



The sounds of Saturday morning cartoons, children's laughter and Chinese-inflected English bounce off the walls of the small Monterey Park, California home. The cacophony of running water and clanking pots and pans adds another movement to this symphony of familial chaos. Sarahi (pronounced Saa-rah-ee), who at 2½ years old is already a head-turning beauty, shrieks and laughs then shrieks some more as she plays nearby.



*Felicia Jiang and her daughter Sarahi*

as a client. At the time, Felicia, a troubled high school student, was under the watchful eye of the Department of Children and Family Services. Placed under house arrest for trespassing on private property (she entered a school building after hours), Nurse-Family Partnership was recommended to Felicia as a resource when it was discovered she was three months pregnant.

Felicia's initial response to the pregnancy was naïve anticipation. "Cool," said the free-spirited teen with a penchant for raves and heavy eyeliner. Then reality began to sink in. When she finally got around to telling her mother, Wanda, the response was overwhelmingly negative. "It's a disgrace for Asian parents," explains Felicia. She recalls her mother's exact words: "You're going to suffer."

Sarahi's mother, Felicia Jiang, 20, sits at the kitchen table with her visitor, Clarissa Mendoza, a nurse with the Nurse-Family Partnership. The two women begin to reminisce. Theirs is a relationship of heart-filled sharing and bonding forged more than three years ago when Felicia first came to Clarissa

"I was not going to help them a lot," admits Wanda, who was facing the stark reality of having not just one but two teenage mothers living under her roof. (Corinna, 19, would give birth to a daughter, Alexa, on the very same day as her sister Felicia.)

Thanks to the Nurse-Family Partnership, Felicia was better equipped to take on her new role as mother. She developed the necessary skills with the on-going support of one-on-one visits: that included sharing, guidance, and instruction each week that truly bolstered Felicia's capabilities.

The pair met once a week for four weeks followed by twice-weekly visits. They convened anywhere and everywhere—at Felicia's home, her boyfriend's house, and even at the local Jack-in-the-Box restaurant. "You start to get a vibe, and I knew Clarissa really cared for me," says Felicia when asked why she responded so readily to the nine-year Nurse-Family Partnership veteran. Last year, when Felicia graduated from the program, Clarissa marked the occasion by taking Felicia, her boyfriend and little Sarahi, to the Los Angeles Zoo for a fun-filled outing. "I still have a DVD for you. I'll bring it next time," she suddenly remembers on this January day, wanting to ensure Felicia has tangible memories of this milestone.

Part role-model, part mentor, part friend, Clarissa is the kind of person any woman, young or old, dreams of having. It seems only natural that as the conversation



Sarahi, Felicia and NFP Nurse Home Visitor Clarissa Mendoza

Clarissa encouraged Felicia to get her high school diploma and go to college, explaining that she would be better able to support her daughter if she completed her education. The young mother, who works 15 hours a week at a retail store, is completing a two-year program in fashion design and marketing, and has plans to continue her education.

grows intensely intimate, neither woman hesitates. No topic is off-limits. They communicate with ease about subjects many mothers and daughters avoid, and through it all Clarissa deftly strikes a balance between humor and good old-fashioned common sense—even when Felicia confides that she’s not currently using birth control. “You’re playing Russian Roulette!” Clarissa exclaims, and in the background, children’s shrieks ring out even louder, as if sounding an alarm.

“Clarissa helped me to think better, to know what’s out there, and to make choices. She’s been one of my biggest supporters, and she’s one of my best friends, too.”

“What’s good about the program is that it’s not from my perspective, and it’s not from her mom’s perspective,” Clarissa explains. “We work on our client’s goals and what they want to get out of it, and then we support what they are already thinking about.” Clarissa encouraged Felicia to get her high school diploma and go to college, explaining that she would be better able to support her daughter if she completed her education. The young mother, who works 15 hours a week at a retail store, is

completing a two-year program in fashion design and marketing, and has plans to continue her education. Clarissa also urged a reluctant Felicia to engage Sarahi’s father more.

“I’ve matured a lot,” says Felicia. “Clarissa helped me to think better, to know what’s out there, and to make choices. She’s been one of my biggest supporters, and she’s one of my best friends, too.” As if to offer proof, Felicia adds one more thought: “She always answers her phone.”

“Unlike you!” counters Clarissa without missing a beat. “I learned the trick is to text her!” Both women laugh. Two mothers, two different generations linked not by blood or culture but by mutual respect, shared experiences and a deep appreciation of the humor that can be found in nearly any experience if you look hard enough.

“I showed her this unexpected pregnancy was a curve in the road – not the end of the road,” explains Clarissa. One they would navigate together.

*This Nurse-Family Partnership program is implemented through the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health Programs in California.*