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Mom Tanisha Reiff with Kayla, then 6 months, and nurse home-visitor Cheryl Rodriguez in 2008. FILE PHOTO

SOCIAL SERVICES | BY JEREMY MOULE

Growing the Nurse-Family Partnership

The women served by the county's Nurse-Family Partnership Program have access to a new tool: peer support groups.

Through the NFPP, trained nurses work with first-time, income-eligible mothers on parenting skills, health, and personal relationships. The nurse works with the mother from typically the 16th week of pregnancy until her child is 2.

The peer support groups, which started this week, give the mothers and mothers-to-be a chance to network with and get support from each other, says Kara Halstead, senior staff assistant to Monroe County Executive Maggie Brooks.

The groups will meet monthly and are facilitated by NFPP nurses. They'll focus on topics like health, relationships, babies' developmental milestones, and breastfeeding. The makeup of each group is determined by the mother's age and her baby's development.

"We just think that it will be a nice way to keep the girls engaged," Halstead says.

The county is also working on a support group for dads.

Nurse-family partnerships are regarded as an effective means for improving the health of mothers and their children, improving children's school readiness, reducing child abuse, and preventing crime.

In a report released earlier this year, the Children's Agenda, a local child advocacy organization, recommended expanding the county's program to serve 1,000 families a year; the program currently serves 325 families.

The program's funding has been flat over the past couple of years. Private donors, via the United Way, contribute about \$350,000. State matching grants account for \$600,000.

There's a chance that the program could receive additional funding through the federal health care legislation. County officials are watching for those kinds of opportunities, Halstead says.