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CIVIC AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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# Hettie's Hope Chest

## Diaper Program Consultation Report

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**Report Presented to**

**Hettie's Hope Chest**

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## Introduction

Hettie's Hope Chest is a Lancaster PA 501c3 nonprofit social service organization that serves to support children and their caregivers with diapers and associated supplies. The organization works with local daycares and social workers, specifically the social workers of the Penn Manor School District, to arrange for the provision of diapers to families in need. The organization, which is small and overseen by a voluntary board of directors, needed assistance regarding research and program development.

The Center for Public Scholarship and Social Change (CPSSC) was approached by Hettie's Hope Chest in May of 2021. At that time, executive director, Ms. Deb Franssen was interested in having a market analysis conducted to help inform programmatic decisions of the nonprofit. They were currently purchasing diapers via Amazon but were unsure if, given delivery issues and other logistics, this was the best and most feasible option for their program. The CPSSC agreed to provide assistance in researching this topic to support the program operations.

In order to best understand the phenomenon at hand, researchers conducted a literature review about the health and hygiene aspects of poverty, namely the issues facing low-income households with small children who utilize diapers. They then explored a number of logistical issues related to the purchase of diapers in consultation with Hettie's Hope Chest to best understand their needs and program. Both delivery of the diapers and the ability to store large quantities were important considerations. The quality of the products and the cost also were of concern. In addition to ongoing consultation with Hettie's Hope Chest, researchers collected data about all of these domains from websites, physical stores, and online reviews. This research led

to recommendations for product selections and implications for program development and are presented below.

## **Literature Review**

### **Poverty and Diapers**

Randles (2021) illustrates the diapering of children as an undertaking that requires more than the physical tasks of procuring or purchasing diapers and disposing of or cleaning used diapers. Though a primary job of all parents is the disposal of their young children's waste, managing and affording limited diapering supplies is "a complex physical, cognitive, emotional, and social process for poor parents who must plan, calculate, save, stretch, sacrifice, and innovate regarding diapers" (Randles, 2021, p. 39).

Families experiencing poverty may receive support from school and community resources to meet some needs of their children, but programs like SNAP (Food Stamps) and WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) do not contribute to the considerable cost of diapers for young children (Goldblum & Shaddox, 2021). These programs with goals to alleviate poverty have largely omitted costs associated with nonfood essentials such as diapers. With nearly half of US families that raise infants and toddlers living at or below 200% of the federal poverty level, meeting basic needs including sufficiently supplying diapers to keep children clean, dry, and healthy is a significant challenge (Massengale et al., 2020). A study by the National Diaper Bank Network and Huggies (2017) found that over 30% of families reported struggling with diaper needs and experienced a shortage of about 19 diapers each month. The ability to keep oneself clean and sanitary is foundational to human dignity. The cost of essential products such as menstrual hygiene supplies, diapers, and toilet paper is not covered by public programs such as SNAP (food stamps), which covers only food items. A family's disposable income has to stretch

to cover these items and therefore it is often a point of budget compromise and deficit (Goldblum & Shaddox, 2021). Families, especially mothers, have responded with increased creativity and innovation regarding diaper resourcing.

Studies have found a strong association between low socioeconomic status and elevated parenting stress (Arikan et al., 2019, Hurt & Betancourt, 2017). This is perhaps because families experiencing poverty are likely to face the stress and challenges of parenting a young child with fewer financial, emotional, and social supports (Rhoad-Drogalis et al., 2020). Disproportionately, this stress falls to women who are over-represented as heads of households in poverty. Specifically, over 50% of all children who are living in poverty live in female-headed households (Dubois & Miley, 2019).

### **Health and financial impacts**

Some studies suggest that to best support maternal women's health, healthcare providers should assist perinatal women in finding resources in their community that assist with formula, diapers, and other supplies (Barbosa-Leiker et al., 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic, shelter-in-place restrictions contributed to myriad difficulties for pregnant women and new mothers in obtaining maternal-fetal healthcare, childcare, and resources such as diapers (Barbosa-Leiker et al., 2021). These increased stressors may create a domino effect of issues, such as less engagement in stress-reduction and coping mechanisms by postpartum mothers (Barbosa-Leiker et al., 2021), and increased problematic behaviors in their children (Arikan et al., 2019).

Supplying families with an adequate amount of diapers may be a worthwhile strategy for reducing parenting stress, further increasing positive impacts on a child's development and health

(Smith et al., 2013). Children's diaper poverty puts them at risk for experiencing discomfort or even pain from wearing diapers beyond the recommended time frame, previously worn disposable diapers, diapers too large or small, or supplementing with non-diaper items such as cloths or plastic bags in the absence of diapers (Massengale et al., 2020).

### **Hettie's Hope Chest Program**

[Hettie's Hope Chest](#) is a small nonprofit organization (501c3) that provides free diapers to parents in need within the Penn Manor School District. Hettie's Hope Chest works directly with third-party social workers and daycares who verify need and coordinate the referral resources. Hettie's then works to stock, supply, and support families with the diaper supplies that are needed.

### **Methodology**

Hettie's Hope Chest partnered with Millersville University's Center for Public Scholarship and Social Change (CPSSC) to conduct market analysis to obtain comprehensive information about diaper options including branding, location, delivery options, price points and quality. The goal of the analysis was to determine which diaper brand had the best value based on its quality, ability to be delivered to the distribution center at low or no cost, and price per diaper. Student researchers from the School of Social Work conducted market research in-person and online. The researchers shared findings with Hettie's Hope Chest leadership and CPSSC faculty liaisons at periodic team meetings conducted over Zoom throughout Summer 2021. Researchers gathered data using mobile phone cameras to capture prices and quantities of each size of diaper at stores and by observing and noting posted prices and quantities via online sites of stores selling diapers. The data were assembled into a spreadsheet shared among the research team online via Google Drive, where each diaper brand was divided into its available sizes, and

prices per diaper were noted. Researchers also provided field notes regarding whether a brand was eligible for delivery and whether delivery was contingent on enrollment in a program or on a minimum order.

### **Data/Findings**

Diapers are a daily necessity for parents of young babies and toddlers. Our findings indicated that assessing the quality of diapers the program is providing can assist parents in not having to use as many. Using adequate quality diapers will prevent product waste due to leakage, falling off or changing a child before thorough use has occurred. Rashes and irritation can also be a common problem with certain brands of diapers as well which can be a result of quality issues as well as a child's skin type. Quality was identified as the most important factor to the organization in their approach to purchasing diapers for families.

The next factor that the team identified as high priority is price per diaper. Keeping diaper costs low allows the organization to be able to further spread funds to serve more families and purchase a greater number of diapers. The organization aims to keep overhead low so that most, if not all, incoming funds can be used towards the purchase and provision of diapers. Keeping quality and price in mind allows for a more far reaching positive impact on the community.

The final factor that impacts provision of services for the organization is the availability and price of delivery services. The current storage and reception of diapers is carried out by the organization president and therefore delivery of the product is key in continuing successful operations. Walmart offers free delivery with Walmart + subscription. Target offers free delivery with the Target Red Card and Amazon includes free delivery with a Prime membership.

The team identified three brands of interest based on quality, cost, and the availability of free delivery and subscription services. The team measured the following distribution of one through five star reviews for each of these three brands:

	<b>Luv's – Walmart (9,967 reviews)</b>	<b>Mama Bear – Amazon (31,000 reviews)</b>	<b>Up &amp; Up – Target (4,557 reviews)</b>
<b>Five Stars</b>	77%	74%	54%
<b>Four Stars</b>	10%	12%	11%
<b>Three Stars</b>	3%	7%	6%
<b>Two Stars</b>	2%	3%	7%
<b>One Star</b>	7%	4%	23%

The team conducted a brief qualitative analysis of the reviews to identify recurring themes regarding the factors relevant to diaper brand selection. The reviewers read the ten most recent reviews to identify recurring themes in the categories of Price, Quality, Delivery and Stock. The following table summarizes the themes noted in the reviews.

	<b>Luv's – Walmart</b>	<b>Mama Bear – Amazon</b>	<b>Up &amp; Up – Target</b>
<b>Price</b>	<i>“Best price around” “Great diapers” “Great Price” “Good for the price”</i>	<i>“Affordable”</i>	<i>“Can't beat the price.” “Most diapers for the best price.” “Best diaper for the value.”</i>
<b>Quality</b>	<i>“No blowouts” “Run smaller in size” “No rashes” “No leaks”</i>	<i>“Holds a lot” “Absorbency” “No leaks” “No rashes” “No blowouts”</i>	<i>“They do their job.” “Not overnight diapers!” ” “Leaked everywhere” “Contains poops well” “Run small and do not fit well.”</i>
<b>Delivery</b>	<i>“Terrible delivery” “Delivery complaints” “Nasty shipping”</i>	<i>“On time” “Fast shipment” “Easy delivery”</i>	None mentioned
<b>Stock Issues</b>	<i>“Not having sizes I need” “Price went up” “Never have size that I need”</i>	None mentioned	None mentioned
<b>Percent Who Recommend</b>	91%	Not noted	60%

### **Discussion & Recommendations**

In discussion with Deb Franssen of Hettie's Hope Chest, the following areas of need were identified for the organization: increased funding, improved systems of diaper delivery and storage and distribution logistics. The research group developed an advocacy letter on behalf of the organization, introducing its purpose, background, and specific needs-based requests for donations (see Appendix A). As many chain store managers may not have discretion in how



donations are distributed, a second letter to be shared with corporate offices is also available to the organization. Ideally, Hettie's Hope Chest will be able to enter into a cooperative partnership with a business able to provide the preferred diaper brands at a reduced price.

Hettie's Hope Chest has generally relied upon community donations, which the organization President reports can be generous but are somewhat inconsistent. In order to support continued operations and increase the number of families/children receiving diapers through this program, the research group investigated identifying resources such as community grants and other publicly available funds on behalf of the organization.

One potential option is a public grant opportunity provided by the Unitarian Universalist Church of Lancaster's Art Walters Grant, which accepts applications quarterly. Any program applying for a grant must complete an application, budget statement, a brief statement regarding the purpose of their project, and a narrative describing how the project aligns with the Unitarian Universalist principles of compassion and making the world a more humane place. This generous local resource has the potential to award several thousand dollars to Hettie's Hope Chest.

On a broader scale, the National Diaper Bank Network, sponsored by Huggies brand, offers membership benefits for diaper banks run on the local level. Hettie's Hope Chest has not formally pursued this option beyond initial inquiries, as it is unclear what benefits the program may offer. The benefits of joining this program would be an ongoing assessment for the organization as it continues to evolve and grow.

The analysis completed by the research group recommends prioritizing the use of subscription-based services whenever possible. There are savings available with the following subscription plans:

- Amazon's Subscribe and Deliver Plan offers 15% savings. Use of an Amazon card saves an additional 5%.

- Target offers free shipping for orders over \$35 and a 5% discount if purchased using its Red Card.
- Walmart + is a membership option that costs \$98 per year and includes free delivery with no delivery minimum required.

If Hettie's Hope Chest were to choose a diaper subscription plan that requires the same amount of product to be delivered monthly with the goal of cost savings, additional storage may need to be considered to hold the diapers until distribution.

Hettie's Hope Chest should continually assess diaper delivery, storage, and distribution logistics to ensure that it is using the most efficient operations consistent with its organizational capacity. Program operations should grow and evolve parallel with the organization so that services continue to be provided in the most impactful and ethical manner. Good stewardship of funds and donations should always remain at the forefront of any 501(c)(3) and a well thought out and transparent plan for operations helps to achieve this goal. In its current size and scope, Hettie's Hope Chest has been able to achieve this goal of good stewardship of funds.

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## Appendix A

[Name of Company]

[Address Line 1]

[Address Line 2]

[Salutation]

I am writing on behalf of Hettie's Hope Chest. Since YEAR, our organization has provided infant and toddler diapers to low-income families in the Penn Manor School District. Many of these families are also receiving support from the school and community resources to meet the needs of their children. Although programs like SNAP (Food Stamps) and WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) are available to meet food needs, these programs do not cover the considerable cost of diapers for young children.

Hettie's Hope Chest is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Our board members volunteer their time and diaper purchases are made possible through generous cash donations we have received from the community. In order to increase the number of families we are able to serve, we are approaching local businesses to ask for help with our program.

(Option 1) Currently, we are purchasing approximately NUMBER of BRAND diapers from Amazon per month, at a cost of approx RANGE per diaper. We would prefer to buy from a locally-run business and would like to know if we could arrange a lower-cost ordering option from (STORE NAME).

(Option 2) Currently, we are purchasing approximately NUMBER of BRAND diapers from Amazon per month, at a cost of approximately RANGE per diaper. Based on information available on your website, it appears we could purchase NUMBER of BRAND of diapers per month, at a cost of approximately RANGE per diaper from (STORE NAME). We would like to meet with your management to discuss lower cost ordering options.

(Option 3) Our program is always in need of monetary donations to cover the cost of diaper purchases.

If your business is able to provide a lower cost for diaper ordering, we will gladly promote your business on our flyers and Facebook page to thank you for your support.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Deb Franssen, President, at PHONE NUMBER or email at [hettieshopechest@aol.com](mailto:hettieshopechest@aol.com). Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,