

HEALTHY LIVING



New mom Elena Ramirez holds her baby, Edenahy, while visiting with Durham Connects nurse Jane Schwarting.

Durham Connects is all about infants

A new program called Durham Connects aims to reach out to all parents of newborns in Durham County to create a stronger future for Durham's citizens. Durham Connects' mission is to improve child well-being by bridging the gap between new parent needs and community resources.

According to the latest neuroscience, fostering the fundamental physical, emotional and cognitive needs of children can improve the overall health of a community. That is because from the time children are born, their earliest experiences affect the architecture of the maturing brain. Over time, the quality of that brain architecture establishes either a sturdy or a fragile foundation for all of the development and behavior that follows. This includes the likelihood of developing certain diseases including depression, diabetes, obesity and heart disease, not to mention the overall success of the child as he moves



into adulthood. Ensuring a sturdy foundation for children in Durham County is what Durham Connects is all about. This is why Durham Connects aims to visit parents when the baby is between 4-6 weeks old when brain development is entering a critical phase.

The unique part of Durham Connects is its ability to visit every parent of a newborn in Durham County. "I think Durham Connects should be recommended to all parents in Durham, because it helps everybody and is a great resource for our community," said new mom Elena Ramirez. Ramirez was one of the first parents to take advantage of the free nurse visit. Elena and her husband live in a

home well equipped for their new daughter. The baby naps in the new swing as Elena chats comfortably with her Durham Connects nurse on the plush sofa nearby. Elena is lucky to have a strong family support system and knowledge of child development, but like all new parents, she is full of questions. "Everything was really fun. The way we interacted. She took care of the baby's measurements and told me how much she was growing, so that was exciting. I learned so much from the community nurse; I just hope that all parents take advantage of this unique program," said Ramirez. She plans to participate in programs at Teer House, Duke Medical Center's community education program.

Durham Connects nurses are trained to provide a physical assessment of the baby and mother, as well as answer questions, assist with health issues and make referrals to other community agencies for additional

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support. The Durham Connects visit does not replace, but rather complements a standard well-baby visit and may allow parents to ask questions between visits. Health providers such as pediatricians, family practitioners, obstetricians, delivery departments and community clinics are happy that such a communitywide effort is being launched. "Durham Connects provides a continuum of care for patients from clinic to hospital to home."

said chief of the division of community health at Duke University Medical Center, Susan Yaggy. "The visit provides families of newborns with a full range of services during the critical first weeks of life." Information about Durham Connects can be found in prenatal packets distributed at doctors' offices and during hospital birth center tours.

The program began visiting parents in July with an official launch in August. The program will be rolled out in phases with a total of 20 public health nurses assigned to geographic neighborhoods. Today, about half the county is covered, with more areas being added as nurses are hired.

Durham Connects is a collaboration of the Durham Family Initiative, itself a partnership of the Center for Child and Family Policy at Duke University and the Center for Child and Family Health, and the Durham County Health Department. It is funded by The Duke Endowment. For more information, visit www.durhamconnects.org or call (919)