

MOM KAYLA & GOAL MAMA

As a U.S. Navy corpsman, Kayla worked in the labor and delivery section of a hospital, watching as new mothers wrapped their arms around their newborn babies and beamed with joy.

Then at 20, after she had separated from the Navy, Kayla got pregnant and she knew she needed help.

“Nothing prepares you for having your own baby,” she said.

Kayla, who struggled to manage depression and anxiety-induced seizures, became aware of Nurse-Family Partnership® (NFP) at Gift of Life when she enrolled in WIC, the supplemental nutrition program for women, infants and children in Montgomery, Ala.

Through the program she met Kathy, her nurse, who began visiting her at her home where she lived with her mom and stepdad, and their relationship was strong from the start.

“Me and nurse Kathy communicate with each other about just about everything,” Kayla said.

“We talked about a lot of things when I was pregnant. She educated me about taking folic acid and iron, how that would help the baby with its development,” she said. “She prepared me for labor and taught me about the signs of early labor.”

At the same time, Kathy helped Kayla work with her doctors to adjust her medications and develop techniques to manage her anxiety.

Her daughter, Sidney, was born a month early. Kayla’s doctors induced labor after she had fallen on her belly during a seizure. “She was in the NICU for a couple of days for breathing problems,” Kayla said, but at nearly 2 years old, she’s a healthy thriving toddler.

“She really makes me happy,” Kayla said. “Before she was born, I was really a depressed person, but she gave me a purpose. She gave me a reason to get up in the morning.”

Kathy has helped Kayla find a group for people with anxiety disorders, which has helped her realize how common anxiety is and how to find ways to cope with it. “I know it’s not something I can get rid of. I just have to manage it day by day,” she said.

Kathy also has taught Kayla about child development and how to deal with the challenges of rearing a small, demanding human being. And often her advice is different from that her mom would give.

“There were a few things my mom thought were funny,” Kayla said, like Kathy’s advice on when to introduce baby food in her diet and dealing with thumb-sucking.

But Kayla’s mom has been won over.

“”” SHE’S AN AMAZING MOM. SIDNEY IS SO SMART AND IT’S APPARENT HOW MUCH THEY’VE BONDED. I FEEL HONORED TO BE IN HER LIFE. -NURSE KATHY



Kathy (right) has taught Kayla (left) about her daughter Sidney’s (center) health and development.



Nurse Kathy (right) supports Kayla in setting her personal goals on the Goal Mama app.

“This partnership has been amazing,” said Wendy, her mom. “At first, when Kayla said she had a nurse coming over, I said, ‘Kayla, I have four kids. I think I know about this stuff.’ But after about a month, I looked forward to nurse Kathy’s visits. I would come home from work and say, ‘What did nurse Kathy say today?’ It’s been a beautiful relationship.”

Kayla also has been involved in a trial of a new tool, the Goal Mama app, available exclusively to NFP moms.

Goal Mama helps Kayla set personal goals. It also helps her set a timeline for achieving them, sends her reminder notifications for appointments and activities, and helps her track her progress.

As part of the process, nurse Kathy asked Kayla to write a list of her personal strengths so, as she struggled to meet her goals, she could look back and realize how strong she is.

Her list included that she is a good thinker and planner; that she is aware of what’s happening all around her; she’s a realist who sees things as they are; she is a good mom who is attentive to her surroundings and to Sidney; she is caring, loving and a very good listener; and she is strong.

During her home visits and through the Goal Mama app, Kathy would remind Kayla of these attributes whenever she would become discouraged.

One of Kayla’s goals was to join a support group to manage her anxiety. Another was to enroll in a training program for a career in medical billing and another was to find a good day care program for Sidney to help with her social development. She has achieved all of them.

Kathy communicates regularly with Kayla via Goal Mama, sending her encouraging notes and reminding her that she stands ready to help.

“Nurse Kathy sends me uplifting messages and it really means a lot,” Kayla said.

“I’ve seen so much growth in Kayla,” Kathy said. “She’s very eager to learn about herself and to learn ways to cope with her anxiety.”

The app also provides a platform for Kayla to communicate with NFP moms across the U.S. Moms can ask each other for parenting advice, so they don’t second-guess themselves when they are unsure what to do when their child is teething, for example. The app also has guides on what to expect with each stage of the child’s development.

“It’s been really helpful,” Kayla said. “It’s very easy and it has sections for the mom, the nurse and the child. I have the app on my phone.”

“She’s an amazing mom,” Kathy said. “Sidney is so smart and it’s apparent how much they’ve bonded. I feel honored to be in her life.”

Unlike many young moms, Kayla has had strong family support, but in addition to that her relationship with Kathy has been vitally important to her success as a new mother.

“Sometimes our children need an outside person, a third party, to show them things,” Wendy said. “There was so much excitement in Kayla when she would read the books from nurse Kathy, do her homework, make her lists and everything. I started to get excited myself. It’s good to have someone to lean on and uplift you.”

“Even though Kayla has a lot of family support, it’s nothing like nurse Kathy’s support,” Wendy said. “I’m going to be really sad when Kayla exits the program.”