Layettes of Love: NCCS Signature Program

**EXPANDED CONTENT**

Many CCS members probably have stories about Moms who have received layettes through CCS. One such story was recounted in the Albany Chapter newsletter:

While at a print shop getting a newsletter printed, a member encountered a Mom who had received a layette years ago. The woman told her that she is now married and that baby is 20 years old. She has kept the hand knit blanket and sweater set so her daughter can use them some day for her babies.

Putting together a beautiful and useful layette is an excellent way to honor the memory of Mary Virginia Merrick.

BASIC MODEL

At baby showers, Moms love to open packages of sweet, soft clothes and blankets. Moms in poverty enjoy the same thing; we can feel the joy of wrapping her baby in something special. Yet, paying for baby items is expensive.

The **Vendor list** (link to Layette Vendor List) is a compilation of sources recommended by chapters.

One thing to be aware of is quality. No matter what vendors are used, be mindful that some “special deals” available may not be for quality items. Look for things like flaps over zippers, secure snaps, good quality and non-flammable fabrics. Buy onesies with expandable shoulders that allow for movement and growth. Sleep and play suits should have easy access closures so Mom can change the baby. If baby is in a cold climate, make sure the play suits have feet. Any drawstrings should be avoided. Elastic should always be soft and covered.

If you live in a cold climate, consider adding a snow suit or pram suit. Many moms take the bus or walk with their babies. Again, make sure the zipper is good and the warm filling adequate to fight blustery cold. Toledo makes ‘summer’ and ‘winter’ layettes. Some chapters designate the season with cute tags – a sun for summer and snowflake for winter.

Halo, which makes sleep sacks, has a program for non-profits – ½ of the wholesale price! Be sure to provide a small size – if the sack is too large, baby can slip and get caught in the neck hole. Make sure the baby weight – not age - is clearly labeled on the sleep sack.

Be careful not to order “great deals” on recalled items. Some of the cutest clothing and baby items just aren’t safe! To ensure that your potential purchase isn’t recalled, you can check one of the available databases of such items. Safe Kids.org is an organization dedicated to protecting kids. They keep up to date, comprehensive lists of recalled items as well as current news about consumer issues. BabyCenter.comalso provides a searchable database of recalled items.

Consider including:

A coupon for diapers

hand knitted items – what a treasure that can be passed down from one child to another.

 Books

A summary of what chapters include in their layettes can be found **here** (link to Layette Content Study Summary).

PACKAGING

Make your layette attractive from the outside in. A reusable tote is a great option. Remember that every mother wants the best for her baby.

* Northern Michigan packs their layettes in a diaper bag. They searched for an economical and attractive bag.
* South Bend packs their layettes in a reusable fabric bag – much like grocery stores now offer instead of ‘paper or plastic.’ They cost about $1.50 per bag from Uline. One Mom referred to her layette as a baby shower in a bag. So much goes into the bag that they ordered a larger size. Ordering Information for Blue Canvas Tote Bag
* Washington DC offers a different kind of layette. They purchase pre-packaged cubes that cost about $21 each. These have been purchased from Baby Vision. They are also on Amazon for about the same cost (Order through Amazon Smile and make money for your chapter! This is an alternative if you are struggling finding volunteers and shoppers.

FUNDING

Many chapters ask the community for assistance in funding Layettes. Some current methods are second collections Masses at local parishes or Baby Bottle Drives, where empty bottles can be picked up at church or civic organization meeting, filled with spare change over a period of time, and returned to the church or organization.

Baby items are easy to “sell.” A mail funding drive could include donation level categories such as:

 $100 – Snow Suits because every Mom wants her baby to be warm

 $50 – Diapers – Imagine baby crying with a wet diaper

 $25 – Books for developing infant brains

 $20 – Sleep Sacks for safe sleep

Grant funding is also available for Layettes. Again, request funding for specific items with heart tugging stories to explain the need for them. Check sources such as:

 Local Family and Corporate Foundations – Candid.org is a resource for information

Local Energy Company

Diocesan Funding, Knights of Malta, Our Sunday Visitor (osv.com)

Manufacturers for in-kind donations

Check out the **Grant** (link to Grant seminar under Fundraising) information on the NCCS website. Also, Candid.org has excellent grant writing tips.

DISTRIBUTION

CCS chapters use many methods to distribute their layettes: in hospitals, Women’s Care Centers, health departments and clinics. If your chapter done the same thing for decades, try researching where there might be a greater need. Maybe it is time to reevaluate your distribution process. Measure the response to your layettes by asking the hospital or agency that distributes them. Are mothers enthusiastic about the layettes? Check out the **Program** section (link to Programs) for tips on finding good partner agencies if it is time to improve your program.

Some partner ideas:

The Atlanta chapter has several interesting partnerships. One is with the Pregnancy Aid Clinic. This clinic is a crisis center that has decided to reserve the layettes to give to women that decide to keep their baby after their consultation visit. Layettes are also given to Grant Park Clinic and Beacon of Hope, free clinics that pass them out as an incentive after completion of the prenatal visits. Beacon of Hope also places them in their "store" where mothers can use "earned" point certificates from attending prenatal and parenting classes to "purchase" items in the store. Also, Mercy Care Hospital uses the layettes as a "graduation" present for a pregnancy program that serves the Hispanic community and offers prenatal training classes through a local hospital.

MAKING THE MOST OF LAYETTE CONNECTIONS

Challenging poverty is part of the NCCS mission. There is so much more to breaking the cycle of poverty than giving away clothes. How can chapters maximize the opportunity they have to connect with under-resourced families?

National conferences have presented seminars and the NCCS website has information about **Poverty** (link to Poverty section) and **Cultural Awareness** (link to Cultural Awareness)**.** In short, it is hard to ‘pull yourself up with your bootstraps” if you have no boots. In other words, without resources, it is hard to get yourself out of poverty. CCS chapters provide many material resources. They can go beyond material goods by giving self-esteem, confidence and information as well.

 Chapters can best serve by being aware of ethnic cultures as well as the culture of poverty. That includes when selecting the books and educational materials included with layettes.

As chapters prepare layettes, think about the mom who will receive it. Some educational materials have dense text– are the moms going to read lots of stats or medical jargon, or will a clear picture of a baby on her back in an empty crib get the message of safe sleep across better?

Are chapters giving moms their baby’s clothes in a nice bag that makes her feel warm and fuzzy like we did at our baby showers? Are they given out by agencies that are loving and kind to moms, just like we would want to be treated as a vulnerable new mom?

Let’s be as careful and thoughtful as we would be for a favorite niece’s baby shower gift.

One aspect of living in poverty that has received increasing attention is the effect on brain development in children that is caused by the stresses of their lives, poor nutrition, unstable childcare and poor educational opportunities.

Every chapter has an opportunity to start each baby off with some basic tools: a book and suggestion for their caregivers on how to read, sing and talk to their baby. Developing language and literacy right from infancy is key to future success in school – and in life.

The NCCS **Read to Me** card (link to card) has already been given to over 25,000 families. Imagine the impact of that! Please continue to share that in all layettes.

Be aware that chapters can use the layette as a means of educating families about outreach programs the chapter may have. Do you have parenting classes? Do you give out clothes to older children? Do you read at a preschool or tutor in an elementary school? Let your new moms know what else your chapter and community offer.

NCCS compiled a l**ist of possible sources for educational materials** (link to Layette Resource List\_ Educational Materials )that can be included with layettes. There is free stuff out there! Local health departments usually have pamphlets about healthy babies. Many state governments and national agencies provide educational materials helpful to new mothers.

The Shaken Baby pamphlet produced by NCCS for years was replaced by the **Calming Your Baby card (**link to card)**.** The latest strategy by many professional organizations and pediatricians is to stress how to calm baby. This handy guide can be a quick reference for any caregiver who is at wits end with a screaming baby.

Finally, since blankets are not safe with a sleeping baby, chapters should all include a **warning tag** (link to Blanket tag) with any blankets included in layettes. The previous CCS tag has been updated. It can be printed: there are 6 to a page to be printed on cards (card stock is recommended) or on Avery labels if you prefer sticking the tag on a packaged blanket. The simple image captures safe sleep.

EVALUATIONS

As with any program, it is important to do regular evaluations of your procedures. Review your vendor list; are items still safe? Of good quality? Meet with your partners to ensure that distribution is done equitably and consistently. Is it time to add partners or sever relationships with others?

Finally, get feedback from the partner agencies and the clients you serve. **A Sample Layette Evaluation Form** (link to form) used by the Northern Michigan Chapter is a good guide to questions you should be asking periodically.

BEST PRACTICES

Below are some ideas worth imitating.

*DENVER*

Their layettes have been called Mother's Day Layettes because they deliver them to a free family clinic around Mother's Day. The enclosed cards were made by one member who is very crafty. She has a collection of die cutters from 'Stamping' UP". At their 1st fundraiser last September, they had a beautiful tree with the blank cards. If you “purchased” a layette (with a $50.00 donation) you could choose a tag and sign it. People loved them and wrote lovely messages. When layettes were delivered to the clinic, the midwives were ecstatic because it made it very personal.

*ATLANTA*

Their layettes include; one package of newborn Pampers, onesies, sleepers, baby socks, 2 bibs, 2 receiving blankets, the baby board book "100 First Words”, and educational materials. All items are wrapped in a handmade play quilt and pinned shut before being placed in a large bag.

The quilts are made of quilted fabric on one side and darling flannel printed fabric on the other side. These are sewn together with binding tape by sewing volunteers.

*TEXAS CAPITAL*

Do you attend civic or religious meeting to spread the word about what your do? Do you hold events to raise money? Here’s an idea that helps get your message across visually.

One of the Texas Capitol members designed a display box, made out of a box with 2 lids- one stored on the top and one on the bottom of the box. It is easy to take to functions where you want to set up a quick, very professional display instead of dumping out a layette bag and trying to make an attractive display on a flat table.  The items are stitched onto the lids and the box has a false bottom that holds some of the larger items for transport- wipes, diapers, hooded towel. The member is a former teacher and put her skills to good use making this. They also have one that displays their bereavement angel gowns.

*NAPLES*

The Naples chapter has included the book, “Bringing Baby Home” to new moms living at or below poverty level in Collier County, FL. That comes to 30,000 copies!

CCS partnered with the Healthcare Network of Southwest Florida to store and distribute the book to moms who are patients in their pre-natal services.

The book is authored by Dr. Janice Wood, a professor of early childhood education at the University of North Florida.; it provides important and practical medical and developmental information. More than half of the book is devoted to the importance of literacy in infancy. It is available in English, Spanish and Creole.