



**Maria was 16 when she left home in the western suburbs of Chicago. She was carrying a dark secret about sexual abuse, so she was glad for the chance to start a new life in the home of her older brother and sister-in-law.**

But after a couple years, she met a man who told her how beautiful she was, and Maria didn't know he already had a wife and family. When her brother learned that she'd become pregnant, he was furious. Maria ran out of the house, and when she returned the next morning, her brother wouldn't let her back in.

Maria was in high school. She should have been studying trigonometry and the American Constitution. Instead she was worrying about where she was going to live, what childbirth would be like, and how she could possibly care for a baby on her own.

"I had no family to help me through," she says. "But Nurse-Family Partnership® was there for me." Over the next two years Maria endured many stressors and upheavals, and Nurse-Family Partnership was a stabilizing presence through it all.

When Maria was concerned about the drugs and smoking in her next living environment, her nurse learned about a group home where she could live. When she dropped out of school after Fernando was born, her nurse helped



her figure out practical options like daycare and transportation so she could reenroll and finish high school, a huge accomplishment.

But perhaps most important for Maria—and for Fernando—has been a personal connection she could trust. "Juanita has been a big part of Fernando's life," Maria says. "She's been there at so many different

stages, asking how he's doing, what's going on with him, what I need. It means a lot to have someone ask."



Today Maria has a high school diploma, a stable home environment, and a job she rides her bike to. After more than a year of being estranged, she reunited with her brother. "He can't believe how much I've matured," she says. "And he's right. I feel very fortunate that this program is available where I live."

There will certainly be challenges in the years ahead, but Maria will carry with her the strengths she developed, thanks to the guidance and support of Nurse-Family Partnership. "I've become a mother," she says, "a true mother."

*This Nurse-Family Partnership program is implemented through the Kane County Health Department in Aurora, Illinois.*