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*Celebrating the Delaware County Experience*

## Foundation for Delaware County's Nurse-Family Partnership Celebrates Decade of Success



Images via Rick Davis.

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The Nurse-Family Partnership, an evidence-based nurse-home visiting program operated by [The Foundation for Delaware County](#), is celebrating 10 years of delivering free, nurse services to low-income, first-time pregnant mothers, their babies, and their families. This national model, which operates in 44 of Pennsylvania's 67 counties, is recognized for its success in improving long-term outcomes for mothers and their babies.

Throughout the past decade, more than 735 mothers and infants in Delaware County have benefitted from the program.

Under the Nurse-Family Partnership, which is funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, registered nurses begin making regular home visits to women early in their pregnancies. These home visits are weekly at first, then occur every other week until the birth of the child. Home visits become weekly again for the six weeks following birth, then every other week until the child's second birthday.

Nurse-Family Partnership is like no other nursing job out there. Families bring nurses into their home when they are having their first baby – a significant period in their lives. Building relationships based on trust and consistency is a key component to the program's great outcomes.

In order to help the mothers achieve healthier pregnancies and births, the nurses encourage them to eat well, practice self-care, and keep prenatal appointments with OB/GYN providers. The nurses also help mothers set goals for economic self-sufficiency by encouraging them to seek or continue their education or find work. Research has shown that the transformational relationship that develops over the two years between the nurse and the mother helps boost the mother's confidence, improves birth outcomes, and helps break the cycle of poverty.

Ursula Watson is a registered nurse and Certified Breastfeeding Counselor who has been with the Foundation's Nurse-Family Partnership program since 2010. She is responsible for 25 clients in Prospect Park, Ridley, and Upper Chichester.



"Community health has always been my passion," she said. "I like being able to go out to my clients and meet with them one-on-one and have a relationship with them. This program gives me a chance to really impact their lives."

After a pregnant woman is referred to the program, Watson sets up an initial meeting to describe her role and the role expected of her new client.

"I just try to get to know them during that first visit," she said. "They tell me there are so many things going on with their bodies, and it would be nice to have someone like me to talk to, their own personal nurse. Most of them are very receptive."

Since many clients are also dealing with other issues like homelessness, domestic violence, and mental health concerns, Watson often feels like she is playing the role of social worker and counselor as well.

"I tell them I'm here to talk about the pregnancy, but I'm also here to help them in other areas too and to find resources for them," Watson said. "They tell me what their goals are, and then I try to help them obtain that goal. I let them know we have other supportive areas within our program that can help with what they need. It's not just related to the pregnancy."

A recent grant from the state gave a boost to the available resources to new mothers by funding a sixth nurse and a part-time social worker. Medical Legal Partnership Attorneys are also available onsite to address families' civil legal needs.

The Nurse-Family Partnership focuses on first-time mothers because studies suggest the best chance for promoting positive health, parenting, and child development occurs in the first pregnancy. One of those mothers, and one of Watson's clients, is 27-year-old Ashlee White, who enrolled in the program in August 2017 when she was 25 weeks pregnant.



White currently lives in Prospect Park and works a driver for the Interboro School District. She delivered a baby boy named Benjamin on Dec. 1.

"Ursula helped quite a bit with any questions I had, and the things I was nervous about," said White. "She helped me tremendously about what to expect as a first-time mom and was part of a great support system along with my family. Every question that I had about anything, she had the answer to or she looked up for me."

Watson's certification in breast feeding was an additional benefit to that nurse-mother relationship since White's goal was to breastfeed Benjamin from the start.

"Breastfeeding was something I chose to do, and she helped me get started and get through the all the struggles with that," said White. "I think the program is really great for first-time mothers who don't know what to expect."

As the visiting nurse, Watson also benefits from her relationships with clients, and she sees the positive impact the program has on everyone involved.

"We have really connected," she said of her relationship with White and her son. "She is doing an excellent job with Benjamin, and I've learned some things from her just as she has learned some things from me."

"Overall, the program has been very rewarding to me because I see how clients have grown when they graduate. They have been through a lot but have stayed with the program and feel really good that they accomplished something. They trust me and know that there is a person there for them, and it makes me feel good that I'm a part of that process."

[Click here](#) to learn more about the Nurse-Family Partnership.