

Building Close Relationships Between Nurses and New Mothers in Greater High Point

Nurse-Family Partnership – Guilford Child Development

Summary

Guilford Child Development is one of the largest non-profit providers of early childhood education in Guilford County, North Carolina. Since 2016, the Foundation for a Healthy High Point has funded Guilford Child Development to support the implementation of Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP). Nurse-Family Partnership is a national, evidence-based, intensive nurse home visiting program, serving residents in areas of highest need in Greater High Point. The program provides a free, personal nurse to visit first-time mothers from pregnancy through the second year of their child's life. The goals for the program are to improve birth outcomes and the overall health and well-being of mother and child.

Highlights

- Nearly 100 families, most living in highly impoverished areas of Greater High Point, participated in weekly or monthly home visits with Nurse-Family Partnership nurses.
- All babies born to participating mothers were born at full term and a healthy weight, and over 80% of mothers opted to breastfeed their babies for at least six months.
- The program pivoted to virtual meetings during the Covid-19 pandemic, providing families with much needed support during a challenging time.
- An economic analysis of the program estimates that the Foundation's investment in Nurse-Family Partnership equates to over \$1.3 million of value for High Point families and the community.

Funding

The Foundation for a Healthy High Point supported the Nurse-Family Partnership program from January of 2017 through December of 2020 with grants to Guilford Child Development totaling \$229,645. Additionally, NFP in Guilford County is supported by the Duke Endowment, March of Dimes, and Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust.



The Foundation for a Healthy High Point encourages, supports, influences, and invests in efforts that improve the long-term health and wellness throughout Greater High Point. We accomplish this by examining health issues and identifying and investing in evidence-based practices.

Background

Guilford Child Development (GCD) supports young children and families in Guilford County through early childhood education programs such as Head Start/Early Head Start, the High Point Opportunity Center, Learning Together Family Literacy Program, and Nurse-Family Partnership. GCD started with a group of community organizations in 1967 and is now one of the largest nonprofit agencies in the county. GCD's goal is to ensure that all children have the advantages they need to be successful in life, including early childhood education and supportive services.

Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) is a nurse home visitation program serving vulnerable first-time mothers and their children. GCD has provided the program for over 20 years as the first NFP site in North Carolina. The program is designed to serve low-income, pregnant women most in need of a medical home, supporting them through pregnancy, childbirth, and their child's first two years of life.

Need

Greater High Point is a high-need community with many families who have lived in poverty for generations and a recent influx of new immigrants and refugees needing support. High percentages of High Point families lack access to healthy food, isolation from healthcare services, and high levels of violence both inside and outside the home. These factors intersect with race resulting in African American mothers having the poorest maternal and infant health outcomes.

Nurse-Family Partnership strives to address health disparities, prevent child abuse and neglect, and break cycles of poverty in the Greater High Point area. As MiShawne Carrington, NFP Program Director, stated, "A healthy child makes a healthy adult. And a healthy adult is a productive member of society."

Project Description

Nurse-Family Partnership is a national evidence-based nurse home visitation program designed to achieve healthier pregnancies, improve child health and development, and increase economic self-sufficiency. The program model was born 40 years ago with the idea of pairing a Registered Nurse with a mother to change the trajectory of her life and the life of her child. Intensive home visits begin during the second trimester of a mother's first pregnancy and continue until the child reaches two years of age. Over the course of 64 visits, six domains are addressed by the program: personal health, maternal role, environmental factors, family and friends, life course development, and health and human services.

The Foundation for a Healthy High Point's funding supports one FTE nurse to serve families in Greater High Point, including central High Point and Jamestown. High Point's 27260 zip code, the most impoverished zip code in the area, has the highest enrollment levels in the program. Three nurses maintain relationships with new parents who live below the poverty level.



Nurse-Family Partnership nurses:

- Provide up to 64 home visits to pregnant mothers – weekly during pregnancy and the first six weeks post-partum, two times per month until 20 months, and then once per month until the child is two years old.
- Ensure mothers receive prenatal care and babies receive newborn care, including providing transportation to physician, prenatal, and pediatric appointments.
- Monitor the health of mother and baby and address other needs such as transportation, food, education, and safety.
- Provide parents with child development education for their children from birth to age 2.
- Coordinate with other local early childhood programs, such as Guilford Family Connects, to prevent duplication in services.

In March of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic “shined a light on the economic razors’ edge that families are surviving on and increased the needs of High Point families,” according to NFP staff. The pandemic had a considerable impact on the program with pandemic restrictions halting home visits and forcing nurses to pivot to video and phone visits to maintain contact with families. Nurses resumed home visits in June of 2021, however, virtual meetings have continued as needed to ensure participants and nurses feel safe and comfortable. The program has seen an increase in participation with existing participants, although recruitment of new participants has been more difficult during the pandemic.

Results

The near-term goals of the Nurse-Family Partnership program are to improve birth outcomes, reduce and delay subsequent pregnancies, increase nutrition education, increase breastfeeding, and reduce barriers to accessing health care for first-time, at-risk mothers. In reports to the Foundation for a Healthy High Point and interviews for this report, program staff stated that between January of 2017 and December of 2020:

- 99 first-time mothers participated in the program. The majority of participating families lived in areas of highest need in Greater High Point (27260, 27262, 27263, and 27282 zip codes.)
- NFP nurses completed 3,134 home visits during this period, despite challenges due to the pandemic.
- 35 mothers from Greater High Point have graduated from the program, with the option of transitioning to GCD's Early Head Start program for continued support.

An evaluation of the initiative in High Point found that all the babies born to NFP-participant mothers were born at full term and a healthy weight. All the mothers were educated on breastfeeding and 83% opted to breastfeed their babies for a minimum of 6 months. Additionally, all participating mothers received education on family planning and proper nutrition and were provided with access to behavioral health services.

A national 18-year longitudinal study of NFP found evidence that the program improved multi-generational outcomes for participating families including positive outcomes during program participation. These include 20% fewer preterm births, 48% fewer incidences of abuse and neglect, and a 10% increase in earning a high school diploma/GED after program enrollment. Two decades after graduation, the study found that NFP mothers spent 20% less time on welfare and were three times less likely to die from all causes of death. NFP children were three times more likely to graduate from high school with honors.

An economic study of the program calculated that every dollar invested in NFP creates up to \$5.70 worth of value to the moms, families, and communities served and over \$17,000 in savings (a reduction in public assistance spending) per family. Applied to the Foundation's investment, this would equate to over \$1.3 million of value for High Point moms, families, and the community.

GCD staff shared the story of a program graduate to illustrate the power of the program to bring families out of poverty. The NFP participant had grown up as the oldest of a family of 12 living in a three-bedroom home. While pregnant, she enrolled in NFP, determined to rise out of poverty. She participated in the program through graduation and then enrolled her child in Early Head Start. She and her baby's father got married, her husband gained long-term, stable employment, and she received a college degree and works as an illustrator of comic books. Her daughter was described by NFP staff as an "exceptional child" who is in second grade and speaks Japanese.



Source: Guilford Child Development website

Lessons Learned

In reports submitted to the Foundation and interviews for this report, Nurse-Family Partnership staff shared that they learned that:

- **Nurse-Family Partnership illustrates the power of building a “caring and collaborative relationship” between nurses and families even during the pandemic.**

The COVID-19 pandemic made staff realize that they needed to find new ways to maintain relationships outside of home visits. They learned that telehealth and teleconferencing can maintain and even deepen relationships. Doing porch drop-offs and other socially-distanced meetings were important ways to check in and safely connect in person. The pandemic challenged staff to think about how to use their funding in creative ways and learned that virtual visits can provide flexibility that mothers appreciate.

“The COVID-19 pandemic shined a light on the economic razors’ edge that families are surviving on and increased the needs of High Point families. The Foundation was gracious in being flexible with funding and said, ‘you do what you need to do.’”

- **FHHP funding allows NFP to reach the neediest areas of High Point, such as the 27260 zip code in central High Point.** High Point is a difficult city to serve, with great need and many challenges facing the community such as lack of transportation, lack of accessible jobs, high rates of violence, and health disparities. The program can provide transportation to doctor appointments, removing barriers to access to healthcare. However, nurses report that clients’ daily Uber bills are very high and take away from families’ abilities to buy healthy food or other necessities. Staff stated that they are more deeply connected in Greater High Point community than they would be without the program.
- **Being part of the Healthy Beginnings initiative has strengthened the program.** Networking with other Healthy Beginnings partners has resulted in referrals from other organizations and has created a shared commitment to addressing maternal and child needs in Greater High Point. GCD appreciated the Foundation for a Healthy High Point’s flexibility in the use of funding during the pandemic. This allowed them to use funds to meet High Point families’ urgent needs, such as rent, diapers, utilities, etc. GCD staff emphasized that they feel Foundation staff really “care about the community” and “have their fingers on the pulse of what’s needed.”