

# Free in-home nurse visits for all new Durham parents are near

Julie never expected that her new baby would make her feel like this ... overwhelmed, tired and isolated. New moms should be fresh-faced, overjoyed and full of love and patience ... right? But, this is real life.

The first weeks of baby Ben's life were challenging for Julie. "Ben developed a cold and that kept me up most of the night and into the day. Since I have a 3-year-old, I did not get much rest during the day. It seems there are not enough hours to care for the children and myself."

Despite a house full of relatives, Julie felt isolated and alone as they continued on with their jobs and lives. Meanwhile she was left at home with no transportation and little support. She found help when she met a Durham County Public Health nurse. The nurse recognized Julie's need for a mentor and referred her to the GrandParent Network of Durham. The GrandParent Network, a nonprofit group



sponsored by the Durham Family Initiative, pairs new parents with seasoned "Grandparent" mentors. Volunteers are Durham senior citizens 50 years of age and older who are willing to spend six hours per month with a new parent and their family. The mentoring relationship provides care and support to new moms, so they can better care for their children and themselves. "Sometimes parents just need another person to hold the baby so they can take a shower or a quick nap," said GrandParent Network Coordinator, Annie Jones-Clement. "There is a large untapped resource in our senior citizen popu-

lation. The GrandParent Network utilizes these vast life experiences to foster positive relationships with parents. That's the beauty of mentorship."

Enter, Thelma Hamilton. Thelma is a retired activity therapist from John Umstead Hospital. She has grown children and grandchildren and belongs to several community organizations that promote the safety and well-being of children and families. Thelma is eager to use her experience as a mother and grandmother to reinforce responsible and loving parenting skills. After a thorough training, Thelma was matched with Julie and Ben. Today is their first meeting. "Helping Julie achieve her goals to become a better parent will be rewarding to my life. I am up to the challenge. I like knowing that I have helped someone and I hope to help this family be the best they can be," said Hamilton.

By helping to reduce



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Thelma Hamilton and her "grandson" are part of the GrandParent program that has senior citizens serving as mentors for new moms and dads.

some of the stress associated with child rearing, people like Thelma can help promote positive parenting even before problems arise. Through personal experience, Thelma can help Julie with skills such as healthy

meal planning, sleep scheduling, educational playtime and taking care of herself. "The Grandparent Network is about offering support when support is needed

# CONNECTS

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most. We all need an extra hand when a new baby arrives. And sometimes it's hard to ask for help. Mentors come into the home and become like family dedicated to sharing their experience and knowledge," said Jones-Clement. Since its launch in October 2007, The GrandParent Network has recruited over a dozen volunteers to work with new parents. They are trained in infant and maternal health, parenting skills and community and personal safety, as well as the importance and role of a mentor. Referrals come exclusively from public health nurses who identify moms and dads who could use a little one-on-one nurturing. Currently, there are three "neighborhood nurses" working for the Durham County Health Department, but that number will grow substantially with the launch of Durham Connects. Durham Connects is a new program that will provide free in-home nurse visits to EVERY new parent in Durham County by 2010. With more than 4,000 births in Durham County each year, the need for GrandParent Network volunteers will grow substantially.

"We anticipate that we will find new moms that can benefit from a grandparent mentor that might not otherwise know of this service. This program transcends income, race and gender. It all comes down to support. We all need support when caring for a new child. Durham Connects recognizes this fundamental

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**Annie Jones-Clement**

GrandParent Network Coordinator

need and is proud to link parents with the GrandParent Network." said Jeannine Sato, director of office of community resources for Durham Connects.

For Julie and Ben, the added attention allows them to spend more quality time together nurturing the parent-child bond. Early parental attachment is shown to produce healthy, well-adjusted children. Thelma has committed to helping Julie with the challenges she faces in motherhood for at least one year. To GrandParent Network coordinator Jones-Clement, this is a win-win scenario. "This program lowers parental stress, creates happy children and fulfilled seniors. It can't get any better than that!"

To become a GrandParent Network volunteer, please call (919) 668-3289 or e-mail grandparentnetwork@duke.edu.

(The names of mothers being mentored and their children have been changed to protect privacy.)

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.