

MOM KATHY

Expecting a child is a time of great joy and anticipation, but for many first-time mothers it can also be a time of great stress. For Kathy, the new pregnancy was exciting, but also was a pivot from her previous life as a truck driver.

"I got into truck driving because it paid decent money," said Kathy. "It's a very male-dominated field, though, with only four or five women on every 30-member team. I was a 'yard dog' – I drove the big rigs around the facility. I was really, really good at my job."

As Kathy reached her third trimester, she was introduced to nurse Shari with Nurse-Family Partnership® at Riverside County Health Department in California. Three months later, she gave birth to her daughter, Lieghanne. Shari was with her every step of her journey into parenthood.

"It was Shari who helped me to move out of my parents' house," said Kathy. "I was busy with moving and working, on top of trying to move things to the new apartment. Shari made it really easy for me by coming to wherever it was that my crazy schedule was taking me. Sometimes it was my parents' house, sometimes it was my new apartment."

"It was nice having someone to turn to for advice who was objective and outside of the family. Shari helped me with knowing what milestones my daughter needed to hit, and most importantly, I was more relaxed than a doctor's office visit since I didn't have to pack everything up to take with me. Shari was even able to point things out like things in the home that might be dangerous and how to mitigate it."



When Kathy (shown left) graduated from Nurse-Family Partnership, she shared that nurse Shari (shown right) had been there for every step of her journey into parenthood.

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Shari's nursing background was a blessing in helping with baby Lieghanne's early health issues. She had a tongue tie and had a hard time latching. When Lieghanne was four months old, she started spitting up blood due to severe acid reflux, and severe fever spikes. Each time, Shari was there to help teach Kathy what to do.

"Shari really helped me with knowing what to do, because it was really scary when it first started happening. I learned that we could make adjustments and help Lieghanne so that she was more comfortable."

“She hated tummy time, so Shari helped me with putting her in positions that helped her get stronger but didn’t hurt her stomach. She also helped me with figuring out how to make adjustments in my own diet because even what I was eating had an impact on the milk Lieghanne was drinking. So nurse Shari helped me with things like cutting out chocolate, tomatoes and anything else that was acidic. Chocolate was hard,” she laughed.

Lieghanne still has a protein deficiency and large tonsils, but with Shari’s support and encouragement, Kathy knows what to do now to address recurring health issues.

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“It took us awhile to figure out what was causing her acid reflux, but it turns out she’s not able to drink anything with dairy. Once we figured out some of the triggers, Shari taught me about what other foods have the vitamins and nutrients my daughter needed to be healthy that we could give her instead.”

“You basically become good friends with your nurse, since you see them every couple of weeks,” said Kathy, thinking of the months after giving birth. “It was nice because she’d come and hang out and see how I was interacting with Lieghanne, then make suggestions and comments based on what she was seeing. I wish the program was longer than two years!”

Kathy also reflected on Shari’s critical role in helping her to understand instructions from her doctor. “I can look up the medical notes online for my doctor’s office, but I didn’t always understand what they meant. I’d ask Shari to look at them and she’d go through and explain to me in plain English what the notes meant and she’d help me with figuring out the right questions to ask when I went back to the doctor for follow up appointments.”

Now a proud graduate of the program, Kathy works for the YMCA as a bus driver. “Truck driving didn’t have flexible enough hours for having a small infant, so school bus driving seemed like a better fit,” she observed. It also allows her time to pursue her passions.

One of those passions? Promoting the Nurse-Family Partnership program. Kathy recently flew to the California State Capitol for Education Day with her daughter to share with legislators how Nurse-Family Partnership improves outcomes for moms and babies.



When challenges occurred in the beginning of motherhood, nurse Shari was able to help Kathy (shown left) improve her daughter’s (shown right) health and development.