



Changing lives

When two very special women noticed the need for good, reliable antenatal and postnatal nursing in the Jeffreys Bay area, their lives were changed forever. **Christine Klynhans** found out how The Healthy Mom and Baby Clinic was formed.



1. and 2. Jeffreys Bay townships 3. The Healthy Mom and Baby Clinic 4. Staff at the Healthy Mom and Baby Clinic 5. Margreet and Laura 6. Clara and Loes getting out there - postnatal homevisits in Jeffreys Bay townships 7. Clara visiting pre-schools - growth monitoring 8. All these women attended the postnatal class with Sr Mariette



When baby Ezra nearly passed away in 2002 from malnutrition, despite having well-educated parents, Laura Birch, a registered nurse and midwife since 1988, realised that there was a very real need for a specialised clinic to promote mother and child health care. In 2004, Laura started seeing a few babies once a week and a year later, Margreet Wibbelink, a midwife from The Netherlands, teamed up with Laura.

Together, Margreet and Laura developed the vision for The Healthy Mom and Baby Clinic and registered as a NGO/NPO. A board of trustees was formed, and Margreet's trust in The Netherlands helped raise the funds that finally led to the clinic launching in March 2009.

The many faces of midwifery

The Healthy Mom and Baby Clinic is a facility that reaches out to families in Jeffreys Bay and the surrounding areas, a community in desperate need of the care offered. The clinic offers a wide variety of services for moms and babies. It is the only midwifery practice in the area that offers antenatal classes, antenatal consultations and ultrasound scans, postnatal care, hospital and home visits with breastfeeding support, well-baby care, immunisations and education that aims to improve mother and child health outside of government institutions. The clinic also offers HIV counselling and testing and crisis counselling for unplanned pregnancies, rape, etc. Where possible, they provide clothing and food for needy families.

The clinic currently performs around 450 well-baby checks a month. They also see on average 250 women a month for antenatal checks, postnatal visits and family planning.

It is through all these initiatives that The Healthy Mom and Baby Clinic helps to empower women to make informed decisions about their lives, health and families during pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood. Through all these efforts, the clinic provides education, quality healthcare and support where needed. Their aim is to see a decline in mother and child mortality rate in the area and to bring healing and health into families' lives. While they strictly adhere to the protocols of care and management provided by the Department of Health, they take on the view that pregnancy and childbirth are natural processes, and not medical conditions.

Going mobile

The mobile clinic was a very special initiative that The Healthy Mom and Baby Clinic used to run. This mobile clinic was operated by a volunteer from The Netherlands, who used her own car to pay postnatal home visits to every mom and newborn, offer breastfeeding and postnatal support, and supply each mom with a gift pack. She would also take the mobile clinic to visit local crèches and daycare centres in disadvantaged communities, where she offered growth monitoring and screening programmes, monitored the children's immunisation statuses, provided the children with vitamin A supplementation and referred them to the clinic when necessary.

Unfortunately, this volunteer needed to return to The Netherlands, and because the clinic does not have its own vehicle, the mobile clinic has now been placed on hold. Grant applications to obtain a proper vehicle and a full-time sister for the mobile clinic are currently in process, and they are hoping to launch this new mobile unit before the end of 2013.

Running the clinic

It can be quite a challenge to run the clinic. Margreet is currently the only full-time midwife there; after she completed her Advanced Midwifery Degree in 2011, she took over the management of the clinic from Laura. Laura is still actively involved in the administration of the clinic and fundraising efforts, and steps in when one of the sisters is absent. One full-time nursing sister provides the well-baby care, and an office manager and two nursing assistants are also employed. Throughout the year, different volunteers join the project from all over the world for periods of 1–3 months. These volunteers are embraced, as they play a big role in the day-to-day operation of the clinic. Occasionally midwifery students from The Netherlands join the practice for an opportunity to learn about South African culture and the healthcare system.

The cost of running the clinic is also substantial, and they are mostly dependent on donations and support from outside parties. Running costs of the clinic are currently around R50,000 a month. With their future plans of expanding their services, including the purchasing of an appropriate vehicle for the mobile clinic and employing a nursing sister to run it, the proposed budget will increase to approximately R85,000 per month.

It's great to dream, but it can't end there – write your dreams down and run with them!

The clinic has formed a partnership with the Department of Health, which supplies all the vaccines and medicines to provide primary health care to moms and babies. Because of this, they are not allowed to charge a service fee for this basic care. They do charge a R100 fee for ultrasound scans, which provides a small source of income, as do the fees charged to their private clients for services like antenatal classes and birth support. A lot of time goes into writing funding proposals and promoting the clinic's cause amongst

possible sponsors. They are also audited annually.

Making a difference to mothers and babies

However, none of this detracts from Laura or Margreet's passion for the clinic. Margreet says that for her, the biggest reward lies in working with the beautiful women in the community. "I absolutely love them and feel so privileged to be able to do what I do. They are so very vulnerable. Unfortunately, the high number of poor and destitute people in our nation continues to grow and there are simply not enough qualified and passionate people available to work on ground level. The clinic is our attempt to not just be critical of what is not being done by the government, but to get involved and add our expertise to offer good medical services. We want to make mothers understand that they are valuable."

Margreet's advice to other midwives would be that they don't have to know everything to start making a difference. "You learn as you go along, one step at a time. But just start stepping! Everything is possible."

The perception of midwifery in the area

Margreet is the first private midwife in the area, and the concept is fairly new, but slowly growing. She offers midwifery care to private patients for home and hospital deliveries. This private practice is small and something Margreet does on the side. She partners with the private hospital in the area, as well as local GPs and one gynaecologist. However, all the women from the community project currently deliver their babies in the local government hospital, and so far Margreet has been unable to gain permission to assist with deliveries there. In 2012, she had 12 private clients – three had hospital births and six had homebirths, of which three were water births. The remaining three needed Caesarean sections. *✍*