



# A FIRST BREATH SUCCESS STORY



By Beth Turner

**MADISON** - It's a baby shower! Streamers line the walls, gift bags fill the floor, and moms chat and snack on goodies. It's a celebration of life. New life for moms and babies...smoke-free. Dean West is hosting the baby shower. The Wisconsin Women's Health Foundation and its *First Breath* program are the motivators behind this event.

Out of the 20 Dean West women enrolled in First Breath this year, 50% have quit totally while others continue to cut back, says Kate Piotrkowski the Prenatal Care Coordinator for Dean. Piotrkowski says she's never had so much success in helping expectant moms quit smoking than in the past 2 months.

"It's the incentives. They should be rewarded for what they're doing for the baby," Piotrkowski adds. For setting quit dates, cutting back, and being smoke-free, moms get to pick out lotions, rattles or other gifts for themselves or their babies.

"Pregnancy is the biggest motivator," Piotrkowski says. Dean doctors ask about smoking on an expectant mom's first visit and educate them on why they ought to quit. Piotrkowski then follows up with all the *First Breath* educational materials. Some moms have told her they have no plans on quitting only to come back later saying they've read the information and would like to try and quit.

Through *First Breath*, Piotrkowski addresses stressors in women's lives, how to deal with lack of support and problems with transportation, jobs and money. She encourages them to think like a non-smokers. She asks the mom, "What would a non-smoker do in this situation?"

Piotrkowski also encourages moms to write in a journal. "I encourage moms to write down why they want to smoke. Even if they do smoke at least they've identified the craving and the reason."

When a craving hits, moms are taught to shift their focus. Suggestions include calling a friend, taking a shower or bath, or taking a walk.



Taking a walk may sound too simple but it became a successful strategy for Heather, a 21-year-old expecting her first baby in September. She is 8 months pregnant and free of cigarettes for the first time in 10 years. When hard times hit, Heather would hit the pavement and walk.

Another strong motivator was the loss of her brother this past year.

“I promised him I would try and quit smoking. I woke up one day and said, ‘God, give me the strength to get through this day.’ I did not want to disappoint my brother.”

Heather says *First Breath* taught her about the risks of smoking while pregnant.

“Your baby could be stillborn. I didn’t want to lose another person.”

The new life she is carrying is a boy. He will be named Cayden John, in honor of her brother John. Speaking of her brother, Heather smiles and says, “He’d be proud of me.” She goes on trying to explain what her life is like now, free of cigarettes.

“You feel like a whole new person- you do! You can’t explain it. You just have to do it!”

In October of 2003, 5 months pregnant, she had her last cigarette one morning at 10 o’clock put the patch on her arm at 11 o’clock and “I never smoked again,” she recalls.

Terry, the 32-year-old mother of Caitlin, had smoked a pack a day since she was 13. “I always wanted to quit, but couldn’t. I’d get stressed.”



This time would be different. Terry had miscarried ten times before having Caitlin. Because she was considered high risk, she was frequently visiting St. Mary’s hospital. Terry saw *First Breath* material made a phone call and enrolled. Caitlin was born full term and health about 5 months later.

“I didn’t want her to be a nicotine baby and go through withdrawal.”

Terry says the incentives along her road to quitting were very motivating. “It gave me money to spend,” she says smiling, like gift certificates to use on herself and Caitlin.

Terry’s success has been contagious. Her sister, who got Terry smoking to begin with, is now smoke-free too.

In wrapping up with the baby shower, words of encouragement go out to all the moms. Piotrkowski stands before the group smiling and emphasizing, “All the effort that you put forth will help make sure that your baby’s first breath is a health one!”