

SALINTA & DARIAN

The image is burned hard into Salinta's memory. She was three months pregnant, standing in the middle of the street in a neighborhood in Gary, Indiana. Her parents had just told her she couldn't come home, that they had left all her possessions – one bag of clothes – at a neighbor's house. Then they drove away.

She was 17.

"It hurt me," Salinta said. "I was so young. I didn't know what to do. My mom, my dad and my sisters just left me there in the street. Wow.

"I didn't want to have to go to my boyfriend's house, but I had no place to go."

Salinta and her boyfriend, Darian, knew they couldn't stay with his mom for long. She was a single mom, living in an apartment with her four kids. "We were taking food out of her mouth," said Darian.

The two high school kids faced a crisis.

"We figured we had to decide if we were going to stay together as a couple or separate and co-parent," Salinta said. "We knew we had to grow up. We had a child on the way."

They decided to stay together. But they knew they needed help.

Salinta contacted Nurse-Family Partnership at Goodwill Central & Southern Indiana in Gary and enrolled in the program. She attended a pregnancy class, but she was there only a few months.

Darian's older brother was living in Madison, Wisconsin, and invited the couple to move in with him until they could find their own place. By this time, Salinta was eight months pregnant. They had no money and almost no possessions.

Darian's brother sent them \$60 for bus fare, but when they arrived in Madison, no one was at the bus station to meet them.

"We thought it was over," Salinta said.

"They finally came," Darian said, "and they really helped us."

But Darian and Salinta knew they were in over their heads, so they called Nurse-Family Partnership at Public Health Madison and Dane County. Their case was transferred from Indiana, and nurse Sarah came into their lives like an island of stability in the middle of a hurricane.

"Sarah helped us completely with everything," Salinta said.

Darian got a job as a cook at Noodles & Company. Salinta's due date was closing in fast and the couple walked to every doctor appointment to make sure everything was OK.

Not only did Sarah teach them what to expect in the last weeks of pregnancy, and counsel them on labor and delivery, she helped them find a place to live.

"She brought us lists of apartments and taught us about leases," Salinta said. Then, when they had saved enough for the rent and were ready to move in, they found out they needed to have another \$1,000 for a security deposit.



Sarah came through for us," Salinta said. "Our mothers, our fathers, our grandparents weren't there. She was everything."



When Armonie was born, Sarah taught them about the stages of her development so they would know what to expect.

“We didn’t know anything about security deposits,” said Darian. “This was our first apartment.”

Sarah helped them access assistance for the security deposit and they finally had a home.

Each week, when Sarah visited, she brought more information and Sarah’s reassurances helped Salinta put her fears about ordinary aches and pains to rest.

“Sarah came through for us,” she said. “Our mothers, our fathers, our grandparents weren’t there. She was everything.”

When their daughter was born, Sarah “would teach us about stages before they happened so we knew what to expect,” said Darian. “Armonie really isn’t a challenging baby, but it helped.”

Salinta went to work soon after the baby arrived and then, when Armonie was about 8 months old, Salinta’s parents came to Madison with her four sisters. They moved in.

“We wanted to forgive them,” said Salinta. “They had nowhere to stay and we wanted to help because we knew how that was.”

Money was extremely tight as Salinta and Darian worked to support all nine of them. “There were days we didn’t eat so they could,” said Darian.

“We were getting the girls to and from school, and trying to keep food in house,” Salinta said. “Things

were really tough. With my dad, there was drinking and there were fights and police calls.”

Her parents left after eight months. Her sisters remained for more than a year.

Sarah helped the young parents learn to establish healthy boundaries in their relationships and focus on their daughter and their future.

At 2, Armonie is crushing every milestone. “She’s learning how to talk, to eat by herself, getting potty trained,” said Salinta. “She’s becoming an actual human.”

When Sarah made her regular home visits to assess Armonie’s progress, she was always amazed. “Salinta and Darian have a beautiful parent-child relationship,” Sarah said. “That’s been the most rewarding thing for me. With all the chaos in their lives, their relationship with their daughter is really beautiful.”

Salinta and Darian are both working and, little by little, finding themselves able to envision a bright future. They both want to get their GEDs and develop skills that will help them provide a good life for Armonie.

“The strength Salinta has shown is remarkable. She’s taught me so much and opened my eyes to a lot of things. She’s an exceptional mother,” Sarah said.

“When our baby was born, everything changed,” said Salinta. “Now I look at her and I don’t know where I’d be without her.”



Nurse Sarah shared, “Salinta and Darian have a beautiful parent-child relationship.”