Home Visitors Give Babies a Healthy Start

Every year, more than 12,000 babies are born into poverty in Brooklyn. Even in utero, these infants may face limited access to prenatal care, poor early nutrition, lack of health care, substandard housing, or stressed parents who are overworked, underpaid or unemployed.

To get Central Brooklyn’s most at-risk babies off to a better start, two CAMBA programs send trained staff into the homes of the neighborhoods’ hardest-to-reach new mothers and mothers-to-be. Together, the Healthy Families Program and the Community Health Worker Program serve 320 families annually.

Jannette Torres, director of both programs, says education is the cornerstone of her staff’s efforts. She ticks off a list of parenting skills and information CAMBA provides to new moms—a list that rivals Dr. Spock’s famed handbook. These young mothers learn everything from good nutrition, breast-feeding and the intricacies of labor and delivery to how to handle postpartum depression, curb sibling rivalries, bond with a baby and provide a safe sleeping environment.

The programs foster the well-documented links between early childhood development and school success, lifelong health and economic security.

Eya Makeba Bwaye, an immigrant from Grenada, was impoverished and living in an abusive housing situation with her two-week-old son Ajani when Doreen Dennis, Senior Family Support Worker with the Community Health Worker Program, reached out to her.

“I didn’t know what to do,” says Eya. “Doreen told me where to get help.”

Eya credits CAMBA with teaching her to survive and advocate for herself—skills that have enabled her to transform her life.

Dennis visited Eya monthly, monitored her progress and ensured that she got access to pediatric care and

From the Executive Director

In the wake of Hurricane Sandy, helping others is foremost on everyone’s minds. At CAMBA, our staff worked triple-shifts during the storm to ensure that thousands of New York City’s most vulnerable residents continued to receive essential services.

We cannot rest while our neighbors are still suffering.

CAMBA is partnering with The Hudson Companies, the Brooklyn Community Foundation and Enterprise Community Partners in a major initiative to ensure housing for people displaced from their homes. Our Staten Island HomeBase staff is working with the borough’s Restoration Center to help residents get necessities.

The crisis underscores CAMBA’s lifesaving work, providing food, shelter and other necessities year-round. We also strive to be life-changing, and we know that education is a key to self-sustaining independence.

That’s why education is everywhere at CAMBA. We don’t just teach clients to fish. We teach them to read, write, live healthy lives, protect themselves and their families, meet their most basic needs and reach higher.

In these pages, you’ll meet some of the people we serve… and see how CAMBA empowers them to transform their lives.
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CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

immunizations for her baby, GED classes for herself, WIC, food stamps and other necessities. Moreover, CAMBA was able to help get Eya into a safe, new apartment. Today, Ajani is in nursery school and thriving.

Like Eya, many clients in CAMBA’s community outreach programs face multiple challenges. They may be undocumented and have limited English skills and education. Most are single and many experience health problems, domestic violence, substance abuse, overcrowding or eviction.

Because CAMBA offers a vast network of services, family support workers can marshal a wealth of solutions—and provide each family whatever it needs to flourish and to get babies off to a healthy start and a better future. ☀
Fatoumatta Drammeh was the top woman broadcast journalist in The Gambia. She left her career when she came to the U.S. Fatoumatta needed help, so she turned to CAMBA’s Immigrant Professional Training Program (IPTP) to jump-start her career here. Now she earns a living as a home health aide and plans to become a nurse. Eventually, she hopes to combine her nursing career with medical journalism.

IPTP’s eight-week course focuses on finding English-language classes, writing U.S.-appropriate resumes and honing “soft” skills, such as learning to negotiate and network in a new country. Program Director Marc Fallon helps clients set multi-year goals: a survival job to pay the bills, a gateway job in their field, followed by a career position.

One of Fallon’s greatest challenges is helping clients with certifications—tracking down university records from war-torn countries or towns destroyed by natural disasters, translating documents, negotiating with credentialing agencies spread across many states and job titles. With more than 120 professionals from 35 countries served in a typical year, the red tape can seem endless.

Sometimes, there is no magic bullet for immigrants striving to rebuild careers. Thus, “managing expectations” is a part of Fallon’s role, as he gently steers many clients toward accepting reality, assessing their skills and redirecting their ambitions.

CAMBA’s IPTP is unique in New York City because, as Fallon says, “we can offer boutique services—individualized to meet the needs of each participant and targeted to a wide variety of professions.”

Khulood Nasher, Physicist, Yemen

“Cultural misunderstandings” were a barrier, and CAMBA helped Khulood understand her new country. Now, she is exploring teaching physics as a stepping stone back into her career.

“I came here for a greener pasture, but it’s not like I thought it would be…”

Fatoumatta Drammeh

Javier Rincon , IT Professional, Venezuela

Javier is grateful to CAMBA for job search assistance. “I’m just waiting, and I know I am going to get a job. But if not, I will go back to school and go for a master’s degree in public administration,” he says.

Nieves Miranda Reyes, Lawyer, Spain

Being unable to practice law in the U.S. is “frustrating, and makes me feel bad,” Nieves says. CAMBA has helped her find English classes. “I’m learning about jobs and volunteering.”

Youth Spend Summer Learning to Lead

This summer, Kessina, 17, was amazed to learn that Monarch butterflies may not survive their annual migration, but their offspring, hatched along the route, instinctively take flight and follow the migration trail.

“I wish humans were like that… we could just be born into this world and know exactly what we were meant to do,” she muses.

Kessina was among 24 students from CAMBA’s Beacon 269 program who attended our Youth Leadership Retreat this past summer, which combines education, leadership development and recreation in a summer camp setting for students in grades five through eight.

Through team-building and decision-making activities, campers gained life skills—the kind of skills that Monarch butterflies are born knowing but humans take years to acquire. Swimming, running obstacle courses and hiking rounded out the agenda.

For many of the inner city young people, the retreat was their first camping experience. “I learned that… we have to focus about what we’re doing and we have to work together as a team,” says Antonio, 13. “I also learned that you always have to wear insect repellent in the woods.”

The retreat is a reward for students who participate in the Beacon’s school-year Leadership Group or sit on its governing Youth Council.

Leadership activities “teach students to be mindful of issues that affect their communities,” says Beacon Director Regina Mitchell. “They learn the fundamentals of being a local leader: public speaking, advocacy, community-building and how to do presentations and training for younger participants.”
Learning to Work

Kenrick Monize, 20, could easily have been one of Brooklyn’s 50,000 “disconnected youth,” young adults who are out of school, unemployed and facing a dismal future.

Instead, he is finishing high school and working part time at a nursing home, where he is a model employee and a candidate for full-time employment after graduation.

“My mom says she’s proud of me,” Kenrick says, and it is clear that he, too, takes pride in his work.

Kenrick is part of CAMBA’s Learning to Work (LTW) program at Metropolitan Diploma Plus High School in Brownsville, a transfer high school aimed at older high school students who lack the credits they need to graduate and are often at risk of dropping out. LTW gives students intensive social services, academics and real-world, paid internships. The goal is to graduate students who are educated, work-ready and have a solid plan for college or technical training.

Today, CAMBA’s LTW program partners with five high schools and serves over 1,000 students annually.

“Our students weren’t doing well at their previous schools,” says Alison Haberly, CAMBA Director of High School and Career Services. “Here, they receive individual and group support.” If an LTW student misses school, they can expect a phone call or a knock on the door from a CAMBA advocate counselor ready to help them overcome any barrier they face.

And those barriers can be colossal: Many students at transfer high schools are homeless, aging out of foster care, single mothers, immigrants, involved in the justice system or disabled. Still others “just don’t want to go to school,” says Haberly, which is why CAMBA’s LTW program creates a unique action plan for every student.

Every student has an advocate counselor, who builds relationships with the young adult and his or her family.

“We serve our students in every aspect of their lives.” Haberly notes, “And our students regard us as their second chance.”

Scholarship Gifts
Rescued Youth Retreat

“Leadership” is not an abstract concept for CAMBA Board Member Julia Beardwood—it’s a way of life. When her children were young, she left a successful corporate marketing career to start her own now-flourishing design firm, Beardwood & Co.

When she learned that funding cuts were forcing CAMBA to cancel its annual Youth Leadership Retreat last summer, she led an effort to raise scholarships so young students would have this unique opportunity. Beardwood also funded two scholarships in honor of her own sons.

“With both my sons graduating this year—one from high school and the other from college—I was looking for a way to celebrate their accomplishments and remind them of the importance of sharing with others some of the opportunities they’ve been given along the way, especially those invaluable out-of-school activities,” she says.

When you support CAMBA’s youth leadership programs, you could be nurturing the next President or Nobel Peace Prize winner. Fund a scholarship at CAMBA.org.