

JONEL'S STORY

Jonel and her husband, Sawyer, learned they were expecting their first baby in June 2021 while living abroad in Vietnam. “At this time, the COVID-19 pandemic put Vietnam in full lockdown and we weren’t allowed to leave our apartment,” Jonel remembers. “I experienced previous miscarriages and knew I needed regular prenatal care including progesterone to support my new pregnancy,” she added. What happened next was a series of challenges that most first-time parents wouldn’t expect.

Jonel said, “I was 12 weeks pregnant when we traveled back to the U.S. and landed in California to temporarily live with my parents.” The couple moved back so quickly, they hadn’t yet found jobs and were uninsured. It had been four weeks since Jonel’s last health check in Vietnam. “We immediately visited a local crisis center to check the baby’s heartbeat and fetal movement. I was so relieved when we finally saw there was a tiny little human in there!” Jonel exclaimed.

Next, nurse Regina from Riverside Health Department Nurse-Family Partnership contacted



Jonel and her husband, Sawyer, welcomed their son, Andrew, in the midst of the COVID pandemic.

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Jonel. “Regina is the one who helped us get off on the right foot. I could tell that she truly cared about me and my health,” Jonel said.

Jonel gave birth at 41 weeks of pregnancy to baby Andrew on March 11, 2022 after an emergency C-section. “His heart rate kept dropping and we couldn’t risk it,” remembers Jonel. Andrew weighed 7 pounds and 3 ounces at birth and began bonding with Jonel through breastfeeding.

One week after Andrew was born, Jonel’s husband moved from California to South Carolina for a new job. Jonel stayed with her parents in California for four weeks to recover from her C-section before joining her husband.

It was during this time that Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) nurse Regina assessed that Andrew was not gaining weight as recommended. Jonel said, “Looking back, Andrew was seen by so many medical professionals, and none of them mentioned concern about his slow weight gain. If Regina hadn’t visited Andrew and noticed his weight and dehydration, I don’t know what would have happened.”

Because she wanted NFP to continue monitoring Andrew’s weight after Jonel’s move from California to South Carolina, nurse Regina transferred Jonel to Spartanburg Regional Healthcare System Nurse-Family Partnership. Spartanburg nurse Kimberly received Jonel’s file on a Thursday and met with her the following Monday.



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-NURSE KIMBERLY

Nurse Kimberly said, "When I first met Jonel, I noticed how frail Andrew looked. I weighed him and he was 6 pounds and 6 ounces. I immediately called their pediatrician and asked them to see Andrew that day, which they couldn't accommodate. In my nursing judgement, I knew he could not wait another day to be seen." Nurse Kimberly recommended that Jonel take 6-week-old Andrew to the emergency department to be assessed as to why he wasn't gaining weight.

"I trusted her completely. She is a mom herself and a medical professional. I was already concerned about Andrew's weight, so I was going to do anything she recommended for his health," Jonel said. Andrew was admitted to the hospital for five days for "failure to thrive."

They discovered that Andrew had a tongue-tie, lip-tie and cheek-tie which made it difficult to stimulate an increased supply of breastmilk from Jonel while nursing. Jonel said, "I thought I was doing everything right, but I had never nursed a baby before - I didn't know my milk supply had suddenly dropped."

Jonel began supplementing nursing with formula and bottles of donor breastmilk. "I never thought about formula feeding my baby - that wasn't what I envisioned," she said.

Kimberly said, "After they were discharged, I specifically scheduled visits during alternating weeks with their pediatrician appointments so they wouldn't go too many days without a weight check."



When Andrew wasn't gaining weight quickly enough after birth, Jonel supplemented nursing with formula and donor milk.

Andrew now is four-months-old and recently underwent a frenectomy, which is an oral surgery procedure to treat his tongue-tie, lip-tie and cheek-tie. He can nurse easier and is gaining weight with the formula and donor milk supplementation.

"Jonel has so much determination and perseverance and is doing everything possible for Andrew to gain weight. I encouraged her breastfeeding goals - that's what we do at NFP - we encourage each mother's heart's desire and point out their strengths," Kimberly said.

Jonel said, "Kimberly has been persistent about meeting with us. Since we are new to South Carolina, it has been so nice having her here to help connect me to resources and to care for our well-being. Both Regina and Kimberly have made the transition to motherhood a lot easier."

As for her future, Jonel added, "I would like to get back to exclusively breastfeeding Andrew - I am not giving up!"