

CHILDREN HELPING CHILDREN

An Update How VBS Raised Funds Continue to Welcome Babies

Every summer, children who attend a three-day Vacation Bible School (VBS) in Oxford raise money or perform a service project to help community members in need. In 2018, Pam Collins, Chief Patient Services Officer at McCullough-Hyde Memorial Hospital (MHMH), told Prue Dana, who participates in the VBS program, that an infant swing would benefit certain babies at the hospital.

In 2018, about 3 percent of the 430 babies delivered at MHMH had neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS), which occurs when a baby withdraws from certain substances—opioids, antidepressants or sleeping pills—he or she is exposed to during pregnancy. Babies born to mothers who abuse substances are often born addicted to the drugs themselves, since the drugs pass through the placenta. “They may be shaky and have problems with temperature control and colic,” says Sandra Flaishmakher, MD, a pediatrician at MHMH. “These symptoms can overwhelm a newborn’s nervous system and interfere with sleep.” The MamaRoo swing, which resembles the environment in the womb, can help soothe irritable babies with NAS. It’s used by more than 300 hospitals around the country.

The swing fit in well with the notion of children helping children, so VBS leaders told the 30 to 40 children, who ranged in age from preschool to fifth grade, about the hospital’s need. “The children brought in their pennies, nickels and dimes because they understood that these babies needed their help,” says Prue. “One boy donated his entire \$20 savings.” In addition, some of the children’s five churches contributed a portion of the week’s offerings to the cause, and parents donated after a VBS concert featuring a band from Colombia. In total, the children, parents and churches raised more than \$600 for the swing and other nursery items.

Soothing irritable babies

MHMH staff members are grateful for the swing, which has proven effective for many newborns with NAS. Case in point: John*, who was born to a mother with opioid addiction, began experiencing withdrawal symptoms within 24 hours of his birth. He was arching his back, crying until he was hoarse and sucking vigorously on a pacifier. Once the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) nurses at MHMH placed him in the MamaRoo swing, the nurses were able to calm him almost instantly. “It was like caring for a completely different child,” says Maria Kreitzer, BSN, RN, CLC, Director of Obstetrics at MHMH. “It was the best sleep he’d had up to

that point.” John spent three hours in the new swing between feedings and was able to use it several times a day during his NICU stay.

When healthy newborns cry, there are several ways to soothe them, including feeding, diapering and holding them, says Kreitzer. Not so with NAS babies. “When caring for NAS babies, you have to minimize stimulation and keep them in a dimly lit area without noise,” she says. The swing’s constant vibration and movement soothe the infant’s nervous system, allowing him or her to sleep, says Dr. Flaishmakher. The swing can be adjusted with five different motions, such as “car ride” and “rock-a-bye”, and five different speeds. It can also recline.

The swing, which is reserved for NAS babies at MHMH, is used in a quiet nursery space with dimmed lights and minimal interaction with nurses. The infant is monitored at all times when he or she is in the swing. Prue and some of our children recently visited MHMH to see it in action. “I look forward to sharing how the swing is being used with the children this summer,” she says. “I want them to know how their donation has helped babies in their own community.”

Prue Dana