



FIRST BREATH
WISCONSIN WOMEN'S
HEALTH FOUNDATION

A FIRST BREATH SUCCESS STORY



By Stan Milam



Katie Smet

STURGEON BAY – Katie Smet tried for years to stop smoking. She knew that as her family grew to four children, she needed to stop, but she was unable to “kick the habit.”

“I tried everything, but nothing worked,” the 29-year-old Smet said. “Then, when I was pregnant with Aria, I was introduced to the *First Breath* program.”

Smet's daughter, Aria, was born Aug. 30, at least two weeks premature.

“When I came in to talk with the WIC people, I was told about the *First Breath* program and given what I call my book to keep track of my progress,” Smet said. “I just decided I had to quit, and I did – cold turkey, so to speak.”

Although she was unable to stop smoking during four previous pregnancies; Smet was able to stop with her fifth child with the help of *First Breath*. It may have been “cold turkey,” but Smet had a lot of help from Mary Ellen Smith, Teresa Mertens and Marsha Kurth at the Door County health Department.

Smith, Mertens and Kurth coordinate prenatal care, the WIC program and the *First Breath* program. Their carefully coordinated work exposes clients to the dangers of tobacco and offers assistance for clients who chose to try to stop using tobacco.

“I thought the book was really the most important part of the program,” Smet said. “I put a picture of the ultra sound in the back of the book, and every time I had an urge to smoke, I got the book out and looked at the picture to remind myself why it was so important to stay tobacco free.”

Smet was an addicted smoker. She smoked at least a pack of cigarettes a day, and was unable to quit.

“There were several reasons I wanted to quit,” she said. “The cost is outrageous at \$3.40 a pack just for generic cigarettes.

“The kids were on me all the time, especially the two in school, because they were being told how harmful smoking was,” she said. “They wanted to know why I would do something that was harmful to me and them.”

Smet was also aware of the increased risks the older she was.

“But, I had all those reasons before, and I was still unable to stop smoking,” Smet said. “It wasn’t until I started working with the *First Breath* program through WIC that I was able to get the support I needed to stop.”

“When my husband lived with us, he smoked, and that was a problem in terms of me trying to quit,” Smet said. “I tried quitting, and I tried cutting back. Nothing worked.”

One exercise in the *First Breath* program is to encourage clients to make a list of activities other than smoking.

“My list included cleaning the house,” Smet said. “When I first quit, I was cleaning all the time. The important thing, though, is that I got past that 3-minute urge that is so strong when you first stop smoking.”

Smet says she has noticed a difference in what she called Aria’s “temperament.”

“My other kids were normal in terms of birth weight, but Aria is a much more relaxed baby than they were,” Smet said. “I don’t know if there was a tobacco syndrome, but Aria seems to not cry as much and is not as colic.”

“I think that’s important, because Aria was born early,” she said. “I’m just glad for her that I was able to use the *First Breath* program to stop smoking while I was pregnant with her.”

“Programs like *First Breath* are especially important for people who don’t have anyone in their lives to encourage them and help them along the way,” Smet said. “Quitting smoking is very difficult, but it’s even more difficult if there’s nobody there to support you.”

First Breath provided that support for Smet.

“It was a big relief for me to know that I could call the people who helped me and talk to them when I was having problems,” Smet said. “It was comforting to know that somebody gave me information about smoking, ways to quit and continued to care about me and my baby.”