

Meagan was the new girl. She moved to Macon, Ga., to live with her father halfway through her junior year in 2019. She had to learn a new routine, make friends and navigate a new school's unwritten social rules. The adjustment was made more difficult when she became pregnant, finding out on the first day of her senior year.

Scared, uncertain and nervous about what her family would say, Meagan wasn't sure what to do. "I had no clue what I was doing," explains Meagan. "I needed all the help I could get."

She first visited her primary care physician, who connected her with the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). It was at the local WIC office that a representative referred her to what she would later call her "beacon of hope," Nurse-Family Partnership® (NFP) at the Houston County Health Department.

Shortly after, Meagan was paired with Rachael, an NFP nurse with a passion for women's health and helping people. Rachael knew from the moment they met that Meagan needed a strong support system and vowed to be that for her.



At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Meagan (left) gave birth to Preslee (right).

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"High school kids are very opinionated, and I was still the new girl," Meagan says. "My family took my pregnancy really hard, but nurse Rachael was there every single step of the way. She was just always there."

The Pregnancy

The next few months would prove tough for Meagan. With only her father in town, who was not completely supportive, Meagan felt ostracized and alone. She was also due to give birth at the beginning of the pandemic, something that she and those around her knew little to nothing about. And to top it off, Meagan battled health challenges during her pregnancy.

"Meagan's pregnancy was difficult," says Rachael. "She was sick at the very beginning with symptoms that never let up."

Meagan was diagnosed with hyperemesis gravidarum, a severe form of morning sickness that left her with persistent nausea, dehydration and vomiting throughout her pregnancy. She was hospitalized nearly 30 times for IV rehydration, and five of those hospitalizations lasted more than a week.

Rachael worked closely with Meagan to help her through her illness. She provided guidance on when to visit the ER and helped Meagan understand the notes that doctors gave her.

Meagan also experienced preterm labor issues. Midway through her pregnancy, Rachael discussed breastfeeding with Meagan to prepare her for her baby's potential early debut.

Thankfully, that preparation was for naught. Preslee was born full-term at 42 weeks on April 2, 2020 — but Meagan and her daughter weren't out of the woods yet.

The NICU

The birth was not easy for Meagan, who experienced a long labor. When Preslee was born, it was clear to everyone in the room, including Meagan, that something was wrong.

“Preslee wasn't breathing. It took them about 10 minutes to get her to make any kind of noise,” Meagan recalls.

Preslee was rushed to the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU), where doctors found her oxygen level and white blood cell count low and her fever high. To make matters more difficult, COVID-19 infections were spreading, and the hospital limited all visitors as a precaution. Meagan could visit Preslee for only a few hours each day.

“Everything was on lockdown. I could visit between noon and 3:00 in the afternoon every day, but that was it. I would bring Preslee milk every night, but I couldn't go inside to see her outside of visiting hours. It was awful,” says Meagan.

Through it all, Rachael supported Meagan and helped her through this harrowing time. “I would help her understand the reports given to her,” Rachael says. “I helped her ask the right questions and interpret what the doctors and nurses told her.”

After one of the longest weeks of Meagan's life, Preslee's white blood cell count and oxygen level improved and her fever broke. She was finally discharged after 10 days in the NICU.



Meagan graduated high school and is currently in college to become a nurse.

Growing Stronger

Preslee settled in after her scary start and is now a healthy 11-month-old whose favorite activities are blowing kisses and waving to people. Meagan is incredibly grateful for the support NFP gave her.

Besides Preslee's giggle, one other constant in Meagan's life is Rachael. “Rachael was always there when I needed her, and that's what helped the most — having that one person there without judgement,” Meagan says.

“I'm her biggest cheerleader,” Rachael says. “Meagan's been so motivated. She never stops trying.”

While Meagan's sickness made it difficult for her to continue going to school in-person while pregnant, Rachael encouraged her to transition to virtual learning. Now, Meagan is a proud high school graduate ready to take on the world. In fact, Meagan currently works as a temporary employee at the local health department assisting the department's COVID-19 response right alongside Rachael. She's also taking classes at a local college.

Her major? Nursing.