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Family-Centered Support for NICU Patients, Parents and Families

The request: The Valley Hospital Foundation respectfully asks for your support to fund the continuation of the Family Support Program in Valley's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). The program provides significant support and resources for NICU parents and extended families during what can be an unexpected, lengthy, and challenging hospital experience.

The Family Support program, launched in 2015, is a critical service for NICU families. Valley's 22-bed Level 3 NICU cares for Valley's smallest and most vulnerable babies, and NICU babies receiving care might spend weeks or months in the NICU, long after their parents have been discharged home from the hospital. While the infant is cared for by a dedicated team of clinical professionals, parents and families receive much-needed emotional support from Valley's Family Support Program.

Funding would support the following needs:

- *Full-time Family Support Specialist certified in perinatal mental health*
- *Ongoing training for Family Support Specialist and key staff members in the NICU to best support parents and families; professional conference attendance costs*
- *Parent education during and after NICU hospitalization*
- *Programming for ongoing celebrations in the hospital – holidays, milestones, Mother's Day, Father's Day, etc.*
- *Support for annual Camp NICU event for NICU graduates and families to reunite with staff and provide ongoing support network*

Background: For families of infants in the NICU, the post-birth family experience is unique: life-saving protocols necessarily separate mothers from their vulnerable babies; patients face a variety of health challenges; natural instincts are disrupted; and stress levels are heightened. The experience can be an isolating one, with the world moving on around the parents. The goal of the Family Support Program is to provide a *normal* experience in an *abnormal* environment.

The Family Support Program is led by a dedicated Family Support Specialist, certified in perinatal mental health. The specialist is an integral member of the NICU's developmental care team and is a daily support to parents and extended families, offering opportunities to talk, sharing advice, celebrating milestones and meaningful occasions with families, and creating special experiences for patients, siblings, and families during and after their hospital.

Case for Support: NICU Family Support Program



In addition, the Family Support Specialist also provides bereavement support services and connects families – many of whom will face special needs challenges as a result of their infant’s prematurity – with resources long after their NICU graduation.