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New program aims to connect new moms in Leduc

Posted By Alexandra Pope

Sarah Gardiner knows from firsthand experience that being a first-time mother with a new baby can be an isolating experience.

When Gardiner had her first child four years ago, she knew only one other woman in Leduc with a baby.

"I found it really hard to find people who had kids the same age as mine and who had similar interests," she recalled.

At first the Ontario native, who moved to Leduc with her husband in 2003, connected with mothers in Edmonton via online social networking site meetup.com, but when she went back to work part-time in 2007, she no longer had time to travel into the city every day.

So, Gardiner started her own meetup.com group, Leduc Mommy Mingle, in an attempt to connect with other mothers closer to home — with amazing results.

"I met so many fantastic women in town and it made all the difference in the world, having that support network," she said.

"The first time I went to the grocery store and bumped into someone I knew was amazing. It made me feel like Leduc was home."

Starting next month, Gardiner will be taking the concept of Leduc Mommy Mingle to the next level with a program called Mommy Connections, a six-week series of seminars followed by social time for mothers with babies under one year old.

Gardiner's hope is that new mothers in Leduc will learn about services available in the community while learning from each other.

Mommy Connections was started in Edmonton by Carol McBee, a mother who realized she knew a lot of women who had no one to turn to for advice and support after giving birth.

McBee was aware of the Leduc Mommy Mingle group, and approached Gardiner — who has a background in marketing and communications — about starting a Leduc program.

Gardiner leapt at the chance to develop a program for mothers that would be a bit more structured than Mommy Mingle.

"We have to make our own support networks now because a lot of us have moved here," she said. "I've learned so much from other women in town."

The first Mommy Connections session will start May 5 and meet each Wednesday for six weeks from 1-2:30 p.m. at the Leduc Alliance Church.

The first half of each meeting will feature a talk by a local expert or entrepreneur on different aspects of parenting.

Gardiner has lined up several interesting speakers, including an expert in baby massage, the co-founder of Little Tree Hugger, a Beaumont-based online store specializing in eco-friendly baby products, and a local pharmacist.

Gardiner hopes that by introducing women to local businesses, they will feel more confident in their community.

"It's nice to walk into a pharmacy and see a friendly face that you know and trust to ask questions," she said.

The second half of each meeting will be a social time. The participants will also be given a list of other mothers in their neighbourhood and encouraged to set up playdates outside the session to keep the connections going.

Mommy Connections will take place five times a year, in January, March, May, September and November. The sessions cost \$60, which includes six meetings and a gift bag.

For more information about Mommy Connections, or to get started learning about resources for moms in this area, visit www.mommyconnections.ca, or become a fan of Mommy Connections Leduc on Facebook.

You can also follow Mommy Connections on Twitter at www.twitter.com/MommyConnection.