

## **Empowering Under-Served and First-Time Young Mothers to Establish Informal Networks and Social Supports: Experience from Moivo Health Facility in Arusha District Council**

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**Background:** First-time, young mothers require a range of information and support to develop their parenting skills when they become a new mother. In addition, it is essential they adequately space their next child for both health and economic reasons. The uptake of modern family planning (FP) is still low in Arusha. Only 31.8% of married women and 13.3% of adolescents aged 15-19 are using modern FP. The Challenge Initiative (TCI), implemented by Jhpiego, aims to accelerate the use of modern FP methods of women of childbearing age, focusing on girls and young women in Arusha, Tanzania.

**Methods:** Since 2019, TCI has partnered with the Arusha District Council to scale up adolescent, youth sexual, reproductive health interventions in high-volume facilities. Motivo Health Facility adapted the TCI adolescent-friendly approach to establish a first-time, young mothers' group. Members of the group were recruited through the health facility, and sensitization of young mothers to the group was done through community health care workers (CHW). The group members are provided a range of integrated health services and entrepreneurship skills to enhance parental and emotional well-being. The group meets monthly under the support of the facility in charge, where they are provided education on FP, parenting skills, and care of their newborn.

**Results:** The young mother's group membership had increased from eight (8) members in July 2019 to 116 members in June 2020. Fifty-two (52) of the first-time young parent mothers enrolled in this group were referred by a CHW. In addition, 51 young mothers were capacitated with entrepreneurship skills such as the production of soaps, candles, and baking skills. Before July 2019, around 15 new, young clients were served with FP services per month. Since the group's formation, the health center serves upwards of 60 new young clients per month.

**Conclusion:** The development of a first-time, young mothers group improved the overall uptake of modern family planning among youth at the health facility. In addition, young mothers were provided with reproductive health education, factual information on modern contraceptive methods, job and parenting skills. The first time, young mothers were also able to support each other as they navigated their way through young motherhood.

