

NURSE CHINA

China, a 21-year-old, senior nursing student, found out she was pregnant on a rainy morning, when a simple hunch led her to take the dollar-store pregnancy test she had stowed away in one of her duffel bags. The preceding months had been markedly difficult for China, who had found herself in an unstable living situation and struggling to maintain reliable transportation to school and work. Her aunt and uncle welcomed China into their home in Darlington, South Carolina, with open arms and one condition: she would finish her education. China was going to be the first in her family to graduate from college.

The first person she shared the surprise with was her Aunt Sandy, whom she had grown to love and look up to as a mother. Her aunt had been outside in the car waiting on China so that they could run some errands on China's rare day off. Inside the house, having just seen the results of the pregnancy test, China sat on the floor of the guestroom trying to wrap her mind around being a single mom. Finally recognizing that the horn of her aunt's car was blaring impatiently for her, China stepped outside. The expression on China's face, one of shock and fear, sent her aunt running to the door wondering what could be wrong. China held the test out to her Aunt Sandy without muttering a word. She did not have to say anything. The two pink lines in the result window of the pregnancy test said it all – the errands of the day would have to wait.

The reality of the road ahead began to sink in. China thought about the lack of consistent female role models in her life. Sure, she imagined that she would have become a mom someday, but not under these circumstances. She was in her last semester of nursing school and working two jobs, one as a waitress in town and the other as an assistant for a dog kennel located a few counties away. It was clear to China from the very beginning that she was going to be a single parent. She wanted to give her child the best and grew worried about providing and acquiring the resources to do so. Despite her anxieties, China was certain about one thing: she was determined to be a better version of herself for her growing family.

The next day, China started researching how to access good prenatal care with limited resources. She went to the public health department and learned how to apply for Medicaid.

China also heard about WIC and Nurse-Family Partnership.

Later in the semester, Nurse-Family Partnership came up again in her public health nursing class and she had the opportunity to shadow a Nurse-Family Partnership nurse. Right away, she knew that this program was something she wanted. After graduating from nursing school, China called Nurse-Family Partnership to enroll into the program. Later that week, Heather – her new personal nurse – visited her at her aunt's house and she enthusiastically enrolled.

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China with her former NFP nurse and now co-worker, Heather.

It was during one of her visits that China felt comfortable enough to confide in Heather. Heather had shared with China that she too was a single mother. China had recently discovered an apartment for rent close-by, but was nervous about taking such a big leap and making it on her own. With Heather's encouragement and knowledge, China gained a fresh perspective and became more confident and assertive with her choices.

The next visit took place at China's own apartment. China knew that it was going to be challenging having her own place, but was willing to take a chance to provide the best life for her child.

At China's first ultrasound appointment, she discovered that she was having a baby boy. She immediately began preparing the nursery in anticipation of his arrival.

China looked forward to Heather's visits. When China felt stressed, Heather helped her to stay focused on becoming a mom. She was always there for her to monitor her blood pressure and look out for her health. China also decided that she

wanted to breastfeed her son – even though breastfeeding wasn't something many women around her chose to do. Heather taught her what to expect and showed her breastfeeding techniques.

China continued to work the same two jobs to pay the bills, while also saving up for her state board of nursing licensure exam. During one of their visits, Heather mentioned to China a nursing job opening at a local hospital. China expressed interest to the hiring supervisor and awaited a response.

In October, China delivered a healthy baby boy, Ian. During her stay at the hospital, China received a call to interview for the nursing job. She was determined and interviewed for the position just 11 days after giving birth. In December, she passed her nursing licensure exam, and was excited to be a registered nurse. China's hard work had paid off! The nursing job she wanted was hers and she began working as a medical-surgical nurse (just after receiving clearance to work at her six-week postpartum checkup).

Heather continued to visit China and baby Ian with every transition in their lives. China was learning how to take care of a newborn. When breastfeeding became challenging, Heather showed China better ways to help him latch. China was thankful to have Heather's support to help her monitor her son's development. He was thriving!

When asked about China, Heather shared, "When I think of China, the word self-sufficient comes to mind. While pregnant, she balanced attending nursing school, working two jobs, never missing an OB appointment, and moving out on her own. She has been the BEST mom from womb to now a precious two-and-a-half-year-old little boy. She worked hard to better her and her child's life, independently—mission accomplished!"

China would go on to meet a wonderful man named Jonathan who worked in the emergency room as a nursing technician. They became good friends, realizing that there may be potential for something more. China was very cautious about bringing different people into Ian's life. She wanted to spare her son the hurt of temporary, inconsistent people. She confided in Heather about the best time to introduce a potential partner to Ian, and asked for her advice on how to maintain



China with Ian [5 Months Old] celebrating Easter.

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boundaries with her son. After dating a while, China felt that she could trust Jonathan and introduced him to Ian. They fell head over heels for one another, and Jonathan has been a part of their family ever since. Both planned and hosted Ian's first birthday party together and were married that same big year!

Jonathan has been the best dad for Ian, and it was by choice. There are plans for Jonathan to adopt him in the near future.

Just a few months later, China and Jonathan bought their first home together. The next time that Heather and China would meet would be at China's very own house. At one of their last visits before program graduation, Heather mentioned

to China that there would soon be an open position for a Nurse-Family Partnership nurse on her team.

Shortly after graduating from Nurse-Family Partnership – China applied and joyously accepted the now open position to become a Nurse-Family Partnership nurse.

"I feel that this is the job that life has prepared me for. In fact, being a nurse for Nurse-Family Partnership is not a job; it is a calling," shared China.

China has been a Nurse-Family Partnership nurse at McLeod Health for the past four months. She is now 26 years old and works alongside her former nurse, Heather. China helps expectant moms see their potential and develop visions for their future to continue their education and foster independence and development. She understands firsthand the vulnerability felt as a young first-time mom and hopes that her journey inspires them to feel that they too can overcome anything and make their dreams come true. She fondly remembers the wonderful times she had as a Nurse-Family Partnership mom.

"I love my job and I look forward to going to work each day," said China. "It is really inspiring to know that I possibly made the transition into motherhood more graceful for my clients. I love to see the increase in a mother's confidence after our visits."

Today, Ian is a well-mannered, happy toddler who enjoys preschool, playing with trucks, and being his dad's little helper doing projects around their family's home in Darlington, South Carolina.

China is a Nurse-Family Partnership graduate and is currently working as a Nurse-Family Partnership nurse at McLeod Health in Florence, South Carolina.



China and her husband Jonathan purchased their first home together, just months after getting married. Here they are outside of their new home with Ian (1.5 years old).