

Strengthening Families: Past Clients' Perceptions on the Impact of Nurse-Family Partnership

Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) is a home visitation program where public health nurses visit young pregnant individuals and first-time parents experiencing social and economic disadvantage.

The three NFP program goals are to:

1. Improve pregnancy outcomes by promoting prenatal health behaviours;
2. Improve child health and development by supporting positive parenting practices; and
3. Enhance economic self-sufficiency of families by helping mothers set and achieve goals related to education and employment.



Niagara Public Health & Emergency Services has offered the NFP program to eligible families since 2016. The NFP team consists of 7 public health nurses, a team lead, and a program manager.

Between 2016 and 2024, 239 individuals have enrolled in the program during pregnancy, with 90 families completing the program once their child(ren) turned two years of age.

While Ontario mothers' perceptions of the acceptability of the NFP program have been documented (Kurtz Landy et al., 2012), there is a gap in our understanding of how individuals enrolled in NFP perceive the program's impact on their experience as parents.

NFP Client Experiences Study

Using an integrated knowledge translation framework, researchers from the School of Nursing, McMaster University partnered with members of the NFP Team, Niagara Public Health & Emergency Services to conduct a case study to:




Describe past NFP clients' experiences in the program and their perceptions of how the program impacted them as a parent.



Explore their recommendations on how individuals who have completed the NFP program can be involved in program improvement initiatives.

Study Methods

<p>Research Questions</p>	<p>Among individuals preparing to parent for the first-time who completed the NFP program, what did they perceive were the NFP program components that impacted their well-being during pregnancy and their role as a parent?</p> <p>What are the recommendations, grounded in parents' experiences, for the types of strategies that can be adopted by the NFP program for engaging previous clients in initiatives to adapt, refine, and improve overall program delivery to best meet the needs of pregnant individuals and new parents?</p>
<p>Design</p>	<p>A single, descriptive case study (Yin, 2014).</p>
<p>Sample (Population)</p>	<p>Inclusion criteria:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Were enrolled in the NFP program at Niagara Region Public Health & Emergency Services and received nurse home visits between 2016 and 2023; 2) Were formally discharged from the NFP program; 3) Provided Niagara Region Public Health & Emergency Services with consent for future follow-up; 4) Were over the age of 18 years; and 5) Were able to complete an interview in English via teleconference, telephone, or in-person.
<p>Data Collection</p>	<p>Each participant completed a:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demographic survey • One-to-one*, semi-structured interview conducted via teleconference, telephone or in-person. <p>*one individual participated with a parent present.</p>
<p>Analysis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantitative data analysis: Descriptive statistics • Qualitative data analysis: Team-based rapid qualitative analysis  <p>The illustration features a central dark blue circle with a white dotted line forming a path around it. Five circular icons are connected to this path: a woman with dark hair, a man in a suit, a woman with dark hair, a man in a red shirt, and a gear. Surrounding the central circle are several white speech bubbles of varying sizes, some containing horizontal lines representing text. At the top right, there is a magnifying glass icon over a bar chart, and at the top left, a clipboard icon with a heart and a checklist.</p>

Study Methods

Participant Demographics



Mean Age:
23.2
years

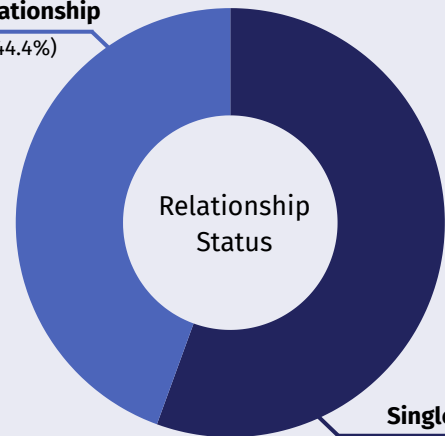
Age Range:
19-29
years



2 babies admitted to NICU
6 babies hospitalized for other reasons (e.g., premature, low blood sugar, jaundice, respiratory virus, growth/feeding concerns, gastrointestinal virus)

In a relationship

8 (44.4%)

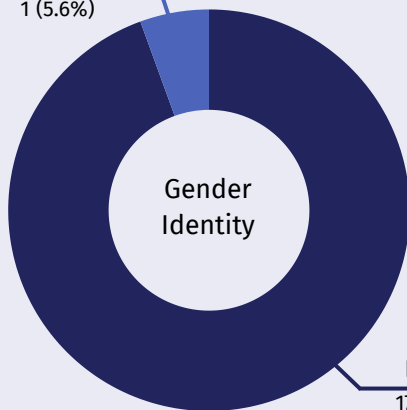


Single

10 (55.6%)

Transgender Male

1 (5.6%)



Female

17 (94.4%)

5

Participants had more than one child.



17 participants identified as Caucasian.



2 participants identified as Métis.

Nurse-Client Relationship

There was consensus among participants that the nurse-client relationship was highly valued and the most critical program component. The NFP nurses were described as:

- Non-judgmental.
- Trusted professionals who respected client confidentiality.
- Able to establish rapport which allowed clients to ask questions on any topic.

System Navigators

Supporting clients to identify, access, and engage with other community-based professionals or services.

Health Educators

Were perceived as credible and non-biased sources of information related to pregnancy, health & well-being, and parenting.

Clients recognized and valued NFP nurses' roles as:

Coach

By validating clients' decisions and actions, NFP nurses support and empower them by acknowledging their choices and offering guidance. This approach encourages clients to take an active role in their health and well-being. Clients reported that this helped reduce anxiety and build self-confidence in parenting.

Social justice advocates

Advocating on behalf of the client with other health care professionals (e.g., primary care providers) or services (e.g., legal, housing) to express client needs and explore options to meet those needs.

She just helped me be the best mom that I could be... Like she set me up for success in a way and I know I would be a good mom without her but I feel like I'm a better mom with the things I have learned from her.

NFP Support

Overall, participants described how helpful it was to receive different types of social support from a public health nurse who was highly accessible to them. Most participants perceived that the NFP nurse was a professional who would always be there for them. They appreciated the:

- availability of and accessibility to the NFP public health nurses when they had questions or needed support and that the nurses were people who “cared” and were “always checking in.”
- clients appreciated the flexibility of NFP nurses to meet in person at a location of the client's choosing, connect by phone, or adjust the visit schedule to align with their needs and preferences. This flexibility extended to visiting and supporting clients while they or their children were in hospital.
- continuity of the program – that they typically have the same nurse from pregnancy until their child is 2 years of age.

For a small number of participants, **the NFP nurse was identified as one of their sole sources of support during pregnancy.** Receiving this type of support was linked to some clients' perceived confidence in their readiness to parent.

Benefits of Engagement in NFP Program During Pregnancy

Emotional Support

Their nurses were described as people they could talk to about their experiences and feelings through pregnancy. This was particularly salient for those participants who were navigating an unexpected pregnancy or experiencing additional stressors during this period of time (e.g., the death of a parent).

Informational Support

NFP graduates valued the evidence-informed information their nurses were able to provide to them on a range of topics related to pregnancy and infant care. At least one participant commented on how helpful it was when their nurse was able to explain and help them make sense of the medical information they received from other providers during pregnancy.

Anticipatory Guidance

For several of the NFP graduates, they valued when nurses would provide them with information on “what to expect” during their pregnancy, labour and delivery, and in preparation for transitioning to parenting and caring for an infant.

Firstly, the great emotional support she had and always kind of just being there like right on top if anything were going to happen like any concerns and stuff with my child or myself, she was always there to answer.

I don't think I would be the same parent I am today. I have so many more tools than I would've if I had just done it on my own.



Perceived impact of NFP program during pregnancy & postpartum by domain

<p>Personal Health</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Received information to normalize experiences and feelings during pregnancy; including normal physical changes. • Improvements to mental health related to nurse skills to assess and intervene to address concerns such as anxiety.
<p>Environmental Health</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Received assistance in applying for subsidized housing.
<p>Lifecourse Development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were connected to educational support. • Taught skills related to self-advocacy, system navigation.
<p>Family & Friends</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased awareness of impact of intimate partner violence and strategies to increase safety through nurse skills in assessing and intervening with clients experiencing intimate partner violence.
<p>Maternal Role</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Received information and guidance which informed their decisions and behaviours related to infant feeding, growth & development, breastfeeding, infant care, and infant sleep routines. • Highly valued nurse guidance in preparing clients to establish breastfeeding once infant born.
<p>Health & Human Services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased confidence in accessing and navigating other community services, particularly with support and presence of NFP nurse. This was especially impactful in contacts with Children’s Aid Societies, maternity homes, or mental health services. • Facilitated referrals for additional mental health support, e.g. cognitive behavioural therapy.



Breastfeeding support positively impacted infant feeding. Having the support of one-on-one time and the skillset of the NFP nurse was important for building confidence around breastfeeding.



I was having trouble with breastfeeding for a while, she got me into a lactation consultant and stuff like that. She went with me to every appointment and made me feel comfortable even in that situation because it, it is a little uncomfortable having your breast out with a whole bunch of other women and you're kind of feeling vulnerable. And it-it just, it helped feeling like not alone.

NFP Nurse Support in Hospital

Given the person-centred and strengths-based orientation of the NFP program where the nurses focus on delivering health promotion interventions from pregnancy to the birth of the infant and through the first two years of childhood, many participants spoke positively about the continued support received by the nurses when they or their infants were hospitalized.

- During hospital stays, NFP nurses provided support via phone and text when not able to be with their clients in person.
- Nurses advocated for clients and translated medical information received from hospital staff (nurses, doctors, social workers).
- NFP nurses reassured clients and addressed family members' concerns.



NFP Clients' Recommendations & Considerations for Program Augmentation

① Enhancing social supports

- Many participants expressed a desire for more opportunities to socialize and engage with other NFP families. This could be addressed by organizing regular social events and support groups.
- One idea for NFP program graduates to receive continued support is through parent-led groups and social get-togethers with other graduates of the program. These gatherings can provide a platform for sharing experiences, offering mutual support, and building a sense of community among past participants.
- Providing access to childcare or child-friendly activities during these events can encourage participation and make it easier for parents to attend.
- Monthly or quarterly events could be organized to maintain ongoing engagement and support for NFP graduates.

② Extending program duration

- Many participants expressed needs and interest in remaining in the NFP program for a longer period of time (beyond child's second birthday).

I felt like I built such a strong connection and then just like it was kind of cut.

- Extending the duration of support could help maintain the positive impacts on maternal mental health and parenting confidence.



③ Tailoring resources

- Clients appreciated the resources provided but identified gaps in areas such as neurodiversity and 2SLGBTQIA+ parenting.
- Developing and providing resources tailored to these specific needs can enhance the inclusivity and effectiveness of the program.

④ Strengthening maternal mental health support

- The support from NFP nurses improved clients' mental health.
- Continuing to facilitate referrals for additional mental health supports and integrating mental health resources into the program can further benefit clients.

⑤ Ensuring nurse availability and flexibility

- Clients highly valued the availability and flexibility of NFP nurses.
- Ensuring that nurses have the capacity to provide flexible support, especially during crises, can enhance the program's responsiveness and effectiveness.

References

Kurtz Landy, C., Jack, S. M., Wahoush, O., Sheehan, D., & MacMillan, H. L. (2012). Mothers' experiences in the nurse-family partnership program: A qualitative case study. *BMC Nursing*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-6955-11-15>

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Acknowledgements

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