

Precious Memories

Helping Parents Record

Every Wednesday and Saturday, parents with children in the Texas Children's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) get a chance to build memories even if their new baby isn't home yet. That's when the volunteers of FirstMemories Texas help parents make albums and scrapbooks and write journals to chronicle their baby's life.

FirstMemories Texas is the brainchild of Jenna Caswell-Nassif, a NICU social worker, and Kirsten Jordon, a mom who has had two babies in the NICU. Avid scrapbookers themselves, Jordon and Caswell-Nassif knew firsthand the therapeutic value of focusing on the positive during stressful moments by taking photos and putting their stories in keepsake albums.

So Jordon and friend Shannon Blake founded FirstMemories in April 2007 with one photo printer and some scrapbooking supplies they collected from about two dozen other scrapbookers. The group provides parents the supplies to build memory cards and create albums, including photographs of their baby, decorative paper, stickers and pens. The NICU staff often asks the volunteers to photograph moments such as when a parent holds their infant for the first time.

"We encourage the parents to celebrate even the smallest of milestones, such as when their baby takes their first bottle after being

on a feeding tube," said Blake. "We tell them that this is their baby's story and it should be honored and celebrated, even if there are tubes, monitors and incisions in the photos."

Volunteers show parents how to put their pages and cards together, and make suggestions for journaling. The group makes sure bilingual volunteers are available every week for NICU's many Spanish-speaking parents. For parents who don't want to leave their child's bedside, FirstMemories volunteers will even take photos and make a story card for them.

"Since the average NICU stay is two weeks, we see most of our parents once or twice and they usually make story cards," said Jordon. "But we have some parents that we see for months and they usually work on albums. They get to know other parents over our table and it gives them support to talk to someone who is going through the same things."

In 2008, FirstMemories' 18 volunteers worked more than 1,000 hours, printed an amazing 3,400 photos and served more than 400 families.

Learn more about FirstMemories Texas at www.firstmemoriestexas.org or by contacting Volunteer Services. 🍷

—by JESSICA JOHNS POOL





Volunteers Irma Ritchie (above left) and Jean Chapman (far right) are two of 18 volunteers who help parents of children in the Texas Children's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) make albums and scrapbooks and write journals to chronicle their baby's life.

