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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FH Care Groups Help Mothers with Breastfeeding, Keeping Children Healthier

PHOENIX (August 3, 2015) – According to the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO), overwhelming research has shown that breastfeeding provides the perfect nutrition to promote healthy growth and brain development for infants. Breast milk has also been shown to provide protection from life threatening illnesses such as respiratory infection and diarrheal disease as well obesity and non-communicable diseases like diabetes and asthma.

In May 2015, Food for the Hungry surveyed a sample of the pregnant or lactating mothers who participated in the training program in Ethiopia, and results indicated that the percentage of children exclusively breastfed in their first six months had increased to 91.8 percent, up from 65.7 percent when Food for the Hungry first began working in the area. Additionally, 64.3 percent of mothers put their children to the breast within an hour of childbirth, an important step to fostering early health for the infant and successful future breastfeeding sessions.

Pregnant and lactating mothers join in the program through local Care Groups, where they have the opportunity to voice questions and concerns and are trained in educational messages relating to infant behavior and feeding cues as well as appropriate responsive breastfeeding and complementary feeding practices (i.e. what table foods are age-appropriate).

Enat Abebe, a 35-year-old married mother of five, who lives in an Ethiopian village called Efrata, recently participated in the first Care Group in her area. When she first joined the group, she was pregnant with her youngest son, Habtamu, who is now six months old. In her previous pregnancies, Enat did not seek out regular antenatal health care, had home births, and did not give the newborns colostrum (the yellow sticky breastmilk produced near the end of pregnancy) within an hour of birth. Instead all were fed fresh butter and/or fenugreek porridge right after birth and fed with different semi-solid foods before the age of six months.

During her participation in the group, she visited local health facilities regularly for antenatal care and learned about the comprehensive nutritional value of breastmilk. Enat also decided to continue with postnatal care after Habtamu was born based on the benefit of the antenatal and neonatal care she received at the facility.

From the first cohort of over 32,000 mothers in 247 Care Groups in Ethiopia, 77 percent are now certified as Model Mothers. Model Mothers are eligible for certification, a public recognition for their dedication to learning improving their babies' health, when they attend 80 percent of health message sessions, adopt sanitation practices in and around the home, and demonstrate 80 percent knowledge and adoption of the health and nutrition messages.

Enat is now a volunteer group facilitator, leading Care Groups and mentoring other pregnant and lactating mothers in the same educational health and nutrition messages she received. In addition to teaching semi-monthly educational sessions, volunteers also make regular home visits during the first month of life for

mothers of newborns to assist with identification of infant behaviors and cues and to address any breastfeeding concerns

When telling the story of giving birth to Habtamu at a health institution, Enat explains that the delivery was safe and her son was given colostrum within an hour of birth and that she exclusively breastfed him until he turned six months old.

“Habtamu is stronger than his brothers and sisters when they were at his age and doesn’t cry at night as a result of better management and feeding practice,” Enat says.

About Food for the Hungry

Founded in 1971, [Food for the Hungry](http://www.foodforthehungry.org) provides emergency relief and long-term development programs with operations in more than 20 countries to help the world's most vulnerable people. Learn more by visiting fh.org. Social connections include [facebook.com/foodforthehungry](https://www.facebook.com/foodforthehungry) and twitter.com/food4thehungry.

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