

AAUW Mothers Project Annual Report 2017-2018 April 2018

Poughkeepsie Mothers Project

AAUW Poughkeepsie Branch has been the major supporter for the Poughkeepsie Mothers Project for over five years. The Mothers Project provides new mothers in the Poughkeepsie area with parenting and health education, social support, and access to local services at this important and vulnerable time in their lives. We meet at the Family Partnership Center one Wednesday a month from 4:30pm-6:30 pm. The meeting opens with an art project, followed by discussions of the parenting curriculum, nutrition, women's health, infant care, etc. Healthy snacks are provided and time is set aside for the mothers to socialize and learn from one another. We have a core group of mothers who help to run the program, new mothers at each meeting, and fathers and grandmothers who participate regularly.

This year the Mothers Project, while continuing its monthly mother's group meeting, has expanded into the development of the **Integrative Women's Health Initiative (IWHI)**. The overall purpose of the IWHI is to integrate conventional women's healthcare with alternative and complementary healthcare, in the context of a community health center serving a low income and immigrant population.

The IWHI has four projects, in addition to its overall goal of providing integrative women's healthcare :

1. Mothers Project monthly meeting
2. Expressive Art Project for women
3. Prenatal and Postpartum Peer Educator Program
4. Group prenatal program

Our small and very dedicated group of volunteers who run these programs, from AAUW as well as from our other supportive community organizations, together with some of our long involved mothers from the mother's group, and some amazing interns from Vassar College, have developed these programs over the past year. We are working with a grant writer in order to pay for administrative help for the projects. The ultimate goal is to incorporate the IWHI into the Women's Health program at Hudson River Healthcare (HRHC), so that women's health patients at these community health centers in Poughkeepsie can have the benefits of conventional, alternative and complementary healthcare as a part of their community health services. The IWHI will continue to incorporate connections to other community services for the patients as well.

Below we will describe the ongoing activities of the Mothers Project, as well as the three other projects, and our plans for the future.

Poughkeepsie Mothers Project provides:

- A familiar face for new mothers: to listen to, acknowledge and help with their problems,
- Parenting education, and health education, to help them to be the good mothers they want to be.
- Interaction and support from other mothers, which helps reduce isolation, and increases confidence and self esteem in their job of being a mother.
- Information and referrals to the many family and health services available in Poughkeepsie.

- We also have support and volunteers from many other community organizations including: Hudson River Healthcare, Dutchess County Healthy Families, Family Services, Cunneen Hackett Arts Center, Americorps, Girl Scouts, and faith based organizations including Vassar Temple, Temple Beth El. WE also have interns from SUNY New Paltz, Marist, DCC, and Vassar College.
- Monthly meeting Wednesdays from 4:30 to 6:30 pm at the Family Partnership Building.
- Average of 10 mothers/fathers/grandmothers at each meeting, with their babies and other children.

At each meeting:

- Parenting education with discussion, curriculum called Nurturing Parenting, community edition
- Art projects : painting, photos, crochet lessons, mobiles, art show, book on Mom's Best Advice
- Healthy snacks
- Mothers participating in planning and running activities
- Time for socializing/social support
- Help with the infants and children while the mothers do activities

Expressive Art Project

- The art program is very popular with the mothers, who consider the projects fun as well as well as educational and emotionally fulfilling
- The projects provide a time for contemplation of the issues of motherhood
- The projects are an excellent way to begin discussions in the group on important and personal issues
- We expanded the art program this year to include monthly Saturday individual art sessions at Art Centro on Main Street, during the fall months, as well as a month long art show at the Art Centro gallery. Each Mothers Project meeting opens with an art project. The projects all relate in some way to the lives and issues of new mothers, in a way designed to help them express their creativity as well as work through some of these issues
- we are currently working on a painting project, at the mothers' request, that the mothers have started at the monthly group, and have taken home to complete

Prenatal and Postpartum Peer Educator Program

- The purpose of this program is to bring prenatal and postpartum education and peer support to new mothers at their scheduled appointments for prenatal and postpartum care at the HRHC community health center. We are finishing with our peer educator training, and ready to move into implementation of the program
- Two experienced mothers who have been prenatal and postpartum patients, as well as long time Mothers Project participants at HRHC have been training to provide peer counseling
- The program is based on the HRHC Hepatitis C Peer Educator Program, and the WIC Breastfeeding Peer Educator Program

- We are using a modified version of the HRHC Prenatal Course course curriculum for the prenatal education
- For curriculum development and training, we have the assistance of a retired and very experienced nurse who taught prenatal/postpartum classes at Vassar Hospital and HRHC for 30 years
- For the development of this program, we have the assistance of a Vassar College intern who is a nationally certified Peer Health Educator
- One of the peer educators speaks Spanish, which is important as about half of the prenatal patients at the Family Partnership are Spanish speaking

Group Prenatal Care

- Group prenatal care has been shown to increase prenatal patient education levels, provide social support, increase assistance and involvement of other community organizations in prenatal care
- Group prenatal care has been shown to increase patient satisfaction with their prenatal care, as well as practitioner satisfaction
- Group prenatal care is based on the Centering Pregnancy model of prenatal care
- Kay Bishop and Corrie Shattenkirk have 13 years of experience in running group prenatal programs between them. With the assistance of the Mothers Project, we are reincorporating group prenatal care into the prenatal program at HRHC.

PLANS FOR EXPANSION AND THE UPCOMING YEAR

Our plans for expansion are based on getting a grant in order to pay an administrative assistant, as well as paying for part of our time to be able to incorporate our programs into the daily operations of the women's health program at Hudson River Healthcare. We are working with a grant writer with a strong record of success for social programs in Poughkeepsie. We have presented our program ideas to the HRHC's Director of Women's Health in Poughkeepsie, as well as the Vice President of Operations for HRHC, who have encouraged us to continue to develop the programs. The grant proposals as we develop them will be submitted to the grant department of HRHC for assessment, and if approved, for incorporation into the HRHC Women's Health program.

We are also developing closer ties with the Vassar College Office of Community Engaged Learning and internship program. This year we have two Vassar College interns who have been instrumental in helping us develop our expanded programs. A stated goal of the Office of Community Engaged Learning is to develop long term relationships between the college and local community initiatives. We have been invited to speak at their annual Celebration of Student and Community Engagement, with the goal of creating long term relationships between Vassar College and our IWHI.

Our **Mothers Project** monthly mother's group meeting is extremely successful, in large part thanks to the support of AAUW. We are unable to expand the program any further with our volunteer resources. With a paid administrative assistant, we will be able to implement our ongoing goals for expansion of this group, including moving into a larger space, adding a Spanish speaking group, expanding a children's

literacy program, increasing referrals and connections to other community partners, and the addition of weekly instead of monthly meetings for the mother's group.

Our **Expressive Art Project** is a large part of the success of our monthly Mother's Group. This program also has been made possible due to the support of AAUW. The opportunity for creative self expression, as well as the discussions that develop around the creative art projects, are a major draw for the mothers in our group. Our plans for expansion of this program also require more time and help than is currently possible with our volunteer resources. We plan to create a 10 to 20 minute documentary about the lives of several young mothers in Poughkeepsie. Our plans including increased connections to other artistic resources in the community, and incorporation of the expressive arts into the daily women's health program at HRHC.

Our **Prenatal and Postpartum Peer Educator Program** now has two trained peer educators, with one who is bilingual in Spanish and English. They are currently working with prenatal and postpartum patients at HRHC. With a paid administrative assistant, we will be able to train more peer educators to provide education and support for the HRHC women's health patients.

The **Group Prenatal Program** has been a service offered by HRHC for 10 years. This program, in order to continue to provide increased education and support to our prenatal patients, will be continued and expanded with the efforts of a paid administrative assistant.

The above projects are all programs of our larger concept of the **Integrative Women's Health Initiative**. Integrative health is based on a real relationship between the practitioner and the patient, which necessarily includes significant time spent at each healthcare visit. The current healthcare system, for private practices as well as community health services, is based on the practitioner seeing as many patients as possible each day, in the name of efficiency and billing. It is well known that an individual's health problems are intricately connected to their lifestyle and social issues, including nutrition, relationships, housing and income. However, the time constraints of the current healthcare system rarely allow for evaluation or inclusion of these issues in a healthcare visit. The IWHI plans to use grant funding to pay for practitioner time, in order to spend additional time with each patient. The time will be used to develop a therapeutic relationship, incorporate lifestyle issues into each visit, and also to incorporate alternative and complementary healthcare into the visit as needed.

Continuing volunteer needs

- Volunteers to come to mother's group meetings and help hold babies, play with toddlers
- Any administrative assistance with any of the above programs. We have monthly planning meetings in addition to the monthly mother's group meetings, and we always welcome anyone who is interested to come to any of the meetings
- Connections to other community organizations to organize a schedule of help for the meetings
- Assistance with a children's literacy initiative for the mother's group meetings
- Assistance with Facebook/social media

Submitted by Kay Bishop and Lula Allen, Mothers Project Co-Chairs April 2018