Particularly, 59.8% of respondents felt less alone, more supported and/or more confident in their parenting because of coming to Baby Steps. The interviews supported this, with one participant explaining, “The early childhood family education was good. It was fun to be around other moms in the area and get connected to other moms...and same thing with the love and logic class, it makes me feel that you aren’t so alone, that you aren’t really going through this on your own, that all, that other parents are experiencing the same thing.”

Respondents also indicated additional services or activities that they would like to earn coupons with:

- “co-operation and success with Parents Forever (divorce)”
- “library "reading to your child" program”
- “I always forgot to ask for vouchers/coupons @ my prenatal visits so it's be good if there was a better way - a reminder for nurses/patients because I missed out”
- “YMCA if possible - to keep kids active”
- “Any community education classes (not just ISD 318)”

Not only does Baby Steps help to educate families, it helps parents provide for their children. 64.2% (163) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they typically redeem coupons for basic needs items, such as diapers, wipes, clothing, etc. Those interviewed echoed this, “I think that it’s helped out tremendously because if we didn’t have baby steps, it would definitely be a lot harder, and I know that there’s been a few times that I haven’t been able to buy diapers, and haven’t been able to afford it,

and I've went into baby steps and used my coupons, so that's really helped me a lot and I really appreciate that."

Respondents were asked to finish the sentence: "If Baby Steps did not exist..." and many gave great responses:

If Baby Steps did not exist....

...I would have been lost when I needed supplies, and not gotten involved with certain programs.

...it would be really hard to keep up with babies needs - if we need something all we have to do is attend a workshop that offers coupons

...a lot of men wouldn't participate and neither would some women in activities rewarded w/coupons

...I would not be able to get the stuff my child needs

...talking with other women (both staff and clients) about raising children was vital also learning how to get out of unhealthy relationships and becoming assertive about my boundaries and realizing I'm important too

...a lot of families who benefit from the program would be w/out resources and support our community would be lacking a great resource for parents in this area

"If Baby Steps did not exist... there would be a great need for support services in many families' lives because baby steps has been a great incentive program and a huge support for whoever makes the most of what was made available to them!"

Conclusion

Through both qualitative and quantitative research we have seen that Baby Steps connects families to valuable classes and services, and helps parents to feel more supported and better prepared to parent. Without the incentive that Baby Steps coupons provides, participants would likely be unaware of these activities and services that they enjoy participating in and find to be extremely valuable. Without Baby Steps, many participants would not be able to buy basic needs items for their children, putting them in a precarious situation. The coupons help families by not only connecting them with the resources they need, but by providing incentives that allow them to learn how to be a better parent and in turn have the opportunity to use the coupons for items for their children. Baby Steps fills the unique gap of serving as an education and information clearinghouse, but they also go a step further to help ensure that families actually use the resources that they provide. This service is greatly appreciated and needed as the surveys and interviews greatly evidenced.

Appendix A

Please complete this survey and return it by March 1st to receive your 3 Baby Steps coupons!

1. How many years have you been a Baby Steps customer?
 Less than a year 1 year 2 years 3 years 4 or more years
2. Are the days and/or hours that the boutique is open good for you? Yes No
If no, what hours/days would be good for you? _____
3. What, if any, other kinds of merchandise would you like to see in the store?

4. Is transportation to and from Grand Rapids a big problem for you?
 Yes Sometimes No
5. There are now Baby Steps Closets in Bigfork, Squaw Lake, Keewatin and International Falls.
Do you use any of the Baby Steps Closets? Yes No
Why or why not? _____
6. Is there another town that you would like to have a Baby Steps Closet? Where? _____

Please state your level of agreement with the following questions:

7. The activities that I did in order to get Baby Steps coupons were worth doing.
 Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree
8. If I did not get coupons, I would still do these activities.
 Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree
9. I wish I did not have to do these activities to receive Baby Steps coupons.
 Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree
10. Coming to Baby Steps has helped me feel less alone, more supported and/or more confident in my parenting.
 Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree
11. I typically redeem Baby Steps coupons for basic need items for my children such as diapers, wipes, clothing, etc.
 Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree

12. I like learning about services and activities for children and families in the area.
- Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree
13. I became more informed about services and activities for children and families as a result of going to Baby Steps.
- Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree
14. I liked the activities and/or services I participated in to receive Baby Steps coupons.
- Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree
15. I have personally benefitted from being involved with the activities I participated in to receive Baby Steps coupons.
- Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree
16. Please check the following services, workshops, and/or classes have you participated in to receive Baby Steps coupons:
- Advocates for Family Peace
 - American Indian Services Program
 - AEOA
 - Breast Feeding Support Groups
 - Car Seat Safety
 - Children's Mental Health
 - Prenatal Care
 - Labor and Delivery Classes
 - Well Child Visits & Immunizations
 - Lead testing at well child visits
 - Breastfeeding class
 - Infant Class
 - Cherish Our Children or R.O.C.K.
 - Crisis Nursery
 - Deer River Health Care Center- early childhood screening or packet pick-up
 - Dental Visits
 - Eagleview Community Foundation
 - Early Childhood Family Education
 - Early Childhood Screening
 - Family Development/Crisis Housing

- Head Start or Early Head Start
- ISD 318 Community Education
- Parenting Classes
- Invest Early
- Public Health
- Special Needs Children & Parent Support Group (IEIC & ECSE)
- Itasca Alliance Against Sexual Assault
- Itasca County Health & Human Services
- Libraries
- Northland Area Family Services Center
- Project Clean Start
- Step Ahead
- Teenage Parent Program
- University of MN Extension Service
- WIC

17. Please list other activities or services where you would like to be able to earn Baby Steps coupons.

18. How did you hear about the Baby Steps program?

19. How do you think we could reach more people like you? Where or how should we advertise?

20. Please finish this sentence: **If Baby Steps did not exist, then** _____

Demographic Information

You are a: Male Female *If female, are you pregnant? Yes No

Your age: _____

Ages of your children: _____

Your zip code: _____

Your race/ethnicity:

- African American American Indian Asian
 Hispanic/Latino White/Caucasian Other _____

Your level of education:

- Less than high school Some college credits Four year college graduate
 High school graduate Technical or community college Masters degree or higher

Including yourself, what is the number of employed adults in your household? _____

Your household's approximate income from all sources before taxes in the past one year:

- \$0 - \$10,000 \$20,001 - \$30,000 \$40,001 - \$50,000
 \$10,001 - \$20,000 \$30,001 - \$40,000 \$50,001 and higher

Your type of household:

- Single parent living alone with child(ren)
 Single parent, living with children and family, friends and/or significant other
 Two parents, living together with children
 Other _____

You are a:

- Parent
 Caregiver
 Legal Guardian

Do you read Baby Steps quarterly newsletter? Yes No

Is the newsletter beneficial to you? Yes No

If you want to receive your 3 free coupons, fill out the information below and return by postmark March 1st.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

Would you be willing to participate in a short interview about your participation in Baby Steps to help provide feedback for the program, in exchange for 4-5 additional Baby Steps coupons?

Yes No If yes, what is your phone number? _____

What is the best day and time to reach you? _____

Appendix B

Phone Interview Questions for Baby Steps Participants

1. How did you hear about the baby steps coupon program?
2. Has the economy impacted how often you use the program? How?
3. I see you have attended some of the services or programs that give out Baby Steps coupons.
 - a. Would you have attended that program/services if you would not have received coupons?
 - b. Did you learn anything new at the program and/or service? What?
 - c. Has that program made a difference in your life or changed how you do things? How?
 - d. Specific question about program (depends on what programs have attended)
4. Would you be able to buy the items you typically redeem coupons for, if Baby Steps didn't exist? Why?
5. How would it impact your life if Baby Steps did not exist?
6. How has the programs you have attended to get Baby Steps coupons increased your education as a parent? Prepared you or your child for school and/or the workforce?
7. How does the baby steps coupon program impact or make a difference in your life?
8. If you could change anything about the Baby Steps coupon program what would it be?
9. If the library was not next door to Baby Steps would you go to another place to use those resources?
10. Ask questions about the answers they gave for the survey (clarification, in-depth feedback, etc)
11. Is there anything else you would like to add?