

MOM TAQUANA

To listen to boisterous Zy'Aire, you'd never guess he started his life as a delicate low-birthweight baby. Now 2 years old, he's full of energy, chattering endlessly and pretending to read books to Taquana, his mom.

"He's something special," she said. "He always brightens up the room wherever he is."

Taquana, who sought help from Nurse-Family Partnership in Charleston, S.C. in 2019 when she was 25 weeks pregnant, said her nurse, Kenyetta, has become a close friend.

"She was just teeny," Kenyetta said, "maybe 105 pounds before she was pregnant."

As the pregnancy progressed, her doctors worried because she was not gaining weight.

"I had no appetite," Taquana said. "People kept telling me I was so lucky to be small, but I was worried because the doctors said my baby was too small."

Toward the end of the pregnancy, she was seeing doctors every week to monitor the baby's growth.



Now 2 years old, Zy'Aire (right) loves to go to the park and read books with his mom, Taquana (left).

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She was given a meal plan and encouraged to drink nutritional supplements to try to increase her calorie intake as much as possible.

"My nurse was there for me every step of the way," Taquana said. "I have friends and stuff, but she was more to me than a friend. I could text her when I was feeling down, and she was always there."

Kenyetta would encourage her to stick with the meal plan and talked to her about what and when she was eating to monitor the situation remotely since COVID precautions made in-person visits impossible. They also talked a lot about breastfeeding and what to expect in labor and delivery.

"After every doctor appointment, I would update her on everything by phone and she kept records of all the information," Taquana said. "Even through Covid, she didn't miss a beat."

At 37 weeks, the doctors, concerned about the baby's slow growth rate, decided to induce labor and Taquana insisted on natural childbirth.

"She believed she could do it naturally and she did it," Kenyetta said. "I told her, 'You're such a super woman.' It was one of her goals and she achieved it."

Taquana's twin sister accompanied her in the hospital and helped keep her as comfortable as possible through her labor.

"It was definitely an experience, but not as bad as I thought it would be," Taquana said. "I really was shocked at how fast it happened."

Zy'Aire weighed four pounds, 15 ounces and Taquana was only allowed to hold him for a very short time before he was whisked away to the neonatal intensive care unit.

He only had to stay there two days, though, and Taquana visited often to breastfeed him and hold him skin-to-skin.

She continued to breastfeed him for 18 months, reads to him regularly and takes him to the park to play with friends nearly every day.

Despite often conflicting advice from well-meaning friends, Taquana was determined to care for Zy'Aire her own way. She engaged with Kenyetta on child development topics and studied all the materials she provided.

"I was a teen mom myself," Kenyetta said, "and working with Taquana made me aware of how important our work is. It showed me the importance of mental health and how much that affects our lot in life."

Kenyetta said when she learned about Nurse-Family Partnership, "I felt I had to do it." She has been with NFP, now at the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston, for three years.

Of Taquana, she said, "It's a rocky road she's been on, and she's given me the opportunity to partner with her through it all. It has motivated me to go back to school and specialize in mental health in my nursing practice to help fill the gaps that exist across different cultures."

Taquana and Zy'Aire graduated from the Nurse-Family Partnership program in May, which was bittersweet for everyone.



Taquana (right) and her son, Zy'Aire (middle), recently celebrated their Nurse-Family Partnership graduation with their nurse Kenyetta (left).

"We have definitely become close," Kenyetta said. "She trusts me and confides in me, so there is sadness for both of us."

Being in Nurse-Family Partnership "definitely changed me a lot," Taquana said.

"When I got pregnant, I was very on edge. I didn't know what to do, where to go with this pregnancy. It was a very challenging moment for me to figure out exactly what the right choice was. I was all worried about considering other people's feelings.

"But getting to talk to Kenyetta – I could tell her anything. She was always there, always willing to answer the phone for me, always helping me find programs that would help me."

Taquana, who is 26 and lives in Summerville, S.C., is working to build her clientele as a hair stylist and hopes someday to have a salon of her own.

"Zy'Aire and me are our own little family now," she said. "He's something special."