

EDUCATION

by Mary K. Bowannie

Caring *for* Community

Nurse-Family Partnership client Maria (l.) and her son, Fernando, read books while NFP nurse home visitor, Juanita, watches (r.).



Caring for young mothers and their children is what Kelly Deal, Lumbee Nation of North Carolina, always knew she wanted to do. “I have always wanted to be a nurse. My love, my passion is labor and delivery and women’s health,” she asserts.

Deal, who is 32 years old, is a nurse home visitor with the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) program located within the Robeson County Department of Health in Lumberton, North Carolina. Deal is one of four nurses in the NFP program in Robeson County, where the program was launched in late 2008. The county program is affiliated with the national Nurse-Family Partnership organization based in Denver, Colorado.

According to the national NFP organization, a typical client is 19 years old, unmarried, with some high school education, and living on \$13,500 a year. Statistics show that 975 out of the 20,059 clients served nationwide are Native American, with the highest number in the state of Oklahoma. Typically, NFP programs are based at county or state level health departments and are funded by federal, state and local funds as well as private foundations. NFP would like to see its program implemented in tribal health care facilities and they are currently in discussions with some Minnesota tribal health leaders and the Minnesota Department of Health about that possibility.

Discovering What Works

NFP was founded in the 1970s by Dr. David Olds who created a nurse home visitation program specifically for first-time mothers and their children. For the next 30 years, the program was tested in three separate, randomly controlled trials in three very different communities—Elmira, New York; Memphis, Tennessee; and Denver, Colorado. The trials showed that NFP made strides in its three main program goals: improved pregnancy outcomes, improved child health and development, and increased economic self-sufficiency.

NFP’s results were affirmed by the Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy (CEBP). According to the CEBP website, “The Coalition is a nonprofit, non-partisan organization, whose mission is to increase government effectiveness through rigorous evidence about ‘what



Kelly Deal and Tammy Chavis-Watson, both members of the Lumbee Nation of North Carolina, are nurse home visitors with the Nurse-Family Partnership program in Robeson County in Lumberton, NC.

RHONDA FIELDS, NFP/ROBESON COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

works.” The organization was founded in 2001.

The 2009 CEBP report *Early Childhood Home Visitation: Effectiveness of a National Initiative Depends Critically on Adherence to Rigorous Evidence About What Works*, found “strong evidence of effects on important life outcomes of children and mothers.”

The NFP nurses work with their clients for two years on preventative health care, prenatal care, diet, eliminating or reducing cigarette, alcohol and illegal substance usage. They help young mothers learn how to be responsible and provide health care for their children, and help them learn to be self-sufficient in the areas of education, employment and future pregnancies.

Passionate Nurse Home Visitors

The NFP goals and strong research evidence are precisely why Kelly Deal is so excited about being an NFP nurse. “You really see the need, but you see how you are making a difference, some small differences and some big differences. There are a high percentage of Native Americans who smoke and have small birth weight babies. [We’re] giving them the education and a choice, knowledge is power,” notes Deal, who received her bachelor of science in nursing from University of North Carolina (UNC) at Pembroke in 2008.

Tammy Chavis-Watson, age 34, is also from the Lumbee Nation and one of the NFP nurses in Robeson County. She was a social worker prior to earning her bachelor of science degree in nursing from University of North Carolina at Pembroke in 2007. Chavis-Watson loves teaching about the maternal process and as a labor and delivery nurse she wanted to engage for a longer period of time with patients. She knew NFP would allow her that option. Chavis-Watson and those involved in the program see the need for it in their community.

Making a Difference

Cindy Herndon is the nurse family partnership supervisor for the Robeson County Department of Health. She received a master of science in nursing from Duke University in 2004 and a Women’s Health Nurse Practitioner certificate from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2007. Currently, she is working on her PhD in nursing at East Carolina University. Herndon knows first-hand the challenges Robeson County faces.

“We have a high poverty rate and the second highest teen pregnancy rate,” Herndon points out. “We realize our young needy families need support from the community that will sustain them and carry them forward into the



Holly, (l.) a NFP nurse reviews a breastfeeding booklet with client, Nely (r.).

future generations to provide for a family, to nurture, to create stronger family units and a stronger, healthier county.”

The North Carolina Commission of Indian Affairs acknowledges eight state-recognized tribes and one federally recognized tribe in North Carolina. The Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina has “partial federal recognition as a result of the Lumbee Act of 1956,” according to the commission’s website. The act acknowledged the tribe, but it did not give them full federal recognition, and so the tribe is not eligible for any services or support from the Bureau of Indian Affairs or the Indian Health Service.

The 2000 US Census found Native Americans accounted for 99,551 of North Carolina’s total population. As far as Robeson County, Native Americans make up over a third of the county’s total population, with whites just below a third and African American’s making up 25%.

Almost a quarter of the county’s population lives below the federal poverty rate. The 2009 federal poverty rate for a single family is just under \$11,000 according the US Department of Health and Human Services’ website. At the time of the 2000 Census, the single family poverty rate was just under \$8,400.

Chavis-Watson says while her county faces some serious socio-economic challenges such as poverty, lack of education, jobs and crime, it is a good community. She knows it is, because she has lived there all her life. Chavis-Watson already sees the NFP program making a difference.

“We have some moms who’ve never changed a diaper, never fed a baby. We took one [young pregnant woman] to a day care center to shadow the day care worker. She changed, fed, burped and soothed a baby. [This experience] elevated her confidence level. She delivered and now she’s breastfeeding her baby—something she never thought she could do,” relates Chavis-Watson.

Nursing Must Be Your Heart’s Desire

Teresa White, 45 years old and a member of the Chickasaw Nation in Ada, Oklahoma, is a NFP nurse home visitor at the Yakima Valley Memorial Hospital in Yakima, Washington. She has been with the NFP program for six years and has 10 years of public health experience. White obtained her bachelor of science in nursing from Washington State University in 1993 and was the first member of her family to graduate from college.

White is happy to comment on how the program impacts her clients. “It involves a process of change, from the moment you meet them,” she remarks. “They’re excited upon entering—there’s a lot of hope. They’ve never done it [the program] before so they don’t have a sense of failure. They want to be there. Progress depends on where they’re at; sometimes they will pull away a little.”

White adds that she has received cards from clients thanking her for showing them what a good mother they can be. The work can be tough

though, but the nurse home visitors are determined. White says nursing is more than just skill. “They [students] have the ability to do it. If it’s their heart’s desire—they [must] have that strength to succeed in a career in nursing.”

It’s clear the nurses involved in the NFP program feel very strongly about what they are doing to help young mothers and their children. “It is my calling, it’s hard and challenging. I’m making a difference and respecting people where they are at,” White notes. It is this aspect of respecting people and accepting them in whatever stage of life they are that resonates with the Native American community and the NFP clients.

“The moms want to be involved, the grandparents and extended family are all involved. [Everyone] becomes more engaged with the visits. You can’t just go in there and ask about the client, it’s more about the community. Definitely you have to be engaged with the whole family to give information and be accepted,” Chavis-Watson explains. Her dedication and commitment to her clients are evident. “I’m empowering my mamas. I was a young mom, but I had support. A lot of these moms don’t have that. [We’re helping them] to believe in themselves.” ❖

Mary K. Bowannie, Zuni Pueblo/Cochiti Pueblo, is a freelance journalist and a lecturer in the Native American Studies department at the University of New Mexico.

Resources

Nurse-Family Partnership

www.nursefamilypartnership.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=home

National Alaska Native American Indian Nurses Association

www.nanainurses.org

United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics – Registered Nurses

www.bls.gov/oco/ocos083.htm

CollegeBoard – Career: Gynecologists and Obstetricians

www.collegeboard.com/csearch/majors_careers/profiles/careers/106711.html