The Mother’s Own Milk (MOM) Project

An Update and Discussion
What is the MOM Project?

- A low cost hospital grade breast pump rental for families at the Foothills Medical Centre (FMC) Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU)
- Families pay $5/calendar month for the breast pump rental and the cost of the accessories needed to make our pumps compatible with their hospital-issued kits
- Currently, the funding for the MOM Project comes from the local ministries fund and from “ear-marked” donations from congregation members. This project is 100% Calgary congregation funded at present
- We have several volunteer knitters and crochetiers who donate beautiful baby blankets and hats to give each family
Why do we do this?

- A mother’s breast milk is uniquely designed for her baby and provides perfect nutrition, immune system benefits, and is the healthiest food for developing digestive systems.
- When a baby is born sick or premature the mother needs to use a hospital grade breast pump every 3-4 hours to establish and maintain her breast milk supply.
- Commercial rentals cost $70-100/month from pharmacies and there is very little cost assistance available for families in financial need.
- By providing a low cost rental we are helping babies get the best nutrition, empowering mothers to provide breast milk for their child, and give them the ability to choose between breast feeding and formula; not be forced into formula because she was unable to sustain her milk supply.
Low income families are identified by the hospital social worker or lactation consultant, and they provide the program contact information to them. This is the only source of the contact information to ensure that we are only providing the service to families most in need.

The mothers contact the program by phone or email, and a coordinator completes an intake form and double checks that the mother meets the program’s criteria.

The MOM Project coordinators meet the mother to drop off the pump, show her how to use it, and give simple teaching on how to manage her breast milk and supply.

Mothers make payment to the program for $5/calendar month and can contact the program for support at any time. They are also provided with contact information for breastfeeding resources in Calgary.

When the mother is finished with the pump (generally several weeks after the baby is discharged home) she contacts the coordinators and they pick up the pump from her.
Who does this?

- Currently, Cindy Larsen and Caitlin d’Esterre are the only volunteers for the program.
- Caitlin coordinates email/text contacts with moms, provides pumping education if needed, manages the paperwork and comes up with big brained ideas.
- Cindy answers telephone inquiries and does 90% of the drop offs and pickups (Caitlin always seems to be working).
- Our blanket team work at their leisure and always supply us with beautiful work! Caitlin has taken up crocheting as well...
What are the statistics?

- The program launched in March 2017
- As of September 24th 2017 we have provided pumps to 16 mothers who have in turn provided their milk to a total of 19 babies. At least one of our mothers has donated some of her milk to the Northern Star Milk Bank.
- We have had rentals lasting from 20 days to 6 months
- Most of the babies we are helping are born less than 30 weeks gestation (two and a half months premature)
- Some of our mothers have other children, but most are first time moms
- About ¼ of our moms are single or do not have a live-in partner
- Most of our moms have chosen to feed formula once her baby has come home due to the complicated feeding of premature babies
What about the cost?

- The initial proposal sent to the congregation asked for a budget of $2129.60 and was meant to cover 6 pumping kits, a per-mother consumables cost of $31.25 and serving 20 mothers in a 12 month period.
- This was before the addition of the baby blankets (we currently purchase the wool for our knitters) which has become an important way to engage those within and outside our congregation.
- It was also before we realised we needed almost double the original number of pumps...
- And that our consumable cost per mother was actually going to be more like $35...
- And that we were going to serve 16 mothers in 6 months...
What about the cost? Cont’d

Total cost to the congregation as of September 24th 2017: $3413.96

Total contributions specifically to the MOM Project: $2500

Total income from rental fees: $255

The “balance” being $658.96
GREAT NEWS!!!

We just received a huge donation from a breast pump supply company!

- 50 sets of back low prevention valves
- 15 sets of pump tubing
- 10 sets of adaptors (only needed with brand new pumping kits)
- 7 pairs of uniquely sized breast shields
What are the future plans?

- Expand to other hospitals?
- Expand to be Calgary wide (i.e., not just NICUs)?
- Expand to other cities?
- Social/government action?
- Stay small?
Thoughts for moving forward

- **Sustainability!**
- **Financial:** We want the program to be charitable, but not give away a good thing for free. It is also important to consider investment/start up costs and ongoing costs.
- **Personnel:** Volunteer hours are averaging 1-6 hours per week. Volunteers must have a vehicle, be comfortable going to a stranger’s home and create an open and secular relationship with these moms.

- A program that cannot replace the cost of its disposables is not sustainable...
- This issue is bigger than we ever imagined...
- How do we enact social change to provide this service to everyone that needs it without exhausting our resources?
Plans for moving forward

Timing
- March 2018 marks the end of the agreed upon pilot project at FMC. No plans to change/expand the program until that time.

Volunteers
- Solicit more volunteers (inside and outside the congregation) to assist with pump pick ups and drop offs.

Streamline
- Streamline the pickup and drop off process while maintaining accessibility.

Funding
- Create a three year business plan and submit it for the congregation’s approval with the 2018 budget. (November 2017)

Independence
- Have the MOM Project become a separate society to increase the buffer between volunteers, AHS and C of C. Will also allow donors to contribute directly to the project and be issued a receipt.
Who wants to help, and how?

- Opportunities to volunteer your time (again, must have a vehicle, be comfortable discussing breast pumping, be okay with going to stranger’s homes, and respect the secular nature of the program)
- Provide funds. Currently you can designate your local contributions to the MOM Project in your weekly tithing, or you can make lump sum donations to the congregation designated to the project
- Write a letter to your MLA! I have drafted a letter advocating for more affordable access to breast pump rentals and breastfeeding support, and compiled a list of MLAs who would most likely be receptive. If you prefer, you may write your own and I can provide you with addresses. No postage required!
- Share your ideas for expansion and program management with me!
- Sign up sheets for volunteers and letter writers/signers
Thank you for all of your support!