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Holistic Moms go green, but don't have to go it alone

Holistic Moms Network offers tips and support for alternative choices.

Amy C. Rippel, Special To The Sentinel

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Tara Felicio-Duratz uses vinegar to clean her house and doesn't use pesticides on her lawn.

Tracy Neely makes her own baby food and eats only organics.

Sound bizarre? To some, it might. But for Felicio-Duratz and Neely, it's all part of a healthy lifestyle. That's why these women recently started a Central Florida chapter of a nationwide group called the Holistic Moms Network.

They and other like-minded caregivers who question some mainstream ways of living, such as using chemical-based cleaning products, jarred baby food and vaccinating their children, have come together for support and to swap secrets. The group had its first meeting March 4 with about 40 other parents, grandparents and loved ones.

The local chapter is an offshoot of the national group that started in 2002 in New Jersey. Felicio-Duratz and Neely said they're thrilled to start the group's Orlando area chapter, the fifth in the state.

"Everybody is on a different journey going through holistic living," Felicio-Duratz said. "You find support that you wouldn't find in mainstream society."

The national club was started by Nancy Massotto, a mom who wanted her family to live "green." She said about 12 people attended the first meeting. Within a year, it grew to about 80 people, and she decided it should go national. The club became a nonprofit organization, and today there are 125 chapters nationwide with more than 3,000 members.

Each member pays an annual \$45 tax-deductible membership fee and, among other things, becomes part of the chapter e-mail loop, which keeps local chapter members in touch.

She said there isn't a single thing that ties the moms in the club together, but they all have the same goals: living cleaner and healthier.

Some breast-feed, others feed their families only organics, and others are dedicated to using cloth diapers.

"It embodies a lot of different things. There are parents out there everywhere who are just discovering natural and holistic living," Massotto said. "It's sort of a snowball effect. A lot of people have this holistic-lifestyle mentality evolve as soon as they have a child."

The meetings in the Orlando area are the first Tuesday of the month at 6:30 p.m. at the University Unitarian Universalist Society, 11648 McCulloch Road, near the [University of Central Florida](#). During the month, the group has scheduled play dates and moms' nights out. They hope to start a home school co-op, Felicio-Duratz said.

Felicio-Duratz, 33, and Neely, 43, who didn't know each other until they both independently decided to start the area chapter, had recently moved to Orlando from New Jersey.

Felicio-Duratz, who has four children ages 17, 3, 2 and 6 months, was a member of a Holistic Moms chapter in New Jersey. She said the group's support helped when even her family questioned some of her holistic choices, such as making her own baby food.

Neely, who has a 14-month-old son, said she also hopes the group will help open some eyes and minds.

"There are a lot of different ways we can take care of our families," she said. "We want to give people options that are going to be safe."

For details, contact Felicio-Duratz and Neely at HMNOrlando@yahoo.com or call 1-877-465-6667, or go to holisticmoms.org.

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