

MOM DANIELLE

The Danielle you see today – healthy, happy, sober, working hard toward an ambitious goal – is a different person from the 25-year-old woman who waited nervously in an obstetrician’s office three years ago.

At that time, Danielle was eight weeks pregnant and undergoing treatment for thyroid cancer. She was a heavy drinker, and she was struggling with the consequences of an abusive childhood.

So when she picked up a brochure from Nurse-Family Partnership, she was looking for a lifeline.

“I was absolutely, genuinely terrified,” Danielle said. Danielle was in college, living with her boyfriend and a roommate in Davenport, Iowa. She went to see her oncologist and “he lost his temper with me,” she said.

“He yelled and berated me, saying I shouldn’t have gotten pregnant. He said I was irresponsible and it was unlikely for me or my child to survive. If the child did survive, he said it would have birth defects.”

She scheduled an appointment for an abortion the next day. “He left me very shaken,” Danielle said. “Everything was doomed.”

But ultimately she couldn’t face terminating the pregnancy. She went home and told her boyfriend, “We’re going to have a baby.”

She still was terrified, but inside her head, something had clicked. She decided to change her life.

She stopped drinking and enrolled in the Women, Infants and Children Food and Nutrition Service so she could eat better. She made an appointment with an OB/GYN and when she got home from the doctor’s office, she called the number on the brochure for Nurse-Family Partnership at the local agency, Genesis Visiting Nurse Association.

“I was really nervous because I thought the nurse would come to evaluate me,” Danielle said. She feared more rejection, more criticism.

“But Beth was wonderful.”

“She gave me resources for whenever I was in need. She

talked to me about what to expect during pregnancy. I’d been abused my entire life by every person I ever knew, and she taught me coping mechanisms.”

Beth taught her how to have a healthy diet, Danielle said. “She helped me find maternity clothes. She helped me with everything. When my feet hurt, she even rubbed my feet.”

Unable to have radiation treatments during pregnancy, Danielle’s cancer was treated successfully with medication. When her baby was born, she said, he was “large and in charge.” He was a healthy, perfect, 8-pound 8-ounce boy. She named him Odin.

The hard part was just beginning, however. It was time for her to be a mother.

“I was very nervous throughout my entire pregnancy,” Danielle said. “Then, when Odin was born, there was so much I had no clue about.”

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BETH AND NURSE-FAMILY PARTNERSHIP HELPED MY FAMILY GET OUT OF A VERY DANGEROUS SITUATION.



NFP graduate, Danielle, and her nurse Beth met with members of Congress to advocate for NFP.

Step-by-step, Beth taught her how to care for a newborn and herself, and what to expect along the way.

“She taught me about all these weird tics newborns have, like the purple cry. She gave me loads of information and I read all of it.”

Through every stage, she posted the current child development information on her refrigerator.

When her roommate left and Danielle and her boyfriend no longer could afford their place, they moved into a “fixer-upper” that turned out to be so filthy and decrepit, it was unsafe. She moved out of state for several weeks to give her boyfriend time to fix the place, but when she returned, it still was a mess.

After seeing the place she said, “I was freaking out. I called Beth.”

Beth helped Danielle and Odin move into a women’s shelter until they could fix the house. There she learned housekeeping and other skills, and she maintained her relationship with Beth.

“No matter what time of the day or night I



Danielle, NFP graduate, shared her story at a Congressional Briefing.

called, she always answered,” Danielle said. “She saved us.”

Odin’s development was right on track and then, when he was 9 months old, they were in a car accident.

“He was not injured physically,” Danielle said, “but the impact was on his side of the car. He was covered in broken glass, very shaken up and disturbed.”

She had taken him to the emergency room, so she was confident that he was in good shape, but still worried about him. Beth advised her to get a new car seat and to seek reimbursement from the driver who caused the accident.

As a result of the accident, Odin reverted to the behavior of a much younger infant and stopped trying to talk.

Beth reassured Danielle that Odin’s behavior was normal after experiencing a trauma. She taught her to care for him at the stage he was exhibiting, to nurture him and reassure him so that he would get back on track.

Two years later, he’s physically on target for all his developmental milestones except for his verbal skills.

“He doesn’t talk very well,” Danielle said, despite her efforts to repeat his sounds back to him and celebrate new words, “but thanks to Beth he’s in speech therapy.”

Danielle is enrolled in college again, studying radiation technology. Odin is in the child-care program at the college.

The family graduated from the Nurse-Family Partnership program when Odin turned 2, and they credit Beth with teaching them how to be a family.

“The cycle of abuse ends here,” Danielle said. “I often think that without Beth, I would have dissolved into the kind of people that members of my family were. Odin would have been another statistic in the shaken baby syndrome.”

“Beth and Nurse-Family Partnership helped my family get out of a very dangerous situation.”

“I would go to the moon and back for them. They’re wonderful.”