



Healthy Start Celebrates 25 Years!

June 25, 2017 – Orlando, FL - It's hard to believe that 25 years have passed since the Healthy Start Coalition of Orange County was born! Under the leadership of then-Governor Lawton Chiles, the Legislature passed the Healthy Start statute to address Florida's high infant mortality rates and poor birth outcomes. This legislation included formation of community-based coalitions to address these issues at the local level. Orange County's coalition came together in 1992 and since then has made great progress in reducing infant mortality and improving maternal-child health in our county.

In addition to our very successful Healthy Start program located at the Dept. of Health in Orange, some of our other most notable initiatives include the *Save our Babies* grassroots outreach program, "This Side Up" onesie campaign, and implementation of *Boot Camp for New Dads* and *Nurse-Family Partnership* programs. We have campaigned with March of Dimes to distribute folic acid, produced a "Get Healthy Before Pregnancy" trailer for movie theaters, conducted "cupcake tours" at businesses to promote Healthy Start, brought in well-known speakers on maternal-child health, and coordinated numerous community baby-showers.

The Coalition has not done this work alone. We have wonderful partners "in the trenches" providing services to our families. Others have supported our special projects with their donations and grant funds. And over all these years, members of our Board of Directors have proven to be the backbone of the organization, steering us through highs and lows with their dedication and wisdom. Their leadership will continue to move the Coalition forward for years to come.

But after 25 years, there remains much to do. We still have a significant gap in outcomes between black and white infants, as black babies are 2-3 times more likely to die before their first birthday regardless of the mother's educational or socioeconomic level. Access to family planning and well-woman care is vital since 50% of pregnancies are unplanned and the mother's health prior to pregnancy plays a major role in the health of her baby. Also, obesity, chronic health problems and age greater than 35 cause pregnancies to be considered high-risk. We need to continue working with the public, obstetricians and hospitals to reduce unnecessary C-sections. Recently we have witnessed an increase in the number of babies being born to mothers who used both illegal and prescription drugs during pregnancy; these babies are born addicted, struggle through withdrawal and are at risk for long-term health problems. As a Coalition, we will continue to do our best to bring awareness of and seek solutions to issues such as these as they develop.

The value of local Coalitions cannot be underestimated. They are in the best position to assess the needs of their unique communities and bring in local partners to offer solutions best suited to their situations (which vary greatly around the state). Florida is fortunate to have the only comprehensive maternal-child health system in the nation – still in place after 25 years. We are grateful to the visionaries who created Healthy Start and all the legislatures that have sustained it for the betterment of life for Florida's babies. The Healthy Start Coalition of Orange County is honored to have led this 25-year journey, and with your help, we will continue our work to ensure that "*every baby gets a healthy start*"!

Warm Regards,

**Linda Sutherland, Executive Director
Healthy Start Coalition of Orange County, Inc.**