

OKLAHOMA NURSES KRISTY AND CATHERINE CELEBRATE 25 YEARS OF NFP IN THE STATE

Oklahoma families are celebrating October 2022 as it marks the 25th anniversary of Nurse-Family Partnership® in the state. Oklahoma's Nurse-Family Partnership – also known as Children First – was implemented in 1997. Children First is delivered across much of the state through the health department system and is administered by the Oklahoma State Department of Health. Nurse-Family Partnership has served 49,035 families in Oklahoma over the last 25 years.

Long-time Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) nurses Kristy and Catherine have each served more than 20 years as home visitors through Tulsa Health Department. “I became an NFP nurse during the second year of implementation, in 1998,” remembered Kristy. “I graduated from nursing school and worked in an emergency department for a few years before joining NFP. Almost 24 years later and I’m still here!” she continued.



Kristy became an NFP nurse in 1998 during the second year of pilot implementation in Oklahoma.

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NFP NURSE KRISTY

Catherine began working as an NFP nurse in 2001. “I’m originally from Jamaica and was a nurse in England before my husband accepted a job offer and we landed in Tulsa,” she said. “To me, public health is about supporting prevention. What better place to start than the very beginning? Nurturing a baby’s life from the beginning sets them on a positive trajectory. This is why I love the Nurse-Family Partnership model,” Catherine explained.

Being an NFP nurse certainly has evolved over the years for Kristy and Catherine. Kristy recalls, “Back in 1998, we obviously didn’t have cell phones – we would receive referrals from the fax machine. We would cold call expectant mothers from our desk phones in the morning and provide our pager number. Then, when they paged us, we would pull over and find a payphone to call them back,” she said.

In addition, Kristy said, “I had a paper map of Tulsa that I kept folded up in my glove box and I would search it for mother’s addresses. It was pioneer compared to how we manage now! I can remember our first Nokia cell phone – we were in hog heaven!”

While many processes as an NFP nurse have grown since 1997, some of the difficulties that first-time moms experience in Oklahoma have remained the same.



NURTURING A BABY'S LIFE FROM THE BEGINNING SETS THEM ON A POSITIVE TRAJECTORY. THIS IS WHY I LOVE THE NURSE-FAMILY PARTNERSHIP MODEL.

NFP NURSE CATHERINE

“One of the biggest challenges I have seen our moms face over the years is their mental health,” Catherine said. “I make an effort to build a relationship with the individuals who have mental health issues to give them a chance for supportive parenting. I have also found that working with the family has been as equally important as working with just the mom.”

Kristy agrees with Catherine that mental health is a top priority for first-time moms in Oklahoma. “Mental health is more of an issue than physical health for most moms I visit,” Kristy said. “There is not a lot of mental health resources available right now – especially if the family no longer has Medicaid. The majority of my families don't have money to pay for a therapist. And even if they did, the waiting list is months long.”

Tulsa Health Department's NFP program continues to evolve to serve their local families. In recent years, the Burmese population in the area has increased. To meet the need and accommodate their culture, the Tulsa Health Department hired an interpreter. “Half of my caseload is of the Burmese culture and Tulsa has a large Zomi-speaking population. We book home visits in advance so that our interpreter can come along. That piece has been really valuable for us,” said Catherine.

Kristy and Catherine now have been NFP nurses for long enough that they are beginning to experience multi-generations in the NFP program. In fact, Kristy was an NFP nurse to a mother and daughter – 20 years apart.

Kristy recalled, “I met a pregnant first-time mom who was 20 years old. I asked her to write down her name and number, I looked at it and thought, ‘I know this name!’ I asked her what her mom's name is and she told me. I said, ‘You were one of my babies 20 years ago!’ I enrolled her and even got to see her mom a few times at home visits.”

While Kristy and Catherine have seen many changes over the past 20 years, the model and mission of Nurse-Family Partnership has been constant. Catherine said, “I enjoy encouraging each mom to read a book to the baby and talk to them face-to-face – interacting with the baby is so important.” Catherine is planning to retire this year, after nearly 21 years of service to NFP.

Kristy said, “I love seeing the baby from the belly all the way to two years old and becoming a little person. The resources we offer to some families can be a game-changer. I see the changes moms make for themselves, and that's the whole goal of NFP – to encourage them to make small changes that ultimately benefit them and their family.”



Catherine began working as an NFP nurse in 2001 and is planning to retire this year.