It’s no doubt that the first three years of a baby’s life mark a critical time for development, and institutions around the city are taking note with carefully designed “Mommy and Me” classes. But for low-income families, providing a baby with even essential items, such as clothing, books and toys, can be a struggle.

Enter Room to Grow, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to providing low-income families with these items, along with parenting support and educational services. Its dedication to improving the lives of low-income families has earned the attention and support of philanthropists like Hannah McFarland. “We are trying to provide the kind of information that middle-class moms are getting more regularly through books and mommy-and-me classes,” explains Lexy Mayers, Room to Grow’s executive director. A major initiative is teaching parents the kind of interactive play that develops speech and motor skills in infants and toddlers.

Referred by prenatal clinics throughout the five boroughs, parents in low-income families visit Room to Grow once a month, from right before the baby’s birth up until the child is 3 years old. It’s during that time, Mayers says, that a deep, trusting relationship evolves between the clinician and the family. “We are meeting both material and parenting needs in a single setting over an extended period of time,” she says.

According to the Citizens’ Committee for Children of New York’s “Keeping Track of New York City’s Children” study, 51 percent of babies are born into poverty in New York City alone, (this statistic refers to families receiving Medicaid at time of birth), and The US Department of Health and Human Services Federal Poverty Guidelines in 2006 defined poverty as an income of $16,600 for a family of three.

With these statistics, Mayers’ estimates that Room to Grow will be supporting close to 360 children within the next three months. The group has designed its space, resembling a warm children’s boutique, to welcome these families. “When they come here, they can relax,” says Mayers. “This is a place where it’s about celebrating parents and their babies.”

Room to Grow is largely supported by many corporate, individual and foundation donations. For more information on how you can help, visit www.roomtогrow.org

—Sapna Moudgil-Shah