

# Durham program provides cribs for kids

**W**e all know that having a baby is expensive. And with prices soaring, the cost of diapers, formula, baby clothes and equipment is more than ever. Like all new parents, LaShauna Brandon was worried about providing all the things her new baby needed, especially a safe place to sleep. Today, three month old Ty'shon is sleeping in his new crib provided by Cribs for Kids of Durham. Cribs for Kids is a local affiliate of a National non-profit organization established to reduce Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) by providing a safe place for newborns to sleep. Science shows that children exposed to toxic stress like that found in tough economic conditions can drastically impact their brain development. Programs that can alleviate some of the stress



new parents feel, can dramatically improve a child's chances in life. For Brandon, creating a safe sleep environment and reducing the risk of SIDS was at the top of her list for being a good parent. "If I didn't have the crib, he would have been sleeping with me in bed. It's hard. I wanted him to have his own space and me to have my own space," said Brandon.

The local program grew out of necessity, said Jeannine Sato, Director of the Office of Community Resources with Durham

Connects, "While we were in the process of developing the Durham Connects newborn nurse visit program, we discovered that there was a desperate need for safe, low-cost cribs for new parents in Durham County." Durham Connects' goal is to connect parents of newborns to existing community services and identify gaps in service. The program will launch this summer in phases and will eventually provide free nurse visits to every new parent in Durham County. A lack of affordable cribs was the first serious gap identified. "We brainstormed with the public health nurses at the Durham County Health Department to find this solution. Once we identified Cribs for Kids, the program was up and running and distributing cribs within weeks," said Sato.

Cribs for Kids Durham is a completely self-sustaining operation. It does not receive funding from Durham Connects, nor does it receive public funding. In fact, the entire program operates from private donations by individuals and corporations. "We've had an outpouring of support, but we need continuous donations to keep the program running. The donations come in dollar by dollar, and sometimes even penny by penny, but each bit counts. We can purchase a new Graco Pack-n-Play for only \$50 and get it to parents within days," said Sato. The program launched in March and has already distributed more than 20 cribs.

Through an agreement with Graco, which manufactures Pack-n-Play portacribs, local affiliate organizations can purchase each

crib for \$50, about half the retail price. Cribs for Kids asks that parents pay a \$10 co-pay to cover shipping of the crib to North Carolina and to build ownership in the program.

The Cribs for Kids program is not direct to public. Crib referrals are made by a social worker or public health nurse who is familiar with the family's situation. Brandon was referred by a Durham County Health Department neighborhood nurse and the help came just in time. Ty'shon is about three months old now. The highest risk for SIDS is between the ages of 2-4 months. Risk is higher for African American babies, premature infants and during winter months. After being trained, LaShauna Brandon is glad to know

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more about SIDS reduction and to have safe place for Ty'shon each night. "This is my first (child), so I was more worried about SIDS at first. Now I feel okay," said Brandon.

To lessen the risk of SIDS, Cribs for Kids recommends that babies be placed on their backs to sleep (this has reduced SIDS rate by nearly 50 percent since 1994). In addition, parents should ob-

serve the following precautions when placing babies to sleep:

- Place baby only on a hard, flat mattress with a closely fitting sheet.
- Do not place pillows, stuffed toys, blankets or other items that could obstruct breathing in crib.
- Never let baby fall asleep in a sofa, air mattress, bean bag chair or other soft surface.
- Do not overdress the baby.
- Baby should always sleep in a smoke-free home.

Info provided by SIDS of Pennsylvania

To sponsor a crib for a Durham County parent, please call 919-668-3295 or visit [www.durhamconnects.org](http://www.durhamconnects.org) and click on programs. Or visit the Cribs for Kids national site at [www.cribsforkids.org](http://www.cribsforkids.org).

Durham Connects is a universal newborn home visiting program for Durham County residents. Phase I will launch in July.

For more information, please call (919) 668-3279

A Web site at [www.durhamconnects.org](http://www.durhamconnects.org) will launch this summer.