Healthy Start, Healthy Future

LWAB Backgrounder at June 30th, 2011
our Mission

To strengthen families and communities by providing ongoing support for new and expectant parents, informational seminars to educate and manage expectations and an open forum for discussing the challenges new parents face adjusting to life with a baby.
our Goals

To provide a healthy start for new parents who are having difficulties adjusting to a new baby.

To promote a healthy start for babies and thus a healthy future for children and adults.

To promote a healthy attitude towards challenges new parents face and support parents who are having difficulty adjusting to parenthood.

To provide a forum for discussion of issues pertaining to the well-being of moms with new babies.

Life with a Baby
REAL PARENTS • REAL CHALLENGES • REAL HELP
In 2008, Life With A Baby (LWAB) was born when a York Region mom found herself at home with a new baby and facing post-partum challenges that included social isolation and anxiety.

Since then Life With A Baby has evolved into a unique peer support community for new parents that is directed by parents. Kids grow up quickly, so parents are challenged to respond to their children’s changing needs and interests.

By conducting research, continually communicating with parents and by collaborating with a team of healthcare providers and subject matter experts, LWAB remains relevant at every stage of a child’s life. As a result, the LWAB community benefits from events and workshops that address parents’ needs at various stages of their children’s lives: from adjusting to new born communication, dealing with toddler tantrums through to disciplining a six-year old.
LWAB’s core is an informative website that keeps the community connected through online discussion forums covering just about every topic that keeps both new and more mature parents up at night. These topics range from colic and teething, sleeplessness in infants to transitioning to solid foods and daycare dilemma. Over 200 members have participated in the online forum where they provide support to each other and offer tips on various issues—including tips on where to find discounted sale items and how to be gainfully employed while still being a stay-at-home mom.

In 2009, a not-for-profit, Healthy Start, Healthy Future (HSHF), was founded to oversee the LWAB program. HSHF is governed by a volunteer board of directors which is charged with fostering the prudent growth of LWAB and supporting staff with the resources required to continue to offer this exemplary program.
Founder’s Message


These are just some of the words that described how I felt after the birth of my daughter.

Most new mothers are challenged to reconcile the reality of motherhood and its unrelenting emotional and physical demands with the pre-natal blissful dreams they once entertained. As a new, first-time mother I was no different. Motherhood came with feelings and thoughts that were in stark contrast to the dreams and expectations I had cherished before my daughter was born. Though I loved her beyond expectation and belief, I found myself becoming anxious, nervous, lonely, and yes, bored with my new life. I had no support around me having recently moved to York Region - and no friends who had babies. My husband worked and I found myself becoming socially isolated and trapped within my home. Even worst, I felt like no one really understood what I was going through.

I was lucky to be connected to York Region Public Health where I was able to participate in the Transition to Parenting program, however once this program was over I was once again in the same situation - no one to go for a stroller walk with or arrange a play date with.

This just feels much more INCLUSIVE to me... I know of other groups that seem to be [like] if you belong to a certain [like a] group or demographic then you could be invited or if you pay enough you can participate

Maureen*, PC participant

*Names used are pseudonyms
In 2008, between bouts of crying, coping with anti-climactic disappointment, and feelings of elation, I reached out to the internet community for companionship and support. I wanted to be connected with other new moms who lived in my area but all I could find were outdated articles and information on parenting groups. I wanted to connect with real moms. I wanted to be able to talk with them face to face and feel a sense of support. Since nothing was available I had the idea for an organization to help new parents—particularly new moms—and LWAB was born. New mothers began to connect through the LWAB website and its discussion forums; we attended social events that offered peer support, speaker series, and workshops. Most importantly, through LWAB we enjoyed real personal connections that helped us as new parents to navigate the uncharted ever-changing course of life with a baby.

The most rewarding part of this journey is seeing the parents who took part and benefited from the program starting to organize LWAB chapters in their communities, volunteering and leading workshops in their areas. Our core team of eight is made up of amazing committed moms who are as passionate about the program as I am and committed to moving the program forward.

At HSHF, as our babies grow, we grow; as our babies change, we change. Like you, we simply adjust every facet of our lives to embrace life with a baby. Let’s continue to support each other as we take on this enjoyable and exciting journey together.

“I use the website, I’ve actually gone on the forum and put in a title, sleep, and people have responded... LWAB has all these different activities and information sessions that are all good... they are all IN GENERAL JUST VERY APPLICABLE

Ellen*, PC participant

*Names used are pseudonyms
A lot of programs focus on the mom working outside of the home... and this was just focusing on the challenges that we face as moms being at home.

*Sandra*, *ME participant*
LWAB’s leadership team has crafted its programs and services to meet the lifestyle needs of new mothers who, because they are nurturing infants, are often sleep-deprived, strapped for time and juggling home finances on a decreased family income. These multi-week parenting programs and services are offered free of charge to the participants (including caregivers, dads and moms). Since the same group of individual moms attends each program for its duration, they are able to get to know each other and build long-term relationships in a setting that accommodates their babies’ attendance as well.

Parenting Confidently

New parents are known to be anxious and nervous about how to care for their babies. Some survive the first few weeks in a sleep-deprived, emotionally-charged environment.

Program facilitators deliver informative and practical tools aimed at reducing the nervousness and anxiety that new parents face while building the confidence that new parents need to develop as they take on the challenges of nurturing a new baby. The topics are varied and may include infant/child CPR and first aid, nutrition for mom and baby, infant massage, baby safety, and early literacy and development.

*Names used are pseudonyms

It just makes you feel more comfortable when you hear that OTHER PEOPLE ARE DEALING WITH THE SAME THINGS

Maureen*, PC participant

You’re not afraid of something happening as much, YOU KNOW YOU CAN HANDLE IT

Alexis*, PC participant
Managing Expectations

New and expecting moms learn how to adjust their expectations and previously-held perceptions so that they can deal effectively with the reality of life with a baby.

Participants benefit from tips and strategies for keeping the marriage strong, dealing with the super-mom complex, designing and sticking to budgets, sleep-nurturing methods for baby, among other topics. The program is facilitated by a peer support coordinator and subject-matter expert each week.

Parenting Your Toddler

Oh, the toddler years! They are sooo cute, they may be talking more now and their little personalities are really showing... but, they are also super bossy, they don't listen, they want their way ALL the time, they throw tantrums to get their way, they refuse to eat, they start waking up at nights, not to mention potty training... oh the list really can go on for a while.

Subject-matter experts help parents manage their toddlers without tears, without yelling and without the battle, each time. Topics include behaviour and development, nutrition and sleep solutions, potty training, active listening and discipline, as well as stress and conflict management.

*LWAB’s leadership team has crafted its programs and services to meet the lifestyle needs of new mothers*

*Names used are pseudonyms*
Our community-based local events help to reduce social isolation and build relationships and social networks. Since LWAB is peer-based and free, it allows members to participate regularly and over a longer period. Members develop long-term relationships and offer each other support - not just during actual participation in a registered program, but over the early years of their children’s development. Our social events include:

- **Seminars** – free informational seminars on various topics from starting solid foods to potty training and beyond.

- **Workshops** – educational workshops to build confidence and equip parents with life-saving skills.

- **Play dates** – events for mom and baby to connect with other moms whose children are at the same stage.

- **Walking groups** - weekly walk groups in various locations to build relationships, promote physical activity and a healthy lifestyle.

- **Support groups** - various support groups for parents based on life stage and shared challenges.

- **Social gatherings** - from fun educational programs to parent’s night out, we have over thirty social gatherings across the region per month.

- **Weight loss buddy system** - buddy system to encourage moms to get active and lose weight with their babies in tow, by going to the gym, and for power walks in the park.

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**IT GETS ME OUT**

I would have gone crazy if I hadn’t met all of you guys.

*Alexis*, PC participant
Our Community At-A-Glance

Making & Painting Baby Imprints

Baby Gymnastics

Painting in the Park

Wagon Ride during a Farm Visit

Mommy & Me Playgroup
Watching Planes at the Airfield

Feeding Time at the Petting Zoo

Mom and Baby Yoga

Circus Arts

Visit to the Fire Station
There are so many treasures to be found through interaction with other parents. When you are a part of the Life With A Baby community you are a part of a group whose members have similar dreams, face similar challenges and celebrate similar milestones. LWAB’s reach is as wide and as varied as its impact: various communities bond during stroller walks and over coffee as moms create opportunities to grow together, and in support of, one another.
Our online community is equally vibrant. Through forums and online discussion, LWAB members connect with each other, sharing tips and information on topics as varied as toilet training and vaccinations to estate planning and daycare options. Aged between 25 and 45 years old, members include single parent families, parents of multiples and married couples from across all socioeconomic backgrounds.

*Names used are pseudonyms*
our Supporters

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- The Regional Municipality Of York: New Agency Development Fund

Partners

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- Jewish Family & Child – The Family Resource Centre
- Catholic Community Services of York Region
- York Child Development & Family Services

Sponsors

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- Heritage RESP
- Richmond Hill Christian Community Church

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- Gymalaya
- Extraordinary Beginnings

“ There is a lot of programs for babies from 0-12 months, and somehow all of them disappear... and a lot of the programs that are being offered for kids their age are all things you have to pay for, and they are not cheap... and financially, being at home... FINANCES ARE THE THINGS YOU THINK ABOUT

June*, ME participant

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