

Nurturing a Better Future

32 Moms Graduate from VNSNY's Nurse-Family Partnership



NFP mom, talks about the positive influence VNSNY's program has had on her and her baby.



On Thursday, July 9, 2009, people gathered in the auditorium of Lincoln Hospital in the Bronx. They were there to watch 32 women graduate from the Visiting Nurse Service of New York's Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP).

Depending on how early in the pregnancy the women called the NFP, and on how late the children were born, the nurse-mother relationship may have lasted for close to three years. In those twelve seasons, visiting nurses accomplish a lot. Their influences affect more than the women, their families and their employers. The medical community at large appreciates the effect the Nurse-Family Partnership has on pregnant women. Some of that effect is indirect; it comes from the nurse's presence.

Mary Joan (MJ) Murphy is the Associate Director for VNSNY's Nurse-Family Partnership. "For a lot of our clients," MJ says, "this woman is the first woman they've had in their lives who's self-sufficient, financially independent, who's nonjudgmental, who is professional, who will come in and really work with them one-on-one."

This gives the pregnant woman both a role model and a source of knowledge. The surety instilled by the former enables the client to put the latter to good use. A self-assured, well-informed patient is easier to deal with; she becomes a partner, rather than a passive—or, worse, a resistant—player in her health care.

A social worker at Albert Einstein had this to say to Murphy: "We love your patients. They come in and they know what they're doing and they're calm and they know exactly what's going to go on."

The mothers' knowledge and awareness make prenatal care much easier for all involved, but the NFP prepares them for more than medical care. The nurses prepare their clients to embrace the role of motherhood. That starts early, and its ramifications are many.

Clarissa Igle, a nurse-supervisor with the NFP program, gets her clients reading to their children during the pregnancy. "Reading is important," Clarissa says, "because it stimulates the baby in utero. It allows the mother to have a relationship with the child—not when they come out, but right from the beginning.

Talk to your baby. The baby understands. The baby can hear you." Telling incipient mothers this fosters an

awareness of the connection with the coming child. Clarissa encourages interaction with the unborn babies—and to think of it as interaction, rather than of form. She tells mothers, "if they know more than one language, then speak to the baby in all of them. "More than that, she tells them why: "Talk to your baby. Your baby understands. Your baby, in the womb, knows the mother's heartbeat, the mother's breath—every move that the mother makes, they're a part of that. They can hear them talk, they can hear them laugh, they can hear them cry, they know their emotions."

All of this makes the baby real. It establishes and nurtures a mother-child relationship before the infant is born. It also trains the mother to teach her baby. Even when the infant is in utero, Clarissa says, "You want to utilize all of the senses in order to increase the baby's learning capacity." By the time the child is born, the first-time mother is comfortable and confident in teaching and interaction. This diminishes the likelihood that a new mother will feel that she is holding an alien creature in her arms.

"It's so important," Clarissa says. "The relationship starts in the womb. This is a living, breathing human being that you're developing a relationship with."

Acceptance replaces separation and postpartum depression becomes less of an issue.

With a healthy baby born into a healthier environment – to a mother who's comfortable dealing with medical personnel and life's obstacles –the NFP is birthing a better future for the community as a whole.

