

PUBLIC HEALTH

Public Health: Home visiting program supports moms in Lewis and Clark County

AMBER JOHNSON

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In June 2006, Marisa Johnson was the brand-new mom of a beautiful baby girl. And like most first-time parents, she had no idea what she was doing. Breastfeeding, in particular, was a great struggle. A single, low-income mom, she had limited support. It was hard, to say the least. This is where her hero's journey began.

After the birth of her second child in December 2010, nurses at St. Peter's Hospital referred her to Lewis and Clark Public Health for breastfeeding support. Remembering the great struggle she had breastfeeding her first child, she was relieved.

"With the birth of my second child, when I was offered in-home breastfeeding support, I jumped at the chance to learn from a caring professional."



Amber Johnson

Photo provided

Johnson immediately bonded with her nurse home visitor, Brie MacLaurin. Brie recognized Marisa as a wonderful mom with a great head on her shoulders and encouraged her to go back to school to become a nurse home visitor herself.

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“When I looked into the Nurse-Family Partnership program at LCPH, I realized that it encompassed everything I am passionate about. Breastfeeding support, maternal and child health, early childhood development and attachment, child safety and well-being, supporting single moms and low-income families.”

In 2017, Johnson graduated with her RN from Helena College. After one year at an OB/GYN office, she landed her dream job. The very reason she went to nursing school. Johnson took a job with Lewis and Clark Public Health as a home visitor with the Nurse-Family Partnership program. She loves her work.

“Each day is different because every parent’s needs are different. I enroll pregnant moms and work with them until their child’s second birthday. Through that time, we work on goals and objectives that are unique and specific to their family.

Breastfeeding, safe sleep, infant and child milestones, attachment and development activities, employment, housing, education, and more. I also support parents recovering from addiction or with families who are involved with Child Protective Services.”

“Most moms aren’t getting the support they need to thrive. Women used to raise their children in villages with other women. Now modern women don’t have villages. But I like to think of the Nurse-Family Partnership home visiting program as a village. Brie was part of my village.”

All these years later, Marisa Johnson and Brie MacLaurin are still friends. They are village mothers, working side by side in Lewis and Clark County to provide support and advocacy for hero moms on their own journey into and through motherhood. Johnson as a nurse home visitor at LCPH and MacLaurin as a contributing member of the Lewis and Clark County Board of Health.

They believe universal home visiting for all expectant and new parents, regardless of income, is the future of public health. This means that every family would be offered a short-term home visitor to assist in the transition between hospital and home. Currently, however, there is an income requirement to participate in certain LCPH’s home visiting programs, including Nurse-Family Partnership and Parents As Teachers.

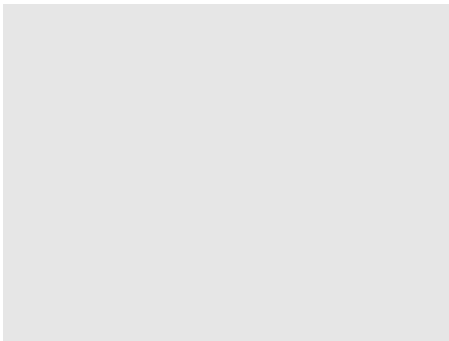
Mary Sparks, home visiting supervisor for LCPH, is confident that increased participation in home visiting programs will decrease the staggering number of annual child maltreatment cases reported to the Montana Department of Health and Human Services. At the height of the pandemic in 2020, statewide reports indicate that 3,777 children were victims of abuse and neglect and that a whopping 3,406 kids were placed into foster care.

“LCPH works closely with Child and Family Services to help identify families that are in most need and provide intensive service and support to reduce the need for children to be removed from their home. As the home visiting programs grow, we hope to serve more families, reducing the number of people who cope with stress by mistreating their children,” Sparks said.

If you or someone you know is interested in learning more about or applying for home visiting services through Lewis and Clark Public Health, please call 406-457-8900 to schedule an appointment. You can also visit the LCPH website at **<https://www.lccountymt.gov/health/health-promotion/pregnancy-parenting.html>** to apply online.

“If you are a low-income mom in need of support, please don’t hesitate to reach out to us,” Johnson urges. “You don’t have to go at this alone. Women need villages. They shouldn’t be ashamed to ask for help. Every mother deserves somebody on their side, advocating for them on their journey as a mom.”

“Oh, and Happy Mother’s Day!”



Marisa Johnson

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Amber Johnson is the communications specialist for Lewis and Clark Public Health.



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