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WCHD's Nurse-Family Partnership Celebrates Six Years, Expanded Services, Positive Results for Families

BELLINGHAM, WA — Six years, 151 babies, 201 families. Since 2012, Whatcom County Health Department's Nurse Family Partnership (NFP) has been investing in the health of the next generation by helping guide first-time parents through the physical, emotional, and social changes of pregnancy, birth, and early stages of childhood. The positive outcomes for parents and kids are obvious: improved utilization of prenatal care, increased parent employment, better breastfeeding and immunization rates, and on-time child development.

Recent stats indicate that 90% of women in the program received their first prenatal visit on time, 80% of clients were employed upon graduating from the program, and 96% of mothers initiated breastfeeding.

The Whatcom County NFP program began in October 2012 with two nurses. Since then, the program has expanded to include five nurses plus a cultural liaison who together serve approximately 80 families annually. WCHD's NFP program includes a component for tribal communities, added in 2016. At the invitation of the Lummi Nation, WCHD added a two-person team comprised of a nurse and cultural liaison dedicated to the tribal community. The team provides NFP services that integrate with tribal health and social services and build on the strengths of the Lummi culture and community.

NFP works by connecting first-time, low-income mothers with a specially-trained nurse during early pregnancy. Families then receive regular visits in their home from the same nurse until the child's second birthday. Nurses and families develop a trusting relationship, and nurses work with parents to set and achieve goals for their family and their child. Visits can cover anything from breastfeeding support and coaching in healthy parenting to enrolling in school or navigating relationships with family, friends, and community.

"It's a holistic, multi-dimensional approach to health," says Judy Ziels, WCHD Public Health Nurse Supervisor who manages NFP. "A child's well-being is connected to all aspects of their family's life: maternal health, where they live, family security, social connections, and accessing the services that support healthy growth and development. It's more than just health care during pregnancy and infancy; it's about empowering families to create an environment that will foster lifelong success for their baby and for them."

Snapshot of a family's success: *A family who was told they would be unable to conceive learned they were expecting their first child. During the complications of pregnancy, a premature birth, months in neonatal intensive care, and ongoing medical and developmental concerns for their daughter, their NFP nurse was always on hand. Their nurse also connected them to numerous resources for financial assistance, mental and physical health services, affordable housing, and supports for healthy child development. Being open to coaching and building on their strengths, the parents developed positive coping skills to manage parenting challenges, and daughter and parents have a positive and loving relationship. Now graduates of the NFP program, their little girl is free of health concerns and on track in all areas of her development. This family is proud to have overcome the challenges they faced, and shared that the support of the NFP program made a significant difference in their lives.*

To learn more about the evidence-based, national NFP program, visit <https://www.nursefamilypartnership.org/>.

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