

24

**WRITTEN STATEMENT OF
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NURSE-FAMILY PARTNERSHIP NATIONAL SERVICE OFFICE**

**SUBMITTED TO THE
NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS AND THE NEW YORK
STATE SENATE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
JOINT LEGISLATIVE PUBLIC HEARING ON HEALTH AND MEDICAID**

JANUARY 25, 2016

Nurse-Family Partnership® (NFP) is one of the largest and most thoroughly studied community health programs, which transforms the lives of Medicaid-eligible mothers who are pregnant with their first child. The program is backed by decades of research that reveals documented reductions in the use of social programs such as Medicaid and food stamps, reductions in child maltreatment, better pregnancy outcomes for mothers, and better language development and academic performance by their children. Needless to say, the mission and goals of NFP embrace a disciplined and effective approach to providing families and children with the tools and support they need to become more self sufficient and thrive.

NFP currently has sites in the counties of Cayuga, Chautauqua, Chemung, Monroe, Nassau and Onondaga, as well as the largest urban program in the country in the City of New York. Since the first replication site was launched in Queens in 2003, the NFP model has served nearly 16,000 families, and currently has a funded capacity to serve about 3,100 first-time families.

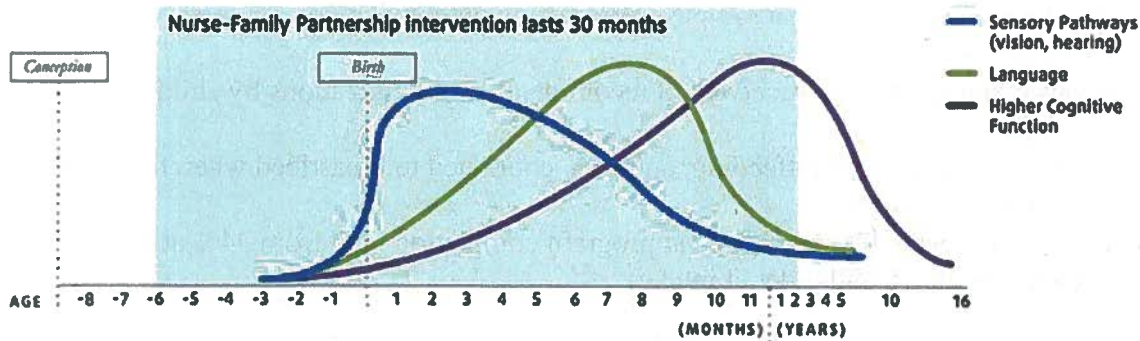
We are pleased that for the second year in a row, the Executive Budget provides \$3 million in funding for Nurse-Family Partnership. It has not escaped our attention, however, that the program has enjoyed the support of the Legislature for the last five budget cycles. Without that support, the program would not be where it is today.

This year, we respectfully request that the Legislature continue its support of NFP and our request for a total of \$5 million in funding. By appropriating an additional \$2 million, funding would be brought above the 2015-16 Enacted Budget of \$4 million, and therefore ensure current program capacity and enable meaningful program growth.

Under the NFP model, each mother is partnered with a registered nurse early in pregnancy, and receives frequent home visits until the child's second birthday. NFP nurse home visitors help mothers have healthy pregnancies, improve their child's health and development, and become more economically self-sufficient. Home visits are always client-centered and focus on encouraging positive life choices as families succeed with life course goals of education, employment, and stronger child health and development. This also yields economic benefits to taxpayers.

Nurse-Family Partnership nurses serve as mentors and, in some cases, as consistent lifelines for the young women who do not have a solid support system. They help mothers set goals for themselves, build their confidence and self-efficacy, and achieve milestones. Nurses do this by helping them believe that they can be successful, take charge of their lives, and forge a new path for themselves and their families – whether it be going back to school, finding more stable employment or finally having the strength and resources to leave an abusive relationship. These nurses are breaking the cycle of poverty one mother at a time.

Moreover, NFP offers a powerful and proven foundation upon which, we can help children by enhancing growth and promoting early development. It has consistently demonstrated improvements in early language development, cognition and academic achievement among children. More and more scientific evidence indicates that brain development is heavily dependent on early experiences. As shown in the chart below, basic functions related to vision, hearing, and language development occur during the first 30 months of a child's life.



Source: Nelson, C.A., In *Neurons to Neighborhoods* (2000). Shankoff, J. & Phillips, D. (Eds.)

During this window of opportunity, NFP nurse home visitors can have a significant impact on child development. Studies have indicated reductions in emotional, behavioral and cognitive problems among children of NFP mothers.

Nurse-Family Partnership has been tested for over 38 years through ongoing research and development, with results showing a remarkable improvement in the life of the mothers and their children, demonstrating that NFP is a truly “dual-generation” strategy. Outcomes observed among first time, low-income mothers and children in one or more of the randomized, controlled trials included the following:

- 35% fewer cases of pregnancy-induced hypertension.ⁱ
- 31% reduction in very closely spaced (<6 months) subsequent pregnancies.ⁱⁱ
- 56% reduction in emergency room visits for accidents and poisonings in the second year of the child’s life.ⁱⁱⁱ
- 50% reduction in language delays of the child at age 21 months.^{iv}
- 67% reduction in behavioral and intellectual problems at child age six.^v
- 28% reduction in 12-year olds’ mental health problems (depression and anxiety).^{vi}
- 67% reduction in 12-year-old children’s use of cigarettes, alcohol, or marijuana.^{vii}
- 59% reduction in arrests by child age 15.^{viii}
- 90% reduction in adjudication as PINS (person in need of supervision) for incorrigible behavior.
- 72% fewer convictions of mothers by child age 15.^{ix}
- 1 month increase in labor force participation during second year of child’s life.^x
- 7 month (or 82%) increase in labor force participation 4 years after delivery of first child among low-income unmarried mothers.^{xi}
- 46% increase in father presence in household by child age 4.^{xii}
- Significant reductions in maternal mortality. Mothers who were not in NFP were 8 times more likely to die from external causes, including unintentional injuries, suicide, drug overdose and homicide (through child age 20).^{xiii}
- Reductions in child mortality. 1.6% of children not receiving NFP died from preventable causes, including sudden infant death syndrome, unintentional injuries and homicide, while none of the NFP children died from these causes, through child age 20.^{xiv}

According to the national performance management system data, New York NFP agencies have made significant strides (see below for a sample of promising outcomes):^{xv}

- 94% of participating children received all recommended immunizations by child age 24 months.
- 89% of mothers initiated breastfeeding, and 34% continued to breastfeed when the child had reached six months of age.
- 60% of mothers were in the workforce at program completion – up from 34% at intake (among those clients 18 and older at intake).

For nearly 40 years, NFP has successfully provided first-time mothers with the knowledge, support and tools to take control of their lives and to come away from their NFP journey as strong, capable parents and with plans for a healthy, stable and bright future. As noted earlier, NFP currently operates in New York State with a funded capacity to serve about 3,100 first-time families. When compared with the more than 45,000 annual first-time Medicaid births, it is clear that the program is barely scratching the surface and could make significant strides if provided with the means to expand its reach and to serve more families.

The NFP program model seeks to foster long-term health, stability and success for parents and children. Enclosed below you will find a series of testimonials from mothers and nurses who have participated in NFP along with photographs of families and nurses. These testimonials provide a firsthand account of how the NFP experience has changed their lives for the better.

In addition to our request for a total of \$5 million to support Nurse-Family Partnership, we also support: the maintenance of funding for the **Community Optional Preventive Services (COPS) program** administered by the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), which is an important funding source for Nurse-Family Partnership; increasing funding to **Healthy Families New York** by \$4.5 million to \$27.8 million in the OCFS budget; adding \$3 million for **Parents As Teachers**; and adding \$1.5 million for the **Parent-Child Home Program**. Extending investment to these other programs will strengthen the service continuum for New York families.

For more information about Nurse-Family Partnership, please contact Renée Nogales, Business Development Manager for the NFP National Service Office at 215-776-1720 or renee.nogales@nursefamilypartnership.org.

STORY #1

*Eridiana Diaz, Nurse-Family Partnership Program Graduate
Visiting Nurse Service of New York – Bronx NFP*

I was 19 years old in October 2011 when I found out I was pregnant. When I heard the news, my world came crashing down. I was a good student, a sophomore at City College and first in my family to enter college. But all of a sudden, everything changed. I became vulnerable, confused and embarrassed. One of my worst fears was becoming just another dropout statistic and an embarrassment to my family. I was devastated and horribly depressed.

In my second trimester I saw a flyer for the Visiting Nurse Service of New York's Nurse Family Partnership. I called the number, and was introduced to Denise, the best nurse, friend, mentor and advisor that a "teen mom" could ever have. Denise completely changed my life.

Before we met, I had no idea how to change a diaper, or even how to hold a baby. I had no basic knowledge of the responsibilities that came with being a mom or what it meant to be the lifeline for another little life. I had never even had "little sister" baby duty. Denise taught me how to eat correctly, take care of myself, and what was important for my baby. She helped me understand how much weight I should be gaining, and why. She gave me step-by-step guidance on my new journey into "parenthood." But I was still having a difficult time accepting my pregnancy and didn't go to school that semester because I was embarrassed about what my classmates would say, so I dropped out and worked at my job right up until the very end of my pregnancy. Denise never gave up on me and she wouldn't let me give up on myself.



Bronx NFP graduate Eridiana (left) with her daughter Hailey (right) at an event at New York University in December 2014 that showcased NFP.

I wanted to look down at my belly and say, "Hey baby, it's your mommy talking." But I just couldn't. I saw only the negatives. I worried about my child struggling, my family struggling, the stereotypes, the money, a place to live, my education, my child's education.

Denise helped me learn to slowly accept and embrace my pregnancy. I took maternity photos, and even had a baby shower. And then, Hailey was born, and everything fell into place—my daughter meant the world to me. I wanted to be the best parent in my child's eyes.

I was 19 years old, and Denise helped me realize that my life was not completely over. We bonded because she was also a young Hispanic mother—her story seemed just like mine—and she motivated me to do better even after Hailey was here. You hear all kinds of wives tales: people telling me to formula feed, "add cereal to the milk," "feed your baby solids at three months," "she's not healthy," "she still looks hungry," "she's not cute and chunky." Believe me, I heard it all. But what kept me strong were weekly visits from Denise to reassure me that my baby girl was growing at the right pace.

There were times when being a new mom, full time student, and part-time worker, was just too much to take. Denise knew I would benefit from talking with Debbie, a psychologist, who helped me improve relationships with my mom, my in-laws, my boyfriend – Hailey's father – and most importantly, myself.

Through the NFP program, I have learned a variety of things, not only about parenting but about myself. The program shapes you to become the best parent you could be for your child, and also to grow and mature and love yourself.

I am so proud today. I breast-fed my daughter for 13 months. I'm a senior at City College who will be graduating with a Bachelor's of Science in Childhood Education, and applying to Grad school. I have an amazing support system, and I know what it is to stand up for your child, and take pride in caring and loving another living being. Of course, there are many obstacles yet to face: the terrible twos, universal pre-k enrollment, school ... and LIFE. But ... as Denise has taught me, I'm ready—my foundation is in place!

Who knows how things might have turned out if I hadn't seen that flyer. All I know is that I'm not a drop out statistic, I'm a Mom, and a pretty good one it turns out, thanks to Denise and the VNSNY Nurse Family Partnership. Wouldn't it be wonderful if every young mom and her child could have a beginning like that?

STORY #2

Jessica Santos, Nurse-Family Partnership Program Graduate Public Health Solutions Nurse-Family Partnership Queens

I was 18 when I got pregnant. When I found out that I was pregnant I was scared but also happy. It was a mix of emotions and I didn't know what to do. I got connected to NFP through a friend of mine. I had recently found out that I was pregnant and I had gone over to her house and my friend's NFP nurse—Michelle—was there and she asked if I wanted to start the program. I am really happy I decided to join because NFP taught me a lot about raising a baby. They would give me little papers that helped me learn what to do when she's crying, how to feed her, and what to do from certain months to certain months and then what she should eat and what she can't eat. NFP was important for me because with Michelle, I knew I could always talk to her and tell her what was happening and as much as she could she would try to help me out.

Michelle was like my daughters second doctor. Whenever my daughter was sick she would say "no no you don't need to take her to the doctor, she probably has this" instead of me having to run to the emergency room every week or something. Also other things I didn't know about my daughter I would ask her and she would give me the answers because I don't know everything about my daughter yet because she's still small and I'm still learning everything about her. Michelle has also brought me thermometers and sippy cups and whenever I asked for something, if she could, she would bring it. Michelle also helped me enroll my daughter in a speech program and she is now starting to say sentences. I would definitely recommend NFP to my friends.



Queens NFP client Jessica made a special design of her graduation cap that includes an inspirational message to her daughter, Jeinabell. Jessica graduated from her GED program in June 2015.

When I started NFP I was with my daughter's father. Around when my daughter was a year old we got into a big fight and it turned into a domestic violence case. That day I texted Michelle. And she called me to see what was wrong and I told her that it wasn't one time. He had hit me once when I was pregnant too and I forgave him because I thought he was going to change. The second time was when my daughter was a year old and then they arrested him and he went to jail. I feel like having NFP here helped me out a lot because it would distract me and help me focus on positive things. That's when Michelle was like "you should go back to school instead of staying home, you're gonna get depressed. You can make changes in your life that he wouldn't let you do." He wouldn't let me go to school, he wouldn't let me work, he wanted me to be a stay at home mom and he didn't want me to become something better. NFP has helped me accomplish a lot. I had told Michelle that I wanted to go back to school and I went back to school, I graduated, and I found myself a job. Now I have my GED and I'm working full time in a customer service and florist shop near where I live. And now I am somewhere where I don't think I would be if I wasn't part of NFP.

STORY #3

*Erin Moore, Nurse-Family Partnership Program Graduate
Monroe County Department of Public Health*



At first I was very reluctant to participate in Nurse-Family Partnership. I was going through some difficult things, was dealing with anxiety, and I was nervous about becoming a mother. My Social Worker encouraged me to do it. When I first met Deb I was living in a hotel. She met me at the hotel and during our entire visit I was in the bed with the covers almost over my entire face. I am the type of person who does not like to get along with people. I remember Deb was talking to me about what to eat during pregnancy; I would cover myself with the blanket and try not to look at her because I don't like people telling me what to eat or telling me what to do in general. I gave NFP a chance because I realized that it would help me.

During my pregnancy, with Deb's help, I learned about what to eat and what not to eat while pregnant, what labor and delivery would be like, how to care for my baby girl after she was born, and how to decrease my anxiety and stress. One of my biggest fears of delivering my baby was the pain I would experience. This fed into my anxiety. During some of our visits, Deb shared with me different techniques, like breathing, and other distractions I could use to decrease my anxiety about delivering my baby. After delivering Amberleigh, I thought she was perfect and at that moment I knew my whole life changed. My anxiety continued to get the best of me after Amberleigh was born. One thing that really stressed me out was when she cried, I wouldn't know how to calm her down. Deb gave me information and talked to me about different ways I could console Amberleigh. And I learned that it was okay for me to put her down in a safe place and walk away for five minutes if I got too stressed out.

As time went on, my boyfriend, Amberleigh's father became very abusive, both physically and emotionally. I wanted so much to have the perfect family, Mom, Dad and baby. I realized that was not going to happen. Through many visits and talks with Deb, I realized that my self-worth and the legacy that I would be leaving my daughter were much more important than being in an unhealthy relationship. I began to realize, with Deb's help, that I did

not deserve to be treated badly, nor did my daughter. I did not want Amberleigh growing up thinking that it is okay to be physically and emotionally abused by someone. Going through this wasn't easy. I was afraid of being alone and raising Amberleigh without help of her father. Deb helped me to realize that I was doing a good job taking care of Amberleigh on my own. What helped me the most during this time was that I knew people were supporting me and assisting me in making good choices for myself and Amberleigh. I also began to see myself change. I began to be able to think more clearly and not act on my emotions all the time as I did in the past. I realized that I cannot make someone else do the right thing. I had to step to the plate and make the tough decisions that were best for me and Amberleigh. It was scary, but so rewarding. My Amber is turning into a smart, beautiful girl.

What I enjoyed most about NFP was that I had a nurse who supported me and had a sense of humor. I enjoyed doing the activities during the visits where I could play with Amberleigh and learn more about her growth and development. As I graduate from NFP, I would like to attend Monroe Community College for Occupational Therapy.

STORY #4

Stephanie Ludwig, NFP Nurse Home Visitor

Told by Stephanie, with the permission of the client Eltude Vilburn

Staten Island Nurse-Family Partnership

When I met Eltude for the first time, she was 22 weeks pregnant with twin boys, living alone in a rented room in a private dwelling in Brooklyn. She had been referred to me by another NYC NFP client, a McDonald's coworker who felt Eltude, too, would benefit from the program. Eltude's story up until that point had been complicated, but her next two and a half years as an NYC NFP client proved to be even more challenging. Our time together has shown me that Eltude is remarkable, ambitious and resourceful, always striving passionately for a better life for her and her family.

Eltude was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and grew up living with her mother, stepfather and younger siblings. At 22, soon after meeting her biological father for the first time, Eltude migrated to Miami, Florida, to live with him. Shortly thereafter, Eltude's father unexpectedly passed away. Still trying to acclimate to a new culture and new home, Eltude had to grow up very quickly. Her stepmother, siblings and aunt in Florida abandoned her, forcing Eltude to take the reins of her own destiny. She did so without hesitation. She completed ESL classes, enrolled in a career training program at her local community college and, when she could not find work as a dialysis technician, accepted a job as a waitress/hostess at a nearby hotel. She also found a roommate to share an apartment with and enjoyed a relatively stable life for the next three years. During that time, she returned to Haiti to visit and marry her high school sweetheart, Johnsy, who remained in Haiti when she returned to the US.

Back in Florida, however, Eltude lost her job and, unable to find a new one, was evicted from her home. At the urging of a distant relative, she joined him in traveling to New York City in search of new opportunities. She spent the first few months couch-surfing with family and friends until she found employment as a shift manager at a fast food restaurant and was invited to share an apartment with a cousin. After about a year of full-time employment, Eltude took time off to visit her husband and family in Haiti. It was on this trip that she became pregnant.

By the time Eltude returned to New York, her pregnancy was not the only change she had to contend with. Her cousin evicted her, so all she could afford was a single room. By the time Eltude enrolled in NYC NFP, she had already lived in three different rooms, suffering through numerous awful experiences such as severe rodent infestation and having to call the police because her landlord had locked her out. All of these challenges, however, only served to strengthen her determination to succeed.

When she lost her job at the fast food restaurant, her need to find new employment became critical. She had just learned that she was expecting twins and her doctor had ordered bed rest. Yet because she had no choice but to work, Eltude had to go against her doctor's orders. This was when she found the job at McDonald's, and she continued working there until the day she delivered her sons.

Throughout the remainder of her pregnancy, Eltude kept all of our scheduled appointments, making the trip either from work or home to her coworker's apartment for our visits. She was always enthusiastic and interested in the information I presented her with. She wanted to know all about the changes taking place in her body and was determined to have a healthy pregnancy. We discussed resources that were available to her within her community and she followed up on all the referrals she was given. One of these referrals led her to Catholic Charities, which not only assisted in supplying Eltude with cribs, clothing and other baby necessities, but was also instrumental in helping her apply for citizenship and in initiating the immigration sponsorship process for her husband.

While Eltude may have been anxious about her circumstances and how she would provide for her boys, it never showed. She was always positive in her outlook and did not spend much time engaged in self-pity. As her due date approached, she still had not found a new place to stay. Her landlord had warned that the room she rented was for a single person only, and Eltude was not welcome once the twins were born. Because her income was insufficient to cover the cost of an entire apartment, Eltude called on the cousin with whom she had previously lived for help. Though initially resistant, the cousin softened when she learned Eltude was expecting twins, and allowed them to stay with her.

On October 25, 2012, at 37 weeks' gestation, Eltude went into labor. She rode the bus and train to Coney Island Hospital, where she delivered her twin boys by cesarean section without her spouse or family to support her during the birth. Three days later, the city was hit by Superstorm Sandy, the hospital was evacuated and Eltude and the babies were discharged early and sent to her cousin's. Three days before Christmas, her cousin said she needed the room Eltude and the boys were using and evicted them. Eltude sums up her feelings about that day by saying, "I cried so much, I ran out of tears."



As luck would have it, when Eltude relayed her story to the cab driver who picked her up from her cousin's, he directed her to another room nearby that she was able to rent. This would become her family's home for the next two years. Eltude struggled to care for her sons in their room and to maintain a routine for them. She went back to work at McDonald's and then found a job as an assistant manager elsewhere in the food service industry. When she lost that job due to a personality conflict with a subordinate, Eltude decided to change directions. In the fall of 2014 she enrolled in the Medical Assistant Healthcare Training Program at the Allen School of Health Sciences, and soon after, won an NYC NFP Heart's Desire Scholarship award to help cover the tuition. She graduated from NFP in October and her training program this past June. I was honored that she asked me to attend her school graduation and very glad I was able to, as I was her only supporter that day (see photo to the left).

Staten Island NFP client Eltude (left) beams with pride on her graduation day along with her NFP nurse, Stephanie Ludwig (right).

Participating in NYC NFP was the steering wheel that helped Eltude through this part of her life's journey. She says that without the program, things would have been different for her. "It would have taken me longer to get to where I am today," she told me, and says she believes that deciding to enroll in NYC NFP was "the best and most wise decision" she has made for herself and her sons so far. When asked to describe our relationship for this story, Eltude told me I was "... like a rock in my corner. You were always there—just a phone call away."

Unfortunately, Eltude and her sons currently reside in a homeless shelter. She tells me she is disappointed that she had to reach this point. But again, she does not let this setback discourage her. With her medical assistant certificate in hand, Eltude remains optimistic, looking forward to working in her new profession and eventually continuing her education to earn a degree in nursing. "I have more hope for a better future," she says. My plan right now is to get out of the shelter, get my husband with me so we can live the life that we always dreamed of." I am confident that Eltude will be successful in achieving her heart's desire!

Eltude's twin sons, Jason (left) and Jacob (right) in the summer of 2014, enjoying Staten Island NFP's Brooklyn Day at Prospect Park. Eltude said that her decision to participate in NYC NFP was "the best and most wise" one she has made for herself and her sons.



STORY #5

Shanell Medlock, NFP Graduate

NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene—Targeted Citywide Initiative



I was living in a shelter and my family was not at all supportive when I got pregnant. They just weren't involved at all. And then I met Joanne and she became my family. She gave me so much guidance and support – especially when my daughter was born and had a lot of medical needs. Joanne came to the hospital and she explained things to me – she always had the information I needed. And she taught me how to deal with things – with patience - and how to fight for what I needed – for me and my daughter Harmony, especially.

Joanne also somehow made me more independent; she taught me how to take care of myself, how to be organized and get things done, I have so much more confidence now. And she taught me to be persistent, to advocate for myself and Harmony – how to get things done and get what we need. I can't believe all the things she taught me & how different our lives are thanks to Joanne and NFP.

STORY #6

Natasha Pennant, NFP Graduate

NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene—Targeted Citywide Initiative

During pregnancy, even though my doctors kept saying everything was fine, Joanne [Nurse-Family Partnership nurse home visitor] kept checking my blood pressure and she knew this was not normal for me. She kept insisting and sent me to the ER – sure enough I had pre-eclampsia and delivered my daughter 2 months early. Joanne probably saved my life and my daughter’s life. After I delivered she visited me in the hospital and I had really bad headaches and the staff kept saying I’d be fine & they were ignoring me. Joanne wouldn’t leave it alone & she told them such severe head-aches are not normal and sure enough – there were complications from my epidural! She advocated for me in so many ways, I learned how to advocate for myself and my daughter – just by watching her.



After my daughter’s birth, she needed PT [physical therapy] because she was early and I was overwhelmed, but Joanne somehow taught me how to handle it all and stay calm. And I kept saying it was too much to go back to school, but Joanne kept saying – “you’re so close, you just need a few more credits, you can do it.” So I did. I finished my Bachelor’s in Judicial Studies at John Jay. Now I’m working at the Hospital for Special Surgery and Joanne has stayed in touch and she’s motivating me to go for my Masters. She’s helping me with the GRE’s and I want to get a Masters in Public Administration. And my daughter is beautiful

Natasha with Aaron Pelzer (far right) and their daughter, Emma, at an NFP holiday party in 2014.

and is growing perfectly.

STORY #7

Donna Freeman, NFP Graduate

NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene—Targeted Citywide Initiative

I learned about NFP from a caseworker at my shelter. I’m usually pretty open-minded, so I thought I’d give this a try. Joanne helped me in so many ways! She gave me confidence as a mother, helped me create a real relationship with my daughter, taught me what it means to be nurturing. I would never have thought about reading to her, or teaching her to play with crayons – but now Zaira is 5 years old and she’s so smart and she loves to write! And she’s doing really well in kindergarten.

I felt like NFP was my family (extended family, better than my real family in some ways). Raising a child is stressful – especially when they get sick – that baby messes with your mood. You can feel really alone! But I always had someone to talk to – and the right someone –



Donna Freeman with daughter Zaira (front) and a friend enjoying a fun and relaxing day at the beach.

because Joanne is a nurse & she knew what to tell me – she was always positive and helpful – she taught me everything I needed to know. And I always felt heard with her. Plus – Joanne really built up my self-esteem – not just as a mother – but as a human being – now I know I’m worth a lot!

I’m working as a police officer in DHS now, and it’s very challenging, but I use all the lessons I learned about patience and compassion, every day.

STORY #8

Cindy Del Vilar, NFP Graduate

NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene—Targeted Citywide Initiative

When I was two months pregnant my son’s father decided that he didn’t want to be a part of his life and left me alone to deal with being a new parent on my own. It was a very scary and sad place to be. I was working multiple jobs to try and make ends meet. I was very overwhelmed. One day I went to one of my routine prenatal checkups and a nurse asked me questions about my lifestyle and if I had any support from friends or family. I shook my head no and began to cry. She handed me a pamphlet and told me to give this company a call and assured me that I would get help from these people. The next day I called and sure enough a nurse was sent to my house a few days later. This is when I met Joanne Schmidt. On our first meeting Joanne asked me a lot of questions about my current situation and instantly assured me that I was not alone. She told me that everything was going to be ok. I looked at her face to see if I could detect if she was lying and just telling me things that she tells all of her clients, but I just saw a sincere look in her face. She wasn’t judging me for being in the situation that I was in. She wasn’t blaming me for my son’s father leaving. She wasn’t looking down on me because I was homeless. Instead she looked at me with acceptance. She knew that I had potential and helped me discover the type of woman I was and the type of mother that I wanted to be.

Later, down the road, my pregnancy was going terrible and Joanne suspected that I was having preeclamptic symptoms. She said my blood pressure was too high and I was too swollen. I told her I had just gotten out of the hospital and the doctor said I was fine. She called my doctor and compared her notes with my doctor’s notes. My doctor said that my blood pressure was on the normal range, but Joanne argued that it wasn’t normal for **ME**. After a quick briefing the ambulance came and took me to a different hospital and Joanne gave me a piece of paper where she scribbled some notes down. She told me to show this paper to the doctor that will be assigned to me and to any nurse that may ask me any questions. Sure enough at the hospital the nurses and doctors were confused as to why I was brought in. They said my vitals looked normal, I quickly pulled out my yellow paper and showed it to them. They then realized that my blood pressure was indeed high. The next day I gave birth to my son. If it wasn’t for Joanne



NFP mom Cindy Del Vilar (left) holding son Caleb and standing with her NFP Nurse Home Visitor, Joanne Schmidt and NFP Mental Health Clinician, Keith Carter (right).

I would've given birth at home or in the middle of the street somewhere. My son came two weeks early. My unemployment money hadn't kicked in yet and I had just reapplied for welfare so I was still waiting on my benefits. I was on my own. After I gave birth I was diagnosed with postpartum depression. Through NFP, I received counseling that would help me deal with my new life and stress so I could focus more on my goals and being a good parent. It was a pretty rough beginning for me as a new single mother.

Little by little my life started falling into place. I made personal goals with Joanne. I wanted to pay off my school debt and go back to school. I wanted to take a course to receive my license to open a daycare and I wanted to move out of the shelter. Eventually, my now fiancé and I were able to scrape up enough to get our own apartment. I confidently checked myself out of the shelter to begin a new life. Joanne continued to work with my family and eventually noticed some delays in my son Caleb. She helped me get him enrolled into early childhood intervention services. Caleb was diagnosed with Autism and started his therapy around the same time that my Fiancé and I welcomed our second baby. After our second baby was born we went through a very difficult time. We had to cope with Caleb's diagnosis and with having two infants at home. Knowing that we had Joanne guiding us and helping us choose what direction we wanted to go made our journey as parents easier for us. Joanne was constantly pushing me to accomplish all of my goals. She was always in the sidelines cheering me on. I was able to accomplish all of the goals that I set for myself with Joanne. I paid off my school debt, got back into school, got my certificate to open my daycare, got out of the shelter, started a family blog and I'm currently writing a memoir. All of this because Nurse Family Partnership believed in me. I would like to tell Joanne and NFP, you guys might not have changed the world, but you definitely changed the world for me. Thank you always for your kindness and unconditional love.

STORY #9

Tiffany Horseler, NFP Client

Cayuga County Health Department

Hello, my name is Tiffany. I am a survivor of Domestic Violence. I have been in this cycle of abusive relationships for many years. It literally took me to face death in order for my eyes to open. The last abuser I was with was the worst in a short amount of time. In one year he had me mentally prepared to end my own life. I felt I had no other escape. I lost my family, I have lost baby after baby. He made sure every day to tell me how worthless I was. As I was in the hospital, I was sent an angel. Darrien, a sitter at Upstate [Hospital] opened my eyes. He gave me a reason to fight for my life, that reason was to believe in myself. Before leaving the hospital I joined a therapeutic support group. The best decision I ever made. I saw and heard stories from other women, and I wasn't alone. As a victim my biggest fear was being alone, or was it loneliness? But the truth behind the matter is I was more alone in this world being with men like that, then I ever have been in my life. My turning point was finding out that I was pregnant with my abuser's baby. Her safety became more important than mine. I took back my life. I came back home to be with family. My mother pushed me to get involved inside the community through Cayuga Seneca Community Action Agency's Domestic Violence program, so I reached out. I joined a support group, in which I have made some life lasting friends.

I also joined Nurse Family Partnership, which taught me everything I needed to know about pregnancy and how to care for this child I was afraid I wouldn't love, given who her father was. This program gave me a chance to learn, cope, and bond with my baby. I was no longer alone. Now my daughter is the greatest love I have ever known. This community has held me together. These programs and advocates never give up on me, and that's just what I needed to stay strong. I am no longer a victim, but a survivor.

My journey hasn't been easy. I struggle with the emotional scars every day. Some days are great, and some days I can't open my blinds. When people hear the words victim of domestic violence, your first thought is violence,

which yes, physical harm is most likely happening. Bones heal, and bruises heal. The hardest part is healing your mind. I can say that the emotional scars fade in time. I have learned to cope. The best feeling in the world is to stand up for myself. Though I'm still on this journey to find myself, and to be the best mother and person I can be. There is always hope, because you're not alone. Reach out, open your mind, and ask for help. You are special, important, and worth a better life. Women, stand up for your life. Once I did, I have embraced, and felt more love, compassion, and support through this community, and I just want to say thank you.



NFP mom Tiffany Horseler (at the podium) spoke for Domestic Violence Awareness Day (October 21, 2015) on the steps of City Hall in Auburn. About 50 people from the community attended, including several members of the Auburn Policy Department. Sheriff David Gould of Cayuga County (standing behind Tiffany), Cayuga County Legislature Chairperson Michael Chapman and county legislator Tim Lattimore (far right) also attended. Tiffany will graduate in May 2016.

STORY #10

***Denise Marie LeeFoon, NFP Graduate
NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene***

I had a high-risk pregnancy so I was more than grateful for the opportunity for a nurse to assist me in the journey of motherhood. I was given reading material every session. I learned about the development of my child within my womb every two weeks. When my child was born I was fortunate that the program taught me to become a better mother by learning what to expect every month and the benchmarks my child should make every three months. Normally I would have to see my daughter's doctor every three months for her vaccinations to answer any questions. Having a nurse visit me in my home to address any of my concerns put my mind at ease. My nurse was very instrumental in helping me pursue my short-term goals. The goal I achieved with the help of the Nurse-Family Partnership was to have a healthy child and be an educated mother to my daughter.



The Nurse-Family Partnership is vital, essential, relevant and beyond helpful to many communities. It provides education, hope, community resources and gifts, and strengthens families. Without the Nurse-Family Partnership I would not be able to cope with the hardship of my daughter's health. My nurse gave me wisdom in the form of lessons and reading material, therapy when I needed to talk, and gifts of baby supplies that were needed during my financial hardship.

To all the people who are involved in the Nurse-Family Partnership, I just want to say thank you very much. I hope the program continues to flourish so it can help people like me.

Denise LeeFoon and her daughter Angelica Sky Henry at the Queens NFP graduation in November 2015. Angelica was born prematurely with a birth defect that required surgical correction. While in NFP, Denise earned a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education and plans to become a special education teacher.

And finally, the picture that is worth a thousand words...



Bronx NFP mom Estefana Norales and her nurse, Dorothy Valcin (front right), pose with dad Karim Estes and daughter Alease Norales-Estes inside the decorative “picture frames” that Dorothy designed for her NFP team’s Mother Day celebration.

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