

Family Advisory Council



The NICU Family News is produced by the Shyan Sun, M.D. Neonatal Intensive Care Unit Family Advisory Council. It is designed to provide you with information we hope you will find useful during and after your family's NICU stay.

nicu Family News

Calling All Interested NICU Parents

You may not know it, but there are a number of ways that CBMC NICU parents like you can stay involved with this very special unit after going home with their babies. These interested parents, who call themselves "graduate parents," help current NICU parents and staff in many ways throughout the year. To get involved, fill out the short, three question form at discharge, available from your bedside nurse or discharge class nurse. You can also get involved or get more information by contacting Stephanie D'Andrea, NICU FAC Coordinator, at stephanie.dandrea@rwjbh.org.

Ways to help vary with the amount of time you can give. Some parents join the mailing list and help out with a special project of their choice or donate/deliver treats once a year or more. Others attend some, or all, of our monthly Family Advisory Council (FAC) meetings, held Wednesday nights. You can also write your personal NICU story for the NICU Family News newsletter to inspire other NICU families!

Some graduate parents even become fully trained hospital volunteers who lend support -- largely by phone, text and email -- to current NICU parents. This is called becoming a NICU Parent Buddy. Parent Buddies attend a 3-to-4-hour training to become experienced listeners who can give special emotional and informational support to parents who are currently in the NICU. While parents need to be out of the NICU for close to a year before they can be considered for the training, they can express their interest sooner. After your NICU experience, you could be a great source of peace and understanding for a current NICU family. The NICU Parent Buddy program coordinator matches trained parents with a family requesting support and they reach out to them to start the buddy relationship.

For more information about any of the ways you can help after you leave the NICU, or to get more information about Miracle Walk, the yearly fundraiser for the NICU in Verona Park, contact Stephanie (stephanie.dandrea@rwjbh.org). You can learn more about Stephanie on page 3 of this newsletter!

Did you know?

There are some great resources for you and your family in your black NICU Welcome Bag. Take a look and start using them right away! Every bag has:

- A NICU Resource Guide with all the NICU phone numbers and groups/classes we offer.
- A welcome kit with a NICU Journal, breast milk storage bottles and a cooler bag with ice packs for transporting breast milk.
- Scent cloths, a brochure about the NICU Parent Buddy Program, a hospital patient guide and a board book you can start reading to your baby RIGHT THIS MINUTE!

Let's Get To Know: Daniel Helfgott, MD *CBMC NICU Neonatologist*

Where did you do your education and professional training?

My training began in New York, where I completed medical school at New York Medical College in Valhalla, NY. I then pursued my Pediatric Residency Training at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital in New Brunswick, NJ, and concluded with my Neonatal-Perinatal Fellowship Training at Stony Brook. I am happy to join the team here.



How did you know you wanted to be a neonatologist?

I was drawn to neonatology because I find immense fulfillment in helping both our smallest patients and their families. The greatest reward is seeing a baby grow healthy and strong and eventually go home to their families. I'm particularly dedicated to providing comprehensive care for infants who face a more complex or challenging journey in the NICU, helping them overcome those crucial early hurdles.

What would you like to say to the staff and your new co-workers?

I want to express my sincere appreciation for the warm welcome I've received since arriving. Everyone has been incredibly supportive and collaborative, which has made my transition here seamless. I especially want to acknowledge the excellent nursing and respiratory therapy staff whose professionalism, dedication, and skill are evident every day, and I look forward to contributing to this remarkable team effort.

What suggestions or advice do you have for NICU families?

My biggest piece of advice is to be an active part of the care team. Please never hesitate to ask questions, especially during morning bedside rounds. Information is power, and the more you know about your baby's journey, the better prepared you'll feel for that long-awaited day when you finally get to bring your bundle of joy home. Remember: you are your baby's best and most important advocate. We are the medical experts, but you are the experts on your child, and your presence and voice are vital to their progress.

Anything else you would like to say to the families about your job or the NICU?

The NICU has its own unique rhythm—it can be very hectic one moment and incredibly quiet the next. I encourage you to lean into those quiet moments for “Kangaroo Care” (skin-to-skin contact), reading, or just speaking softly to your baby. These moments are great for bonding and development. It is also very important to take care of yourself. Be sure to rest and try to stay healthy as this will allow you to be fully present for the busy times, like when you're preparing for discharge. As doctors and nurses, we try to mirror this balance by providing "protected sleep" times for the babies, giving them the rest they need to rest, grow, and develop. We are all in this together to ensure your little one has the best start possible.

Would you be willing to share something you like to do in your free time?

I am a massive sports fan, particularly when it comes to the New York Jets. It has been a long 15 years since the last playoff appearance, but I remain a loyal (and admittedly occasionally tortured!) fan every single season.

Introducing Stephanie D'Andrea The New NICU FAC Coordinator and Ex-NICU Mama

"It's truly hard to believe that my little miracle baby was born in the NICU nine years ago this past Christmas Eve! I had been on bed rest in the hospital for 49 days after being diagnosed with something I never heard of called placenta accreta. Normally, the placenta detaches after childbirth. With placenta accreta, the placenta remains firmly attached to the uterus. This can cause a great deal of blood loss during delivery. Most women with placenta accreta wind up with a c-section and hysterectomy and are at risk for multiple blood transfusions. They also have an increased mortality rate from possible hemorrhaging. When my husband and I found this out, it was overwhelming news but my phenomenal OB/GYN explained everything to me in great detail and put me at ease by answering my many questions. While on bed rest in the hospital, I had several bleeds, small and big. There were moments I feared for my life and for my baby's life. The wonderful nurses treated me like family and kept my spirits up. I meditated. I prayed.

Mia and I managed to hang on until Christmas Eve morning when I woke up with a small bleed. It was go time! The possibility of everything that could go wrong in my delivery was terrifying, but I had the BEST doctors and nurses who assured me that I'd be OK. I managed to deliver Mia safely under anesthesia supported by a large team of doctors and nurses in the OR. We made it! Mia Lily was born at 3 pounds and almost 10 weeks early.

Immediately after giving birth, she was whisked away to the NICU. Her weight dropped to 2 pounds 8 ounces days later. She was so small and perfect. Her tiny head fit in the palm of our hands. Mia is truly our miracle baby. She mostly needed to feed and grow. From day one, the NICU doctors and nurses made us feel like Mia was in the best hands possible, which she was. Mia and I were in the hospital for exactly the same number of days. We visited her each of those 49 days. The NICU nurses became our family. They answered every question, every call. They wiped my tears and gave lots of hugs and pep talks. And then, three weeks before her 'due date,' Mia came home. Her big sister was so excited to meet her. Our little family was finally under one roof. We cannot thank the NICU doctors and nurses enough. They are still my family. They saved our lives, and we will be grateful forever.

Mia is now a happy, healthy 9-year-old who adores her family and friends. She plays softball on our town's travel team, is a cheerleader for the local football team, and enjoys gymnastics and dance. As for myself, from the very start of my crazy bedrest/NICU experience, I vowed I would do anything and everything to give back to this wonderful NICU and hospital.

Eight years ago, I joined the NICU Family Advisory Council (FAC) which is a group of former graduate NICU parents that volunteer their time to help support the families and staff in the NICU. I also spent three years on the planning committee for the Miracle Walk, the annual fundraiser for the CBMC NICU. This journey ultimately led me to the part-time job I recently began as the CBMC NICU Family Advisory Council Coordinator. As a NICU graduate



Important Phone Numbers

NICU: 973-322-5300

NICU Clinical Director:
973-322-8938

NICU Social Worker: 973-322-5503

NICU Case Managers:
973-322-5909/973-322-2678

Birth Certificate Office:
973-322-5327

Lactation Consultants:
973-322-9088

NICU High Risk Infant Follow-Up Program: 973-322-2631

Spiritual Care Department:
973-322-5015

Want to Help the Family Advisory Council?

The FAC is made up of graduate parents dedicated to helping new NICU parents. We meet monthly to discuss ways to do this. We're always looking for recent graduate parents to share their experiences and ideas to make our NICU the best it can be. We welcome your ideas and participation.

Contact: Stephanie D'Andrea
FAC Coordinator
stephanie.dandrea@rwjbh.org
973-322-9486

Family Advisory Council Accomplishments in 2025

- Continued Food Insecurity/Snack Donations for NICU Parents
- Continued NICU Parent Buddy Program
- Continued to provide feedback/input to NICU/hospital for family presence and visitor guidelines
- Continued Monthly, In-Person NICU Family Pizza Nights
- Updated NICU Family Messages of Hope on NICU TV Screens
- Increased Participation in National NICU Read-A-Thon
- Continued Making Welcome Bags with Board Books for all NICU Families
- Celebrations for Staff and Families on Special Occasions
- Continued Monthly FAC Meetings
- Continued Quarterly NICU Family Newsletter (with staff and family stories)
- Continued Weekly NICU 101 Meetings In-Person For Current NICU Families

Introducing Stephanie D'Andrea (continued from page 3)

parent who has walked through the emotional and uncertain journey so many families face, I am deeply committed to supporting parents and caregivers during one of the most challenging times in their lives. My personal experience has fueled my passion for ensuring that every family feels understood and supported throughout their NICU stay and beyond.

Please get in touch with me at stephanie.dandrea@rwjbh.org if you are interested in learning about ways you might give back to the NICU after you take your baby home." - Stephanie

Save The Date The 26th Annual Miracle Walk Sunday, October 4, 2026

The 26th Annual Miracle Walk to benefit the Shyan Sun, M.D. Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Cooperman Barnabas Medical Center will be held on Sunday, October 5 at Verona Park. Bring the whole family and enjoy the DJ, face painting, complimentary bagels/donuts and coffee, all while raising money for our favorite cause.

Learn more and register your family or a whole team now at miraclegwalk.com or facebook.com/miraclegwalk

