

# A partnership for healthy pregnancies

## Non-profit organization aids mothers and babies

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For two years, the Visiting Nurse Service of New York has helped Elmont families grow to be healthy and successful through its Nurse-Family Partnership program. Above, registered nurse Fredyla Urena, left, worked with Simone Foster-Bedward and her daughter Shemaiah Bedward, from Elmont.

COURTESY LINDA FARWELL/VNSNY

By Vanessa Parker

Simone Foster-Bedward, 30, a former teacher who came to Elmont three years ago from Kingston, Jamaica, was vomiting "a lot," she said, when she was pregnant with her first child, Shemaiah, and she rapidly dropped more than 30 pounds. Foster-Bedward was scared. But she had the Visiting Nurse Service of New York, a nonprofit agency, to guide her through her pregnancy. She's now fine, and so is her daughter - age 2.

Her VNSNY "partnering" nurse, Fredyla "Freddie" Urena, has worked with 25 mothers and their babies since the organization came to Elmont two years ago. She vividly recalled Foster-Bedward's case. "She was having a challenging time during her pregnancy-- not just physical, but also her emotional health," Urena said. "My role as her nurse was to ensure that she be able to form a bond with her baby through her pregnancy and beyond. She needed to be ready for her baby."

The Visiting Nurse Service offers programs in Nassau, Suffolk and Westchester counties, as well as New York City. The agency was founded in 1893. Since last year alone, it has aided some 33,000 patients.

"Too often, home health care is misunderstood as being just for older people," the organization's website states. "We do offer more senior care services than any other home health care organization in New York but VNSNY provides much more."

VNSNY provides services for pregnant women and their newborns, children suffering from chronic illnesses and adults of any age recovering from surgery. The Elmont program, known as the Nurse-Family Partnership, offers free, intensive, at-home nursing assistance to more than 1,000 low-income mothers and their children in Nassau and the Bronx.

Mothers are paired with registered nurses, and receive regular visits from early pregnancy through their children's second birthdays, according to Claire Leaden, an organization spokeswoman. "The Nurse-Family Partnership helps first-time mothers have healthy pregnancies, become knowledgeable and nurturing parents, reach education and employment goals and provide their children with the best possible start in life," Leaden said. "The partnership in Nassau County is part of an initiative funded by the New York State Department of Health to support at-risk pregnant women and their first child."

"Up to my delivery, it was traumatic," Foster-Bedward recalled. "My nurse was there to support me through it all. Without this program, I wouldn't have been able to cope. She gave me encouraging words. She helped me find help in other ways, such as the medication I needed to help me feel better. My goal for my baby is for her to grow up healthy and to be a well-rounded person, a contributing member of society. With assistance from a program like this, it's entirely possible for her."

Urena said she worked with Foster-Bedward to get her whatever she needed. "We ask ourselves as nurses, how can we help the mother?" she said. "We go over the benefits and challenges of a woman's given situation. If she needs [Women, Infants and Children] assistance, I help her get it. Can she afford college? Will she be a stay-at-home mom? Will she be a trade worker? These are all situations we consider, and then I help her get connected with a job or school."

Urena met with Foster-Bedward once a week, every week until her due date. Then she met with her every two weeks, and later every six weeks, to monitor both mother and child. On Shemaiah's second birthday in August, VNSNY held a "graduation" for them.

"Once I saw my little girl, my life changed forever," Foster-Bedward said. "My daughter will be normal and OK. I wouldn't change a thing."