

MOM LA'QUANA

By almost any measure, 19-year-old La'Quana is remarkable.

She was barely 16 when her son, Marques, was born and since her pregnancy went undiagnosed for months, she had little time to get used to the idea of motherhood. She was using birth control and, always slender and petite, had gained little weight. So, she was stunned when she went to her doctor to renew her Depo Provera prescription and learned that she was five-and-one-half months pregnant.

"They did a sonogram and saw a baby in there, almost fully developed, and I was like, 'What?' " La'Quana said.

She enrolled in Nurse-Family Partnership® through REACHUP, Inc and the Healthy Start Coalition of Hillsborough County, Fla., and immediately began meeting with her nurse after school to learn as much as she could before the baby arrived.

"She was very mature about everything," said her Nurse-Family Partnership nurse, Polita. "She was attentive to him day and night and took great care of him. I know she was exhausted and, since she lived with her mom and her sisters, she could have let others help, but she said, 'He's my baby and I'm going to tend to him.' "



NFP nurse Polita (left) helped La'Quana (right) become a confident mom to her son (center).

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After a five-week maternity leave, La'Quana returned to school, completed several AP classes and graduated on time.

"This was really important to her," Polita said. "At that age, a lot of people don't have their heads on their shoulders, but she earned A's and B's through all of this. I admire her. She didn't want to be one of the statistics."

La'Quana said her relationship with Polita was crucial to her ability to handle motherhood, work and high school all at the same time.

"She gave me the kind of support that a lot of kids my age need and don't have," she said. "I needed a lot of help with time management in the beginning and she was there for me."

"She was not only my nurse, she was everything."

La'Quana said that she and Polita discussed pregnancy, childbirth, caring for a new baby and the rest of her life.

"I didn't know anything about pregnancy and she taught me so much," she said. "We talked about home births, hospitals, contractions and when to ask for an epidural. I had all the information I needed so that I knew what was going on with my body and, later, with my child. It was really amazing to me. She is one of the main people in my life."

When La'Quana was in the hospital, she met another influential nurse who cared for her during labor and delivery. She told her that she had given birth to a child when she was 16, too.

"She told me that she had made a great life for herself and her kids and that, because she was so young, she felt she could relate to them better," La'Quana said.

It reassured La'Quana and played a big part in her decision to study to be a nurse.

"If I didn't have the nurses I had at that time, I wouldn't be doing so good right now," she said. "I had wanted to be a science major, to study chemistry, but I know I'm more of a caring, helping person. I know I can be a great labor and delivery nurse."

She plans to enroll at the University of South Florida in Tampa and begin her studies in the spring.

In the meantime, La'Quana is working as a maid for a cleaning service and making plans to open a clothing boutique – as always setting goals and working to achieve them.

"La'Quana is really remarkable in that she is an amazing saver," Polita said. "She has a container that she puts money in and she's very good at not touching it."



La'Quana shares that her son Marques (right) is so joyful and playful.



La'Quana (right) says that her nurse Polita (left) has been very influential in her decision to become a nurse.

"When she told me about her savings, that blew my mind. I told her, 'You're doing better than me.' "

La'Quana laughs at the story. She said she actually has two containers – one for savings for Marques and one for her. At the end of the year, she expects to have around \$3,000.

At this point, she is comfortable being a mom and obviously proud of Marques.

"He's so joyful and playful," she said. "He wakes up with so much excitement every day. He's sweet and helpful and tries to hug people – total strangers – whenever he meets them."

She is close to her mother, who has been enormously supportive. But La'Quana said her relationship with nurse Polita gave her access to a caring, skilled professional who could anticipate her needs and give her solid advice.

"She was not only my nurse, she was my friend. I talked to her everyday about everything," she said.

"My two-plus years with her were the best years of my life."