

New program brings nurses to newborns

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Every year, 4,000 babies are born in Durham, and in order to help the new mothers, a new program has also been born.

Durham Connects, a program to provide free nurse visits to any Durham resident taking home a newborn, was launched in August by the Duke Center for Child and Family Policy and the Durham County Health Department, among other community groups.

Through the program, nurses visit a family once the newborn is about four weeks old to give a physical check-up, discuss issues related to being a new parent and deliver a gift basket stocked with diapers, a thermometer, a bath kit, a baby toothbrush and brochures. If families have further concerns, they can request up to three in-home nurse visits.

But Durham Connects is more than a nursing program. One of its main goals is not only to provide free in-home nurse visits but also to act as a connector for new mothers to community resources, such as Cribs for Kids of Durham for free used cribs or the Grandparent Network, a program Durham Connects created that pairs new mothers with older mentors.

"I hope that what we'll see is an improvement in childcare," Durham Mayor Bill Bell said. "Certainly we'll help mothers seek out

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help when they need it, which they might not have done in the past.”

Only a month after Durham Connects launched, 100 nurse visits have already been made. Seven nurses are currently employed, which is only enough to serve half of Durham County, but the goal is to have 20 nurses serving all of Durham by 2010, Durham Connects organizers said. Nurses are trained beforehand and employed full time.

Durham Connects furthers the Center for Child and Family Policy's objective to address important issues in the lives of children and families. The program—expected to cost \$2 million in expenses and salaries—will be funded by the Duke Endowment for 10 years, said Kenneth Dodge, director of the Center for Child and Family Policy.

“The current phase is implementation, to see whether the community can successfully bring the program to families with newborns,” he said. “Then, we will evaluate impact, to see whether the program has positive effects on families and their children. If we can successfully implement the program and it has positive effects, then we will work to sustain the program in Durham.”

Durham residents who have received nurse visits have praised the program's efforts to address the needs of newborn mothers, said Jeannine Sato, director of the Office of Community Resources for Durham Connects.

“The parents really like the nurses' one-on-one attention and the convenience of the home visit,” she said. “They also love the new parent welcome pack the nurse brings. It's full of goodies for mom and baby.”

Bell said Durham Connects is a great collaborative effort to improve the community's health.

“Stepping up to this effort says an awful lot about the University,” he said. “This is an opportunity for Durham to use its resources in a very positive way. We consider ourselves the ‘City of Medicine.’ We can make sure we're also the city of health and stay one step ahead in that direction.”

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