



HomeStory

Stories from the California Home Visiting Program

Shenise's Story: Home Visitor Recognizes Preeclampsia Warning Signs in Young Mom-To-Be

Editor's Note: This is the third in a series of articles featuring one family's experience with home visiting. In this story, teen mom-to-be Shenise was nearing her due date without incident, when her home visitor recognized symptoms of preeclampsia. The early identification resulted in the safe delivery of a healthy baby boy. Previous installments include Ebony's Story and Ivory's Story. Watch for Essence, the eldest sister's story, later this year.

As an eleventh grader, Shenise was expecting a baby. Her mother, Ebony, encouraged her to learn about pregnancy and parenting by enrolling in Riverside County's Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP), part of the California Home Visiting Program.

That was eight years ago, and what the mother and her 16-year-old daughter didn't realize at the time was the profound impact their home visiting nurse, Raychelle, and the NFP program would have on this pregnancy—and the entire family. Looking back, Ebony says, "This program saved my daughter."

Ebony is referring to the last part of Shenise's otherwise uncomplicated pregnancy. Four days before her baby's due date and one day after her regular obstetrician checkup, Shenise met with Raychelle, who immediately knew something was wrong.



Eight years ago Shenise, above center, went straight to the hospital when her home visiting nurse Raychelle, above left, recognized symptoms of preeclampsia. Fortunately, Shenise had a healthy baby boy, Jeremiah, above right and below as an infant with young Shenise.

"I saw her face looking very puffy," Raychelle recalls. "She said she was feeling okay, but her blood pressure was high and her weight had jumped up three pounds from the previous day." Raychelle suspected a high blood pressure disorder called preeclampsia, and calmly told Ebony that they should call the hospital right away. "They admitted her, and sure enough, she had preeclampsia," Raychelle says.



What is Home Visiting?

Home visiting is a voluntary program that pairs pregnant and newly parenting women with a nurse or trained professional who makes regular visits in the participant's home to provide guidance, coaching and access to prenatal care and other health and social services. Home visiting is a preventive intervention focused on promoting positive parenting and child development, with the ultimate goal of strengthening families and communities.

“Had it not been for the fact that I had a home visit with Raychelle that day, I don’t know what would have happened with my baby.” — Shenise

Preeclampsia affects about 3.4 percent of pregnancies in the U.S., according to the National Institutes of Health. The cause is not completely understood, but it can lead to reduced blood supply in the placenta. This triggers factors that cause high blood pressure in the mother and possible injury to her organs. Since the placenta is involved, it is often necessary to immediately deliver the baby to keep the blood pressure from rising. If the mother’s blood pressure gets too high, she can experience seizure, stroke or even death.



Then and now: Thanks to early identification of preeclampsia, teen mom Shenise, left, had a healthy baby boy, Jeremiah. Her mom, Ebony, at left in both photos, says the home visiting program “saved my daughter.” The photo below, taken in 2017, includes Shenise’s niece, baby Ania.



to them, having since served as the home visitor for Shenise’s two sisters.

“All that Raychelle has done for my family, it’s amazing,” Shenise says, reflecting back on the years. “To be able to have an individual like that in your life—and I feel like she saved mine. The side effects of preeclampsia, that’s scary. I used to always think about

how I would have just faded and no one would know because I was just sleeping more.”

Fighting back tears, she adds, “I get a little emotional sometimes, but I’m just overjoyed because I don’t know where I would have been without my home visiting nurse. Raychelle came into our lives—right on time.”

Fortunately, Shenise’s baby was full term, so the next day, the hospital staff induced labor—and healthy baby boy Jeremiah was born.

“I always think back to that day and wonder what would have happened,” Shenise says. “Had it not been for the fact that I had a home visit with Raychelle that day, I don’t know what would have happened with my baby because the next day his heart rate was dropping and they had to induce.”

When Shenise and Jeremiah went home, Raychelle continued her home visits and monitored the baby’s development and milestones through age 2. The nurse also supported the young mom’s educational goals and road to self-sufficiency. Shenise finished high school with her classmates, recently graduated from college and is now seeking a master’s degree. Jeremiah, now in elementary school, is reading at above-grade level.

Even though Shenise and Jeremiah completed the home visiting program years ago, Raychelle remains connected

Did you know?

According to the CDPH Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health Pregnancy-Associated Mortality Review (PAMR):

- Preeclampsia/eclampsia is a leading cause of maternal deaths in California.
- African-American women are 3 to 4 times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than other racial/ethnic groups.



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