

The Rocking Chair Project: Empowering Families, Promoting Change

One of ReThink Health: UCRV's core beliefs is that communities can drive change in systems.

So what does it really take for communities to drive change in systems?

Well, at the core of communities are individuals who require *space, sustenance, and support* to lead healthy and productive lives. But when any portion of an individual's needs aren't met, they may not be capable of growing and developing into an agent of change in their community. In Claremont, NH, [TLC Family Resource Center](#) gets to the core of community change by intervening at the very beginning of a child's life through the [Rocking Chair Project](#) (see sidebar for more information). The Rocking Chair Project is collaborative, inspirational, and multifaceted; it marries the ever present need to address immediate family assistance with long term community health improvement goals. It provides *space* for families to build healthy relationships, enables parents to *nourish and sustain* their babies, and fosters the development of *supportive* connections between physicians and families.

The Interview

I sat down with Melony Williams, Clinical Supervisor at TLC, to learn more about the Rocking Chair Project and to better understand



how her organization sees its role in promoting positive change in the Claremont community. The Rocking Chair Project aims to support families throughout the mother's pregnancy and up to three years beyond the birth of the child. TLC's home visitors, accompanied by a medical student, meet with families regularly throughout the mother's pregnancy to build the foundation of knowledge and skills about nurturing parenting. Then, within two weeks of the baby's birth, TLC delivers the rocking chair to the family, at which time all family members are encouraged to help build the rocking chair.

So what is it about the rocking chair?

Melony and her team at TLC have witnessed the rocking chair as a special place for parents to nurture themselves and to nurture their babies. But beyond this observed transformation, the rocking chair



A Rocking Chair Project participant and her baby

The Rocking Chair Project

Co-founded by Trish and Mike Magee in 2001, the Rocking Chair Project provides families with the opportunity to build a glider rocking chair and take advantage of regular home visits by physicians both before and after their baby is born. This Project targets high-risk families with newborns to ensure that babies are exposed to supportive environments conducive to building positive and loving relationships.

The Rocking Chair Project has earned the attention of community organizations, researchers, and public health forums, from TLC Family Resource Center in Claremont, NH, to Yale University and Health Commentary, for its innovative and low-cost approach to early childhood

could have long lasting implications for children’s development and decision-making. “The connection and attachment between a parent and child can change the choices that they make in life and give them an incentive to create stability and health in their home,” Melony said. And the rocking motion, itself, has even been [proven](#) to positively impact both parents’ mental health as well as their babies’ overall physiological wellbeing.

What kind of an impact is the Rocking Chair Project already having on the community?

“The ripples of change are everywhere,” Melony said, from energizing TLC staff about being a part of the magic that they are co-creating with families, to changing the way medical students perceive their role as physicians. Although parents may not be able to absorb all the information they are given through TLC’s programs, Melony stressed that people absorb and remember the experience they have at TLC, of being nurtured, cared for, valued, and respected. According to Melony, “What we can say for sure is that helping a parent to have a loving connection with their child is the best chance we have at making the world a healthier place. So giving the parent the opportunity to have a warm, close, nurturing connection with their child by providing them with a rocking chair seems like such a simple intervention, but its impact is huge.”

What are your hopes for the future of the Rocking Chair Project in Claremont?

Melony hopes that TLC can fulfill their capacity for the families they are able to serve through the Rocking Chair Project. She has observed huge engagement benefits to the rocking chair, both in helping to pique interest in the Rocking Chair Project and sustain engagement with participants. She and her team have also witnessed the power of the chair-building process as a tool to engage fathers in a way that they hadn’t been before. In one family, she reflected, the father had no interest in engaging in the home visit sessions. However, when the rocking chair was delivered, he got right up and joined in, and since then has been more engaged with his child. “He found his niche in the parenting process,” Melony remarked.

About TLC Family Resource Center in Claremont, NH

TLC also offers a range of services to children and families, including family support and child health services, home visits, and a comprehensive sexual health education program. One of TLC’s programs, Healthy Families America, offers home visiting services to high-risk families until their child turns three. The Rocking Chair Project is one component of the Healthy Families America program. To date, five families have been given rocking chairs and four more families are set to receive rocking chairs this fall.