

We Are Public Health

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We are
public health.

We improve health for at-risk children.

Children born to low-income, first-time mothers are at higher risk for poor health outcomes. The Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) connects these mothers to public health nurses who offer education and support so children can have a healthy start in life. Jefferson County Public Health in northwestern Washington State has offered NFP since 1999.

Photo courtesy of Nurse-Family Partnership.

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Children born to low-income, first-time mothers are at higher risk for poor health outcomes. In response, many health departments across the United States offer programs to support at-risk families. One such program is the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP). NFP is an evidence-based program that is based on over 30 years of research from randomized, controlled trials. This research shows that NFP consistently improves pregnancy outcomes and child health.

At the heart of NFP is a powerful collaboration between a public health nurse and a first-time expectant mother. By making regular home visits, the nurse provides information and support so that the mother has the tools she needs for a healthy pregnancy. Home visits continue after birth until the child turns two years old.

NFP currently serves over 22,000 clients across 41 states. Currently, there are 11 agencies that offer NFP in Washington State. NFP first began in Washington in 1999 when a group of four county health districts formed a consortium to implement the program. Quen Zorrah, PHN, currently serving as NFP State Nurse Consultant for Washington State, was working for Jefferson County Public Health at the time. "In 1999, we saw we had a higher-than-state average of child abuse and neglect in Jefferson County. We chose NFP because we wanted to have some confidence that there would be both long- and short-term changes."

Three years ago, Zorrah and others in Jefferson County wanted to enhance their existing NFP with a short questionnaire that was created from exciting new research. This research was conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in collaboration with Kaiser Permanente's Health Appraisal Clinic in San Diego, California. Called the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study, this research suggested a strong correlation between specific adverse childhood experiences and health outcomes.

The short questionnaire from the ACE Study that Jefferson County Public Health is using quickly accesses the number of adverse childhood events a person has experienced. The higher the score, the more likely the individual will suffer from chronic disease and a number of other health challenges.

Because NFP is designed to help families reduce or prevent adverse childhood events, use of this questionnaire was a natural fit with the Jefferson County Public Health's NFP. Zorrah says, "We thought that this information would help motivate our clients to make changes in their health behavior. Because parents have such potential to reduce lifetime chronic disease for their children, we felt we had a responsibility to share this information."

Another NFP enhancement Jefferson County Public Health is using takes a completely different approach. Jean Baldwin, MSN, ARNP, Jefferson County Public Health Director, is working to make Jefferson County Public Health a "hub" for NFP programs in northwestern Washington. To this end, Jefferson County Public Health currently supervises NFP nurses who are working in the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe. Plans to supervise visiting nurses in neighboring Kitsap County are underway. This leveraging of resources across counties and tribal health districts allows the spread of services in resource-constrained times. Baldwin says, "How do you keep expertise if you are a small department? You share it. When we take a regional approach, it allows us to share funding and expertise. While we do face challenges with this, we also know we are on the right track."

View NFP outcomes data from Washington State.

The Washington State Institute for Public Policy has listed NFP as a good public investment. Learn more.