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Health Department of Northwest Michigan

Growing into Goals

Area family celebrates graduating from Healthy Families

When Erin Hay found herself a new mother finishing high school, she welcomed Kristin Kays into her life. As a nurse and family support specialist with HDNW's Healthy Families Northern Michigan program, Kristin began meeting with Erin and her six-week-old son.

Together, they got to know each other and set goals to build the life Erin wanted for herself and her son. Each month, Kristin would do home visits—times that young Jeremiah began to cherish.

“My favorite part of the program was the visits and how Kristin bonded with Jeremiah so well,” Erin says. “Jeremiah loved the visits so much that he would wait by the window or door for Kristin to come.”

On June 13, Erin, Jeremiah, and father figure, Keegan, graduated from Healthy Families. The diploma includes a list of accomplishments like:

- I am able to help my child manage feelings and frustrations
- I know what causes stress for myself and my family, and I have a plan to get help and support if this happens
- I have a safe and stable place to live
- I have and can access at least one positive support person or community resource in addition to my home visitor
- I take my child to the doctor as needed to stay healthy

“This family has had so many successes since I have been working with them,” Kristin says. “I have watched Erin blossom into an amazing young woman and mother. They are a true success story for the mission of Healthy Families.”

Healthy Families is an intensive home visiting program from Prevent Child Abuse America. The focus is on the parent-child relationship and their bonding by providing resources, activities, and education to allow the parent to be their child's first teacher and to create a secure attachment. Healthy Families also monitors child development and provides tailored resources to meet the family's needs.

Step by Step

Although motherhood was unexpected, Erin and Kristin established a plan for her to finish high school, get her driver's license and obtain employment. In about a year, all three of these goals were met. Next, Erin saved enough money to move from a family member's home to her own apartment in the Oden area.

“Erin did all of this while also creating a very special bond with Jeremiah and supporting his growth and development,” Kristin says. “When we discovered a delay in his gross motor and speech development,

HDNW is mandated by the Michigan Public Health Code to promote wellness, prevent disease, provide quality healthcare, address health problems of vulnerable populations, and protect the environment for the residents and visitors of Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, and Otsego counties.



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Erin balanced extra appointments with Early On to support Jeremiah's speech, which really paid off! Jeremiah is no longer experiencing any sort of delay. He is not only speaking in full sentences and showing everyone just how funny his little personality is, but he is also counting and working on his ABCs!"

Jeremiah will turn four in September. Erin and Keegan are engaged and expecting a baby. As they move forward as a family, planning to purchase their first home, Erin says she's grateful to have picked up parenting skills like how to cope with tantrums and how to calm Jeremiah when he has fits.

"The graduation means everything to me because it showed me how far Jeremiah has come and has grown from beginning to end," Erin says.

If you know someone who would benefit from participating in Healthy Families Northern Michigan, email k.kays@nwhealth.org.

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For more information on HDNW's various home visiting programs, please reach out to media@nwhealth.org.