

partners in developing healthy children

UCSF Fresno Pediatric Residency Training Program • University Medical Center
445 South Cedar Avenue, Fresno, CA 93702 • tel: 559-459-5751 • fax: 559-459-3852 • rkreutz@fresno.ucsf.edu

Elizabeth and Her Baby July 2006

Healthy Steps Fresno has been working with young mothers, fathers and their babies for almost three years with great success. One of our goals has been to give families all the tools and help needed so that their children can thrive. The Healthy Steps Specialist (HSS) offers a helping relationship and developmental expertise to assure that both parent and baby reach their potential. Our other goal is to educate residents in the Healthy Steps approach to well-child care. The resident benefits from the Healthy Steps education and at the same time gains experience with pediatric care that is collaborative, family centered and has the potential for great impacts with patients and their families.

The story of Elizabeth and her baby demonstrates all that works well with Healthy Steps. Stories like hers' keep us working hard everyday. Today, Elizabeth is a high school graduate with hope of becoming a nurse. Her baby, Aileen, is almost two years old and thriving. We had the privilege of seeing this mother and baby blossom despite facing very significant challenges.

We met Elizabeth before Aileen was born. The TPRC (Teen Parent Resource Center) social worker, Maricella, referred Elizabeth to Healthy Steps and Veronica Ybarra Tamayo (HSS) made a home visit with Dr. Janice Kezirian, MD. Veronica remembers Elizabeth asking about the pending birth of her daughter, *"Is it going to hurt...will I be able to do it...what will my in-laws think?"* Elizabeth said about this visit, *"I used to ask myself, if I go to the clinic, what am I going to ask?...talking to her (Dr. Kezirian) made me realize she was a good person...Dr. Kezirian told me what to expect at the doctor's visit... that was really helping, because the first time I didn't know what would be happening, but it really helped to know."*

This young mother was used to facing challenges. Having emigrated from Mexico and learning to speak English, she still had not received her legal documentation despite her siblings and parents obtaining theirs. Her parents were divorced and Elizabeth says, *"I used to have to move back and forth between my mom and my dad and I didn't have many friends."* After not getting along with her mother in Los Angeles, she moved to her father's house here in Fresno. She met her boyfriend, Carlos, and became pregnant at 16 years old. She says, *"I didn't have any friends and being pregnant at high school was hard and everybody stared at me...so that's why I dropped school and went on home studies."* Elizabeth moved in with her boyfriend's family and wondered who was going to be there for her.

Veronica worked alongside Dr. Kezirian teaching and modeling Healthy Steps, developmental screening and using the child's development as a way to engage parents. Elizabeth said, *"When I come for a visit, Veronica goes into the room with Dr. Kezirian...I fill out a survey (ASQ) and she actually tells Dr. Kezirian that she is doing well on everything...it is like teaching her more (about development). The doctor will just tell me, her height is ok her weight is ok, but she is not going to tell me more about how she's growing. She (Veronica) explains everything. Those*



papers she gives me, those activities I'm suppose to be doing with her at this age, that really helps, because she really likes doing those activities. Regarding her child's development Elizabeth says, *"Veronica has taught me a lot of things about babies, how they grow, things I did not know before."* When asked to give an example, she says *"The babies at 18 months have to learn 10 words...I wanted her to learn fast and I was pushing her, but Veronica told me that she was normal."*

Hearing this was important for Elizabeth, because her baby Aileen was born with a deformed ear. She says, *"My baby was born with a deformed ear and the papers that Veronica gave me told me that she was doing well."* Regarding her baby's learning she says, *They told me to read to her a lot of books, to talk to her a lot...so she can hear normal, talk normal and learn."* This has been a challenge for the family, because Carlos, the baby's father, has had a difficult time accepting his daughter's disability. Elizabeth says, *"My boyfriend, he really doesn't understand...he covers her ear when we are at the store or something...sometimes he says it is my fault."*

Having someone to speak to about difficulties in relationships is very important young mothers. Elizabeth lives with Carlos' family and Carlos's mother is supportive of her. Carlos works and struggles understanding why Elizabeth wants to go to school when he plans to support her. He sometimes goes out with friends and drinks alcohol. Elizabeth tries to engage him in Healthy Steps, but he has only come to the clinic one time. Veronica continues to consult with others on the Healthy Steps team to find a way to help Elizabeth with her struggles with Carlos. Elizabeth has opened up to Veronica and she says, *"I like Veronica, like the way she explains everything to me...helps me in my personal life, like what to do."* Veronica has helped her focus on her goals and schoolwork and in the spring of 2006, Elizabeth graduated from Roosevelt High School. She earned "student of the month" and graduated with a 3.5 GPA. Elizabeth says, *"When I had my baby I started really doing my homework, and I did it, I did it by myself."* She hopes to go to Fresno City College and become a nurse, but she still needs help with her legal papers. Veronica is helping her get assistance from a local immigrant advocacy organization. Dr. Kezirian has been amazed at Elizabeth's progress and says, *"she has it all together...it is because of Veronica."*

Healthy Steps is not the only program helping Veronica. Perhaps the most important help has been from the Lori Ann Infant Center support group for families with children with disabilities. Elizabeth says, *"When she was born I was stressed out and I was not happy about it, but at Lori Ann I see the other moms...they really help me deal with this.* Elizabeth has received much help from other mothers and many of them in her group have children with deformed ears. Elizabeth says about her baby's ear, *"I used to believe that it was my fault, but now that I have got into that program, I know there are a lot of kids that have that problem and on television there are a lot of kids that had the surgery. Now I know that it wasn't my fault, it was just something that happened."* Elizabeth has learned to watch for Aileen's response to sounds, and she says, *"I think she can hear out of that ear."* Veronica and her pediatrician have helped her see all the other positive developments with her baby and she receives all the medical information needed about future surgery when the baby is four or five years old.

Elizabeth knows she has a long road ahead. She needs to get her papers together so she can qualify for assistance to go to college. In the mean time she plans to work. Her relationship with Carlos is difficult and she is faced with difficult decisions. She appears as a young woman, confident that she can make good decisions for herself and her family. She says, “*Now I have a lot of support...first Maricella and now Veronica.*” She also has her boyfriend’s mother, the other mothers in her support group, Lori Ann staff and counselors at Fresno City College. Most of all, she has uncovered a strength within herself that grew out of her love and care for her baby. Healthy Steps will continue to be there for Elizabeth and her baby, step by step as a young family grows.