



HomeStory

Stories from the California Home Visiting Program

Ebony's Story: Three Daughters; One Amazing Home Visitor

Editor's Note: This is the first in a series of articles featuring one family's experience with home visiting. In this installment, mom Ebony talks about the bond she and her daughters built with their home visitor, Raychelle. Most of the home visits took place at the family hub of Ebony's centrally located home, as each daughter, one after the other, enrolled in the voluntary program. Over the years, Ebony has watched "Nurse Raychelle" provide her family with resources, developmental and milestone assessments, parenting skills and much more—and this is Ebony's story. Watch for upcoming stories about each of her daughters: Shenise, Essence and Ivory.

When Ebony's 16-year-old daughter, Shenise, became pregnant in 2009, Ebony encouraged her to enroll in Riverside County's voluntary home visiting program to learn about pregnancy, having a baby and raising a child. What Ebony, Shenise and even their new home visitor, Raychelle, could not foresee was the profound impact the decision to sign up for home visiting would have on Ebony's entire family.

Home visitors maintain a close client-nurse relationship during pregnancy and through the child's first two years of life. In this case, Ebony's two other daughters—Essence and Ivory—each



Ebony, top left, with her daughters and grandchildren, and Nurse Raychelle, center, who has served as this family's home visiting nurse for over eight years.

became pregnant in succession after Shenise. Home visitor Raychelle was there every step of the way.

Unique Situations

Ebony explains that each daughter's experience was unique, starting with teen mom Shenise, shown at left with her son,



now 7, and Raychelle. Shenise had an uneventful pregnancy, but close to her due date, home visiting nurse Raychelle recognized symptoms of a pregnancy-related condition called preeclampsia, which can lead to serious—even fatal—complications for mom and baby.

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 preventive intervention focused on promoting positive parenting and child development, with the ultimate goal of strengthening families and communities.

“This program saved my family...” - Ebony

The home visitor got Shenise admitted into the hospital that night. “We were able to catch it early,” Raychelle says, adding that Shenise was full-term so they induced the next day. “Everything went smoothly from there, and she delivered her baby boy the following day.”

Ebony adds, “This program saved my family, saved my daughter.”

For Essence, the eldest of the siblings shown below with her son, age 2, and Raychelle, the program offered an opportunity to gain knowledge, have a healthy pregnancy and be more prepared. Raychelle provided a great deal of information,



including breastfeeding resources. Essence then breastfed her son beyond the goals of at least six months exclusive breastfeeding and one year of breastmilk with other foods. In fact, Essence

breastfed beyond her son’s second birthday, and Raychelle recommended her for the online documentary series [Chocolate Milk](#), sponsored by The African American Breastfeeding Project.

As Essence neared her home visiting program graduation, Ivory, the youngest sister (below) who has polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS), a hormone imbalance that can cause many problems including infertility and premature babies, was surprised to learn that she was pregnant—and with twins.



Ivory did show signs of preterm labor at 25 weeks, but following Raychelle’s advice, staved off delivery until 30 weeks. Her twins, a boy and girl, stayed in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) for three



Nurse Raychelle, left, with Ebony, who several years ago encouraged her teen daughter to enroll in the home visiting program and has since had Raychelle as a home visitor for her two other daughters.

weeks. Home visiting nurse Raychelle helped Ivory, Ebony and the rest of the family learn about life in the NICU, transitioning to caring for the twins at home and child development in preemies.

Healthy Lives, Healthy Babies

“For me personally, it is just an amazing experience,” says Raychelle. “Even though it is a professional relationship, I feel like they are family because I’ve been with them for so long. I love seeing how all three sisters, being first-time moms, are now really empowered. I love to see how they really strive to be the best moms that they can be, and the best people they can be, and they’re not just looking at the here and now, but they are planning for their future.”

For these siblings, it includes college and career goals. Shenise, whose son is now 7, will start graduate school in fall. Essence, with a 2-year-old son, and Ivory, with infant twins, are well on their way to receiving their bachelor degrees. This follows the footsteps of their mother Ebony, who went back to school after having her children to attain her bachelor’s degree in psychology.

“My daughters have each had different experiences, and totally different from mine,” Ebony says, adding that sometimes she and her daughters would join in each other’s home visits. “Raychelle was just a holistic collaboration of education for my entire family.”

