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Foundation for Delaware County's Nurse-Family Partnership Improves Outcomes for Mothers, Babies



Images via Rick Davis for The Foundation for Delaware County.

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“There is a magic window during pregnancy. A time when the desire to be a good mother and raise a healthy, happy child creates motivation to overcome incredible obstacles, including poverty, with the help of a well-trained nurse.”

Those are the words of Dr. David Olds, the founder of Nurse-Family Partnership, a national evidence-based nurse-home visiting program with a site operated by The Foundation for Delaware County.

Through the program, which is funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, registered nurses regularly visit first-time mothers-to-be, starting early in the pregnancy and continuing through the child's second birthday.

The goals of the program are threefold:

- to improve pregnancy outcomes by helping women engage in good preventive health practices
- to improve child health and development by helping parents provide responsible and competent care
- to improve the economic self-sufficiency of the family by helping parents develop a vision for their own future

Randomized controlled trials over four decades cite significant improvements in the lives of mothers and children in the program, such as 35 percent fewer hypertensive disorders of pregnancy, a 48 percent reduction in child abuse and neglect, 67 percent fewer behavioral and intellectual problems in children at age six, and an 82 percent increase in months the mother is employed.

Two recent studies reported in the *Maternal and Child Health Journal* indicate that involvement in the Nurse-Family Partnership can boost a mother's confidence and improve birth outcomes. Another study involving Nurse-Family Partnership mothers showed a 21 percent increase in infants that were breastfed and a 19 percent improvement in infants who were kept up to date on immunizations. [Click here](#) for more information on the program's proven results.

"Being a first-time mother has got to be the most vulnerable time for any woman, let alone a young mom or a mom who does not have support or a lot of resources out there," said Sarah Updegraff, RN, CNM, one of the program's visiting nurses.



The Nurse-Family Partnership encourages dads to participate, and Angel is a very involved father.

Updegraff is an RN living in Delaware County, who became a nurse home visitor nearly two years ago. Needing a break from a heavy call schedule as a certified nurse midwife, she found the Nurse-Family Partnership as a way to continue her involvement in the lives of mothers and their newborns.

"I thought the program was the perfect blend of what I know and love and am passionate about," she said, "which is young women and their healthcare and the journey and changes through pregnancy and the early post-partum period. It is important to be able to couple that with home visiting for the moms we serve, who often don't have a lot of support or a consistent relationship with someone who they can trust."

The visiting nurses provide that consistent presence as a non-judgmental advocate, and also make the mothers aware of various resources, such as legal or financial assistance, education options, and job fairs, enabling them to be better connected to their communities.

Updegraff serves 25 clients in various stages of pregnancy and motherhood, including many who are at-risk or underserved. She has found that the first time a woman is pregnant is when that woman seriously begins to think about making positive health changes for herself and her family.

"They don't have to do this," she said of the completely voluntary program. "It can be scary to open up your home to a stranger, especially for a population that has felt judged for one thing or another, and who have often been victims of unkind behavior."



One of those clients is 20-year-old Nashia of Chester, who currently lives in her mother's home with her fiancé and who is the mother of eight-month-old Isaac. Nashia heard about Nurse-Family Partnership from a local hospital and entered the program when she was 13 weeks pregnant.

"It's amazing to have someone outside of your own family treat you like family," she said. "It means a lot to have other people who don't know you at all to actually come into your home and get to know you and really feel for you and help you strive for your goals."

Indeed, helping a mother envision her and the family's future well-being is an important aspect of the Nurse-Family Partnership, in addition to the focus on parenting, child care, health, nutrition, the physical and emotional development of baby, home safety, family planning/birth spacing, and much more.

"I recently got a job; it was one of our goals," said Nashia. "The nurses not only build us up as parents, but help us set goals for employment and education."

Nashia now works at a factory and has plans to eventually return to Harcum College to finish her degree. She and her fiancé are also planning to get their own apartment before Isaac's second birthday.

Isaac, of course, is the most important part of the equation, and is off to a good start in life.

"He was born full-term and is developing so well," said Nashia. "He's really smart and very interactive, and he loves music. And he's also a big boy – he was 21 pounds at eight months."

The birth of a healthy, happy child, and a caring mother who appears to have a good vision for her family's future is what the Nurse-Family Partnership works to achieve. It is something that Updegraff and all the other visiting nurses are proud to be part of.

"The program has challenged me in terms of personal and professional growth," she said. "I really like to know there is a group of us out in the community working for a good, working to lower maternal infant mortality, and working to educate and support families. I feel really lucky being able to offer someone that consistent kindness and support, and to show them that things can be different."