

FEATURE STORY: ODE TO MOM'S LOVE FOR BABY: A QUEST FOR A HEALTHY START

Intercultural's **Healthy Start Program** seeks to engage pregnant and/or parenting women (particularly women in their first trimester of their pregnancy) and provide an array of health and social services including case management/home visiting, depression screening, and optimal child health and development. The program is an effective, community-based approach to fighting infant mortality and low birth-weight babies through case management and outreach programs targeting pregnant and parenting women. The program has promoted positive parent-child relationships; supported growth and development of the children by building trust; taught parents to identify strengths and learn problem-solving skills; and improved the family's support system through linkages and appropriate referrals to community resources. In recent years, providing clothing, supplies, diapers and holiday assistance have also been made possible for those requiring assistance.

According to Cassandra Rogers, LCSW, Director of Family Empowerment and Education Initiatives at Intercultural, Healthy Start Program creates a lasting foundation for the well-being of both mother and child. Cassandra leads Intercultural's Healthy Start program and is also otherwise known as the

resident champion. She works diligently with **the City of Philadelphia's Department of Public Health, Division of Maternal, Child and Family Health (DMCFH)** to ensure that the impact of these services and awareness to these important support is known and available. Cassandra explains that, "without the commitment and funding from DMCFH we cannot optimize the support to our pregnant and parenting moms".

To further understand the impact of Healthy Start, we reached out to one of Intercultural's Healthy Start employee and advocate. Tamara Shirer, Healthy Start Case Manager for Intercultural has been working in the social services arena for over fifteen (15) years, specializing in children and families. She explains that the work she does with pregnant or parenting women is exceptionally rewarding because each participant joins the program voluntarily. "Every mother/mother -to -be that comes to Intercultural's Healthy Start Program takes the initiative on her own. The program works very well because the participant is self-motivated and committed to making this work. Ideally, a parenting women and her child stays in the program for two years. Seventy-five (75%) percent of our participants continue in the program after initial contact, and over fifty

(50%) percent of all participants stay the full two years. More than these statistics, seeing the bond being the mother and her child, as well as the strength and growth in the family unit, is incredibly uplifting. I never tire of my partnership with the incredible moms I have been fortunate to support. I am lucky to be part of this start."



Tamara shared many stories of wonderful moms in the Healthy Start Program and it's very evident that she is passionate about her work. One story in particular, is the subject of this article's "Ode to Mom".

“THERE IS NO BETTER FEELING THAN THE MOVEMENT OF LIFE INSIDE YOU”



-- Author: Every Pregnant Mom

Her name is **Kiersten Adams**. She is 26 years old, a first time mom. She lives in West Philadelphia with her grandmother. She's live in West Philly all her life. Her sweet, sweet child's name is Cleo Marie Adams Ford, and she turns two years July 2018.



Kiersten came to Intercultural almost two years ago, when she was 8 months pregnant. Kiersten is a burst of energy and determination. On a scale of 1 to 10, she is 11. She changes the scale! Kiersten has stayed in the Intercultural Healthy Start

Program focusing on providing Cleo the best positive care, involves herself in other events and activities to promote healthy start and partners with her case manager and other Intercultural resources to leverage the most positive outcomes. Kiersten continues to breastfeed Cleo even now. Working with her case manager and additional resources at Intercultural, she learned to breastfeed properly, and she embraced the full benefits of breastfeeding her child. As her experience, confidence and commitment to Healthy Start grew, it took a passion on its own. Kiersten studied with the Maternal Care Coalition to become a Breastfeeding Peer Counselor. "My ultimate goal is to become a doula. I love the idea of helping and supporting women through all the stages of preparing and being a new mom". She is easily accessible and loves to support and coach other moms. She is an active consultant for Philadelphia Birthing Programs, as she is a true advocate for natural childbirth.

Kiersten graduated from University of North Carolina with a Bachelors in Musical Theater. In addition to working at a library, supporting other moms, she is a member of the Improv Troupe with White Pines Productions.



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"I enjoy performing because it allows me the chance to step outside of myself or, sometime, to explore a deeper part of myself that I was not in touch with."

Kiersten explains that she is a complex individual, highly motivated and able to do a lot of meaningful endeavors. She believes that all these are an extension of the "fire in her belly" that awoken when she added "mom" to her identity. Cleo is truly the most precious gift she is given. Each and every day she is provided a freshness of heart and spirit just by being a part of Cleo's wonderful world. Kiersten feels that helping other moms is truly just a way of expressing her joy and gratitude.

Curious as to where she sees herself in five years, Kiersten shares, "I see myself spending all of my available time with my family, being a perfect model of staying true to yourself and attracting what I deserve in life through persistence and positivity.

I will still be running my business and helping others and I will be continuing to expand my career in the arts."

When asked about Intercultural, Kiersten acknowledges that it's been a real blessing.



“I love the people at Intercultural and they do not hesitate to show love right back. I am so grateful for them. My life would not be the same without them. The people at Intercultural are their most valuable resource. I have gotten books, toys, clothes, and boundless access to information through their programs but the best thing I was given would have to be the relationships and the friendships that I would not have found otherwise.”