

NURSE GEORGIE

The story of Nurse-Family Partnership begins in Elmira, New York. It was the late 1970s, and many teenagers were becoming mothers. Elmira had seen brighter days. The community had lost a lot of economic opportunity after a big flood had wiped out many businesses and destroyed homes. Generations were dependent on public assistance, and teenagers had the option to drop out of high school at age 16.

Nurse Georgie McGrady – the mother of four young girls – was looking for her next nursing job.

She had a meeting with a young researcher named David Olds from Cornell University. Olds spoke about wanting to help the youngest moms and preventing teenagers from becoming pregnant. He wanted to get the whole family involved to change outcomes for both the babies and their parents. They were hiring nurses to begin a new program called PEIP – the Prenatal Early Infancy Program.

“The way David talked about doing this...we knew it had to be done,” said Georgie.

Georgie accepted the nursing job and joined a group of nurses that would work together for around 10 years. Their work with young mothers would be the foundation for what would later be called Nurse-Family Partnership.

“You have to go in and first listen. And it might not pertain to pregnancy,” said Georgie. “You can't just go into someone's house and act like you know everything. Kids can tell a phony from those that really want to do something.”

She stressed the importance of continuing to show up at a young pregnant woman's home. “You are going on their turf,” Georgie said. “Find out their biggest need and help them.”

She didn't just visit with the pregnant teenagers; she became the whole family's nurse. Georgie talked with the boyfriend, teenager's father and mother, etc. She shared how the grandmothers – the mothers of the pregnant teens – could often be the most challenging and upset.

Georgie had to earn their trust. She shared how one of the grandmothers would yell at her. Another grandmother just cried when Georgie said, “I am your daughter's nurse.”

It was tough work, but she would remain focused on why she was there.

Being a mother of young girls did it for her. “How would I feel if my teenage daughter was pregnant?”

Junior high classmates of her daughters were pregnant and many were Georgie's clients.

“What I would bring the expectant teenager and her family was so interesting,” said Georgie. It was information they wanted to know – how to comfort a crying baby, what to feed a baby and much more.

continued

“““

IT WAS THE BEST THING THAT HAPPENED TO ELMIRA. DAVID [OLDS] SAVED A LOT OF YOUNG KIDS AND CHANGED A LOT OF LIVES.



Nurse Georgie in Elmira, New York (2018)

The boyfriends also became interested in how the baby was growing and why their girlfriends were uncomfortable. “We wanted the boyfriends to be a part of the visits and ask questions,” she said.

After the teenager became a mother, Georgie helped her to think about what she wanted for her future. Many teenagers had never had anyone encourage them before to pursue their education, and often faced judgement about being poor and not being able to get off public assistance.

Georgie helped advocate for her moms. She worked with them to stay in high school and met them during study hall when needed. Georgie would bring them materials to help them pursue their goals and help them find assistance to go to college.

Recently she ran into a nurse who called out, “Georgie,” and she ran up to her and gave her a big hug. “I did it,” she cried. “I’m a nurse now. You told me there was nothing I couldn’t do if I put my mind to it.” Georgie sees the endless rewards of her

work from 40 years ago.

The moms she once visited are now in their 50s. “The best thing is to see the difference it made in their lives,” Georgie said.

She also now sees their children – the babies she once saw – now in their 30s and 40s – at the grocery store and around town. “They remember me. It’s amazing,” Georgie shared.

Georgie is high-spirited, warm and funny and at 80-years-old she said she wishes she could do it all over again.

“It was the best thing that happened to Elmira. David [Olds] saved a lot of young kids and changed a lot of lives,” she said.

“David was a baby when we started this. He looked like he was younger than 25. He was kind of shy, but brilliant. He was a blessing. I’ll tell you that.”

Founder David Olds also shares this gratitude and affection for Georgie.

The work of Nurse-Family Partnership founder David Olds was born in Elmira in 1977. It has changed over 280,000 lives. Georgie’s five-nurse team was the original nurse team, and today over 1,900 nurses are replicating it across the country and around the world.

“““

“I LOVE THIS WOMAN!” DAVID OLDS EXCLAIMED. “GEORGIE IS NOT ONLY A REMARKABLE NURSE, BUT A REMARKABLE HUMAN BEING. I WAS YOUNG AND INEXPERIENCED AND LEARNED SO MUCH FROM HER. THE FAMILIES GEORGIE SERVED WERE DEEPLY AFFIRMED AND GIVEN HOPE THROUGH THEIR WORK WITH HER, AND THE OTHER NURSES AND I WERE BLESSED BY THE OPPORTUNITY TO WORK WITH GEORGIE - AND WITH ONE ANOTHER.”



Georgie (second from right) and her fellow nurses and staff with David Olds (late 1970s).