Nurse Family Partnership gives first-time moms a fair shot at a healthy, happy life

With funding from United Way of York County, Nurse Family Partnership has helped new moms in York get a strong start for nearly two decades.
Missi Ensminger's heart breaks when she knows a mom hasn't received quality healthcare. Too often, she hears stories of women being treated differently because they are single mothers, low income, or at risk of abuse.

"Access to healthcare can change someone's life," says Missi, a registered nurse with Family First Health's Nurse Family Partnership. "When we start with mothers, we impact the whole family. I've made it one of my life goals to make sure they are never treated differently because of their circumstances."

In her 18 years with the organization, Missi has helped hundreds of first-time mothers reach goals they never thought attainable.

Through referrals, mothers who are considered at-risk are connected to a nurse who meets with them from pregnancy until the child is 2 years old.

We support the moms at whatever level they're at. We're here for the journey, whatever that may be.

“Whatever we do is focus on the desire of the mom’s heart,” Missi says. “As a nurse, it’s tough to not just go in and try to fix everything. But I’m here to support them in their decisions and empower them to change their own lives.”

Funding from United Way of York County is leveraged to enable Family First Health to meet a match requirement of state funds that support the work of Nurse Family Partnership. So, for every dollar that comes from the United Way of York County Community Fund, $3 of state funds are directed to work with local families through the program.

“We believe there is nothing more important than supporting families at that pivotal time when the first child arrives,” says Jenny Englerth, CEO and Executive Director at Family First Health. “Evidence and experience show that by investing in first-time moms and families across York County, we can improve lives.”
Working toward goals

Missi was one of four original nurses hired to launch Nurse Family Partnership nearly two decades ago.

“i really felt this was important for me to do,” she says. “i saw that i could make a difference as a community nurse.”

Missi visits moms every two weeks through their pregnancy until the child reaches 21 months old. Then, she visits monthly until the child turns 2. She conducts simple health checks, weighs the babies, and reviews infant safety.

But she also works with the moms to establish and work toward goals. For some, that’s learning how to cook. For others, it’s getting a driver’s license, continuing their education, or leaving an abusive relationship.

“We support the moms at whatever level they’re at,” Missi says. “We’re here for the journey, whatever that may be.”

Empowering moms is just one of the objectives. Nurse Family Partnership also addresses the gaps of health equity in the community. The metrics measured relate to health and well-being, but the program also shows moms outperforming their peers.
That impact would not be possible without the United Way of York County Community Fund, Jenny says.

“Our graduates gain the skills, knowledge, and confidence to take their families forward,” Jenny says. “Nurse Family Partnership can change the course of someone’s life, and that supports a more just and equitable community for all of us.”

**Support to move forward**

Missi can’t remember how many women or babies she’s helped over the years, but she does remember the stories. She knows many of those children will be fully immunized and safe from child abuse thanks to her work.

When the moms and their children graduate from the program, Missi celebrates their accomplishments and reminds them how far they’ve come.

“I like to think that each visit with these families is a chapter in their book,” Missi says. “I look at those babies and think, ‘Who will you be?’ and I have hope that they’ll be someone great.”

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