



Spotlight on CFS

A Newsletter from VNSNY's Children and Family Services

Bronx Men Embrace the True Meaning of Fatherhood

More children are growing up fatherless today than at any other point in American history. The many negative effects of the absentee father phenomenon are well documented. Among African-American children, 50% grow up without a father.

That's where David Jones, CSW, Director of Family Support Services at VNSNY, stepped in. "I observed the way low-income young men, predominantly African-American and Hispanic, were being portrayed in the media as not wanting to care for their children, and I didn't like it. I've found that they do want to be involved, but they don't know how because they were raised without male role models. I knew that without guidance, the cycle would continue. I felt called to do



Jazzwal Stuart and Haide Garcia learn the importance of nurturing a child.

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VNSNY Programs Join Forces In Support of New Mothers

The clients served by VNSNY's Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) program are young, underserved, low-income women living in an urban setting. Statistics show that these facts alone place them at a higher risk for depression than the general population. When pregnancy is added to the mix, the risks increase exponentially. Mary Joan Murphy, RN, NFP observed clients suffering from a variety of mental health issues. "The population we serve has a higher rate of depression to begin with, and that puts them at greater risk for postpartum depression," Mary Joan — who goes by MJ — explains.

Jessica Fear, LMFT, FRIENDS Program Director, Community Mental Health Services, at the Visiting



MJ Murphy, RN, with the daughter of an NFP client.

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Dear Friend,



Anne Ehrenkranz



Judy Farrell

It is with great pleasure that we celebrate the first anniversary of the Children and Family Services (CFS) newsletter. We have had a year full of activity and accomplishment as we expanded the Nurse-Family Partnership program to the Lower East Side of Manhattan; launched The Bronx Fatherhood Program; and were awarded Early Intervention contracts to continue serving The Bronx and Manhattan regions. In addition, we are investing in the development of initiatives to meet the needs of those children and families faced with the diagnosis of diabetes, who will need help managing their disease and children with life-threatening/life-limiting illnesses, whose families would like to provide them with palliative care services at home.

All of our programs and initiatives would not be possible without friends like you. We want to take this opportunity to thank all of the many supporters who make the work of Children and Family Services possible. The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, which funds the Nurse-Family Partnership, Early Intervention program and Fathers First Initiative in Rockaway; the Department of Youth and Community Development, which funds the Bronx Fatherhood Program; the Administration for Children's Services, which funds the Community Care for Children program, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which provides a grant that supports our Early Head Start program in Rockaway, Queens. We also are fortunate to have received support this past year from the Robin Hood Foundation, Tiger Foundation, Bloomberg Foundation, Carnegie Corporation, Marks Foundation, Charles A. Frueauff Foundation and Simpson Trust. Moreover, just a few weeks ago, Children and Family Services received a New York Yankees All-Star Game Legacy Grant check in the amount of \$25,000!

In this issue, we will focus on the Bronx Fatherhood Program, which has already enrolled 70 fathers who are interested in becoming more involved in their children's lives. We also are pleased to share with you an article on the mental health supports VNSNY provides to the NFP program, an enhancement made possible through the generous support of the Marks Foundation. In addition, we highlight a recent event hosted by a supporter of the Nurse-Family Partnership program, who recently wrote to us, "I love this program (NFP) and congratulate you and your staff for working so hard to bring it to so many at risk young mothers." We also heard recently from a family whose children aged out of our Early Intervention program and they wrote, "I was reflecting back on what a wonderful experience both of my children had with the program. Thank you for the great services—I know my children will miss the wonderful VNSNY therapists and I will miss our service coordinator."

Finally, we are very pleased to report that several of our NFP moms have been awarded scholarships to continue their education. We recently heard from Mrs. Tako Traore, a Bronx NFP mom, who has been awarded a Heart's Desire Scholarship funded by the Starr Foundation. Ms. Traore wrote, "I have dreamed of becoming a medical doctor since I was young and now that I have been named as one of the recipients of this scholarship, my dream is becoming a reality. I wish to thank the Nurse-Family Partnership program and the nurses, Clarissa Davis-Igle and Paula Reynolds-Chambers, who have worked with me. I am truly indebted to all of you and will strive to make you all proud."

We are proud of our front-line staff and the children and families they serve, who are highlighted in an article on our Parents Day Luncheon. Thank you for helping the Visiting Nurse Service of New York to continue to provide high quality care to the most vulnerable families in New York.

Sincerely,



Anne Ehrenkranz, Chair
Children and Family Services Advisory



Judy Farrell, MPA, Administrator
Children and Family Services
Visiting Nurse Service of New York

Children and Family Services Parents' Day Luncheon



Clarissa Davis-Igle, NFP Nurse Manager, with her NFP client.

Back on Tuesday, May 13, the Visiting Nurse Service of New York Children and Family Services (CFS) honored and celebrated the parents of its programs with the 2nd Annual Parents' Day Luncheon. The event, hosted and emceed by our own President and Chief Executive Officer Carol Raphael, was attended by CFS parents, VNSNY Board members, VNSNY staff and many of our individual and foundation contributors. One Board member, Gwendolyn Adams Norton, welcomed our guests and Ms. Raphael then introduced parents and staff from the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP), Early Intervention (EI) and the Bronx Fatherhood Program (BFP). Each parent provided a testimonial on how CFS had improved their lives and made it possible for them to become better parents. One young father from BFP said, "The program not only helps me communicate better with the mother of my own child, but has helped me understand and communicate with my mom. I feel like I have the chance to be the father to my son that I never had as a child." It was a wonderful afternoon filled with good food, good cheer and hope.



Bronx Fatherhood client William Hernandez

Bronx Fatherhood Program

Bronx Men Embrace the True Meaning of Fatherhood

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this work." Fatherhood can be a daunting prospect under the best of circumstances. When the would-be father is young, low-income, and grew up without a father himself, the realities and responsibilities of fatherhood are magnified. Until about ten years ago, the services available to this vulnerable population were severely lacking.

In 1997, Jones founded the successful Fathers First Initiative (FFI), a division of VNSNY's Early Head Start Program, in Rockaway, Queens. Observing the success of the FFI, VNSNY sought support from the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (NYC DYCD) to continue its innovative work with fathers in the Bronx, one of the most underserved communities in New York State. Awarded a three-year \$195,000 annual grant by the NYC DYCD, VNSNY Children and Family Services (CFS) launched the Bronx Fatherhood Program (BFP) in September 2007 with Jones at the helm.

The group, comprised of men aged 16 to 24 in various stages of fatherhood, meets twice a week to learn, share, commiserate, and offer each other support and advice. Before they join the group however, each client has an individual intake meeting where their personal issues and needs are assessed. The BFP functions, if not as a one-stop shop for the various needs of its clients, then as a hub where clients can find information about employment, medical, and legal services. Parenting classes ensure that the men can confidently navigate the mechanics of fatherhood—the diapers, bathing, feeding, etc.—but Jones makes sure to stress that, "You cannot parent effectively until you deal with your own paternal past, and maternal past." This focus on the past, and the importance of dealing with it, is new territory for most of these men, who aren't generally accustomed to talking about their feelings.



David Jones



Director of Family Support Services David Jones, center, with Demetrius Ortiz and his daughter.

A Father is Born

Watching Demetrius Ortiz, 21, with his beautiful 17-month-old Abigail, it's impossible to miss the depth of the love he feels for his child. As one of BFP's first clients, Demetrius heard about the group from his then-girlfriend, who was a client of VNSNY's Nurse-Family Partnership. Though skeptical at first, Demetrius agreed to meet with Francisco Torres, an outreach worker for BFP, where they "talked about personal stuff and got to know each other." Though he admits to not really liking the first few parenting classes, "I had a change of heart." Demetrius explains, "I was like, wow, there's a lot of guys like me here. There were other fathers like me."

Though Demetrius and Abigail's mother are no longer together, both parents are committed to raising their child together. "We may have our differences, but we don't let our personal life get in the way of us being parents," Demetrius explains about their successful co-parenting strategy. "We've both been through a lot. I was raised by my grandparents. She [Abigail's mother] was raised in the court system, and even though we're young, we don't want our daughter to go through anything like that."

Through BFP, Demetrius recently got a good job working security, and spends his days off with his daughter. Demetrius has no plans to leave BFP anytime soon. "I told David [Jones], listen, you're gonna have to throw me out, call the cops, or hire me." When asked if he views himself as a mentor or leader, Demetrius modestly says, "I don't feel like I'm a leader, I'll just give you advice to the best of my ability."

"Demetrius is amazing," says David Jones. "He is someone who is open and excited about learning new things every day. One of the first groups he was at, he looked around and said, I want this room filled with fathers!"

Demetrius may not see himself as a leader, but to young men like William Hernandez, who are just starting the difficult journey, that's exactly what he is.

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Nurse-Family Partnership

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NFP Nurse Lucy Lago

Nurse Service of New York deeply understands this population, and sees a natural intersect between the work of the NFP and Community Mental Health Services. "NFP reached out to community mental health services based on some of the challenges that the nurses were facing. They were seeing that the young moms were struggling in some areas that were connected to their children, but in other ways that were more about their own health and mental health. I think there were a lot of issues that the nurses didn't feel prepared to manage. A lot of depression, trauma histories, complicated psychological stressors and circumstances." She continues, "it makes sense for us to collaborate."

Lucy Lago, an NFP nurse, has experience working with clients suffering from mental health issues or illness. "I have three or four clients that are currently dealing with mental health issues," she says, "and it's been a real struggle trying to find the best fit for them."

The goal of the collaboration is to have a plan in place for NFP nurses when it comes to assessing a clients' mental state, and determining the most appropriate next steps. A new diagnostic tool was created by the National NFP office in Denver in collaboration with the Department of Health in NYC, which the nurses will use to screen all NFP clients. MJ explains, "The score gives us a gauge to determine if the client is depressed and if so how severe the depression is. Once we can have that measure we can apply treatment possibilities." NFP clients will be screened more than once. "They'll be screened in their first few weeks in the program, and then again 6-8 weeks

after they've had their baby, which is when the postpartum depression seems to be the most prevalent," MJ continues.

Another challenge when working with this population is the stigma that is traditionally associated with mental health issues. This is a situation where a trusted NFP nurse can be highly effective in encouraging the client to seek the appropriate treatment. "We can't force clients to go to mental health services," MJ explains, "but what we can do is keep visiting them," keep talking about it, and kind of break down the stigma. And very often how we get through to clients is by explaining what they're experiencing here, the dynamic between us is exactly what counseling is. And we ask them, "how do you feel after you talked about your problems?" And most of the time they feel better."

Lucy expresses a common frustration felt throughout the healthcare industry, that even once a problem is identified, it can be incredibly difficult to find the appropriate services that clients are eligible for. Matching the client with the correct services is a huge part of this initiative. Some clients will be referred internally to the FRIENDS program for in-home crisis intervention services or for counseling through to the FRIENDS clinic, but many others require services not available through VNSNY. Jessica recalls a case where, "there was a lot going on for this girl, and we did an assessment and came to realize that her IQ was under 70, which is technically mental retardation. So, then we had to think about how to best serve a pregnant teenager with mental retardation and what that means. So we contacted YAI (Young Adult Institute, National Institute for People with Disabilities), and worked out a plan with the mom, step dad, and new mother of the baby to have some help in the home, so that when grandma isn't home, the new mother won't be alone with the baby."

Based on the immense need for mental health resources she's witnessed as an NFP nurse, Lucy has decided to pursue a Masters Degree in Psychiatric Nursing at Hunter College and says, "I hope to develop the skills and tools necessary to provide superior care to this often neglected population."

NFP nurses are taking part in several trainings designed to help them better understand, identify and respond to the various mental health issues their clients are facing. The collaboration between the Nurse-Family Partnership and Community Mental Health Services aims to provide a much-needed service to this traditionally underserved population.

Passionate About Parenting

When Joan Easton left a 20-year career in teaching to pursue her art (Joan holds Master's degrees in both education and art), she maintained her strong feelings about the critical role parenting plays in the future of a child. When she was teaching inner city kids, Joan found that there were, "four year olds who came to school angry and unhappy, and you know there's something wrong with that. Head Start is a great program, but for some children it's too late already. It is my belief that the first 3 years play a very crucial role in a child's development."

When Joan found herself on a brief hiatus from working in her art studio, she decided to once again focus her energy on the cause that has always been close to her heart, parenting. After spending countless hours scouring the Internet for programs that appealed to her, she discovered the Nurse-Family Partnership, which she had never heard of before, and something just clicked. "When I found out about this program, I just couldn't contain myself. I just felt excited. I thought, wow, this really has potential to change people's lives." Joan explains, "NFP stood out to me because I know what it's like to try and make a change. Whether it's yourself, or in a child or anyone, change is hard. And even if you want it, doesn't come easily." In Joan's eyes, the one-on-one attention that new mothers receive in the NFP program is vital to their success. "In my opinion," Joan says, "parenting is the most important job in the world, and there's no training for it. There's something wrong with that. NFP is trying to correct that." Joan continues, "it's mothering the mother, and how wonderful is that."

After learning about NFP online, Joan happened to read a supplement about nursing in the New York Times. One of the featured nurses was Carol Odnoba, head of the Nurse-Family Partnership. Though slightly apprehensive about the response she would receive, she called Carol and got an immediate response. That conversation with Carol solidified in Joan's mind that this was the program for her to be involved with. Joan was able to accompany MJ Murphy, RN, first supervisor in the South Bronx, on two site visits, where she was able to experience the program first hand. "Both children — one was 14 months, one was six weeks old — were calm. There was no screaming and crying. I could tell that these children were feeling loved and secure."

Joan felt so strongly about the importance of the Nurse-Family Partnership that she organized an NFP fundraiser/cocktail party



MJ Murphy, Joan Easton and ? at an NFP fundraiser/cocktail party at Joan Easton's apartment.

at her Upper East Side apartment, where she shared her enthusiasm with the group. "My husband Bob and I found this fabulous program that we love, that works, and that no one knows about. I just felt compelled to get out a message about this program. I've never done anything like this before, as most of you can attest to. I think that you will care as much as I do once you hear a little about it." She continues emphatically, "There is no other family program that's one on one and lasts more than two years. I love it. I support it. I hope you'll all love it and support as well."

Carol Odnoba and MJ Murphy were in attendance to speak about the program, and to answer any questions.

The clear stars of the evening were NFP client Shaira and her gorgeous daughter Haily, living, breathing examples of the profound effect that NFP can have on its clients. Shaira speaks beautifully, and the whole room was in tears as she

explained that Haily is, "calmer, quieter, and more content than other children," and that, "I know I am a better mother because of NFP." Shaira dropped out of school in 9th grade, but with MJ's guidance and encouragement, this past September, she began working towards an Associates degree in tourism, while holding down a full time job, and parenting her daughter.

VNSNY's Nurse-Family Partnership is extremely lucky to have Joan Easton fighting so hard to raise both awareness and funds in support of this program. The feeling is mutual. "I feel grateful that this program exists," says Joan, "one that I am so proud to be a part of. I love this program and I talk about it with whomever I meet."



Shaira with her daughter Haily

When William Hernandez, 17, heard the news that he was going to be a father, he was upset. "I had plans about what I wanted to do with my life," explains William, a recent high school graduate with plans to begin John Jay College of Criminal Justice this fall on a full scholarship. "I was scared," he says, both about becoming a father so young, and about how his mother would react. William went to his Pastor, who broke the news to his mother. After the initial shock wore off, William says that his mother went looking for "a program for young adults that are having a child, and have no idea what to do." They found BFP three months ago, and William has been attending the groups ever since. "I come every Tuesday and Thursday," William says, "there's always something new to learn, and there's always time to talk about your personal problems."

With the September due date looming, the situation with the baby's mother is difficult. After splitting up four months into the pregnancy, the relationship has been challenging, and William is unsure of what will happen once the baby is born. Despite this, William remains optimistic. "I'm the kind of person who always takes negatives and turns them into positives. Having a baby will make me work harder, and be more responsible, and excel in my studies and in my personal life."

William will spend the summer working, preparing for the baby's arrival, and of course attending BFP groups. "They teach you more than just parenting," he says, "they prepare you to take the necessary steps to be a better man."



Nurse-Family Partnership Mother Awarded Scholarship

Eiko Tatem, a mom in our Bronx Nurse-Family Partnership program, has been awarded a scholarship by the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and the Starr Foundation so she can further her education. NFP nurses Clarissa-Agle and Paula Reynolds-Chambers assisted Eiko through the application process.



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