

**STATEMENT OF
SHERENE SUCILLA
FORMER CLIENT, NURSE-FAMILY PARTNERSHIP
YAKIMA VALLEY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL**

**BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES**

APRIL 2, 2014

Good afternoon Chairman Reichert, Ranking Member Doggett, and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) program in support of evidence-based home visiting and the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program.

My name is Sherene Sucilla, and I was a client with the Nurse-Family Partnership program delivered by the Yakima Valley Memorial Hospital in Yakima, WA, and I am the incredibly proud mother of my son Andrew who is now 4-years old. As a client, I received regular visits about every other week from my NFP Nurse Home Visitor, Crystal Towne, starting when I was just a couple of months pregnant through my son's second birthday. I am here on behalf of the mothers like me, the children like my son Andrew, and families like our own, in support of the federal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program. I am honored to be here today to get to thank Chairman Reichert and the Members of this Subcommittee in person for their commitment to improving the health and well-being of children with dedicated funding for evidence-based home visiting programs. This program has meant so much to me and my family, and I know that if every mom could be here today to talk about their experience with Nurse-Family Partnership, they would be, because it is truly a life changing experience to be part of this program.

I grew up in Yakima, WA. When I was 12-years old, I went into foster care and remained there through my 18th birthday. In those six years, I attended seven different schools, and they weren't always in the same district. This made it difficult to graduate high school on time, since many of the credits I received did not transfer from district to district. However, through a lot of hard work, I graduated on time, and I am very proud of that. While being in foster care isn't an experience I would wish on children growing up, I would say that the experience has shaped who I am today.

When I was younger, my mom wasn't really a mom. I didn't really have a role model for parenting, and I knew I didn't want to be the mom that she was. So when I got pregnant, I didn't really have anything to go off of – I was really scared. I was clueless, and I was in this by myself.

I heard about the Nurse-Family Partnership program through my doctor's office when I found out I was pregnant. Because I was a first-time mom and met the other eligibility requirements, they referred me to the Yakima Valley Memorial Hospital's NFP program and Crystal. We set up an appointment for Crystal to come to my home and talk more about the program. After our first meeting, I knew that this was the right program for me, and I looked forward to our regular home visits.

At that point, I was new to everything when it came to parenting. But Crystal was a huge help to me and my family. She helped me build confidence, and opened doors for me to set goals for my life and my family. She helped me find other services I needed, like dental care, and she would take my blood pressure when I was pregnant to make sure I was doing ok. When I had trouble breastfeeding, Crystal had a breast pump overnighted to me. At one point when I was nursing, I was afraid my son wasn't getting enough to grow at a healthy rate. But Crystal would bring a scale and we would weigh Andrew every week, and she assured me that he was growing well and according to schedule. That was the first major moment for me where I felt reassured that I was a good mother – that I was getting him what he needed, and then I knew I could do this. Now, at four years old, I can laugh and say that he is the tallest kid in his class.

I was also nervous about his development; like every parent, you want to make sure your baby or child is keeping up with different milestones, and I didn't know how to assess that. But Crystal would bring in questionnaires – called the Ages and Stages Questionnaire or ASQ – to assess his development at different points in time, and we would know that his development was on track.

I remember throughout the program, Crystal would say to me that my son Andrew was a very caring person from a very young age, and he really is. He was about 13 months old when Crystal commented on how sweet he was. He would give Crystal a hug and actually pat her on the back. At the end of each visit, she would leave a form with lots of feedback, including highlights from that visit, what our next visit would be about, and reminders of things I needed to do before our next visit. Looking back at one of the forms, Crystal mentioned how I "was raising such a sweet and loving child, that his hugs and pats melted her heart." Crystal was able to point out to me these different signs he was showing of being a very caring human being even when he was a toddler, and I remember realizing that if I was raising a son that loving, I really was doing something right as a parent.

When I found out I was pregnant, I worked at a barbeque stand. When Crystal and I started talking about my future, she helped me look in to going back to school. Ultimately, I ended up getting a job in a great career through steps I took when Andrew was younger. I am now working in Accounts Payable for a local heating and air conditioning company. I've been there for a year and a half and I have great job security, as I am the only one in the office doing what I do.

It's been really special to look back at the wonderful records that I took of Andrew's first full two years of life while in the Nurse-Family Partnership program. I have a big binder of all of the work, pictures, and activities that we did, and I can go back and read my thoughts and feelings from the beginning of my pregnancy, to when he first smiled, first giggled, first sat up - every milestone. Sharing this with him now when he is 4 years old is so special for us, and I know I will have these resources if we decide to have another child in the future.

I would have been pretty lost without this program. Nurse-Family Partnership really gave me the opportunity to be a good parent, and then to realize that I am good at it, and this gives me a proud feeling every day. I don't know what it must be like to be a first-time parent like I was without this support, and I know there are so many more new moms just like me who are in need of this support. Crystal helped me navigate these rough waters of being a new parent. Having a nurse who I could trust with questions about my health when I was pregnant, breastfeeding when I was a new mom, child development as my son was growing, and life goals – helped me to be a successful parent.

When the program came to an end for us, I was very sad because I really did look forward to each visit. Crystal really believed in me and encouraged me every chance she could - enough so that I could believe in myself. I'm proud of all of Andrew's growth as well as my own personal growth. As I look toward my future, I don't think my family would be where we are today without her support. I can proudly say to all of you that I have broken a cycle; while being in the foster system molded me in to who I am today, I am happy that Andrew will never need to experience that kind of instability.

I truly hope that Congress will continue supporting the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program, which supports great programs like Nurse-Family Partnership. Thank you, Chairman Reichert, Ranking Member Doggett, and the Members of this Subcommittee for the opportunity to testify today.