



Implementing a Volunteer Cuddler Program in the NICU

Alison McLennan, MSW, RSW, Marion DeLand, RNC-NIC, MN & Maria Parzanese, RN, MN



TAHSNp Innovation Fellowship Program, Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre

Introduction & Background

- The Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre is a 42 bed, regional level III with single patient rooms.
- Parental presence, in the form of comforting touch, is a proven benefit to the development and recovery of high-risk neonates (Jefferies, 2012).
- However, many parents have limited availability to provide this care to their newborns throughout hospitalization due to competing family and financial obligations. Staff are also limited in the types of additional support they can provide due to clinical responsibilities.
- This unit has access to 3 volunteers who provide comforting touch to infants in parents' absence, yet their service is underutilized due to a lack of program infrastructure.



Objectives

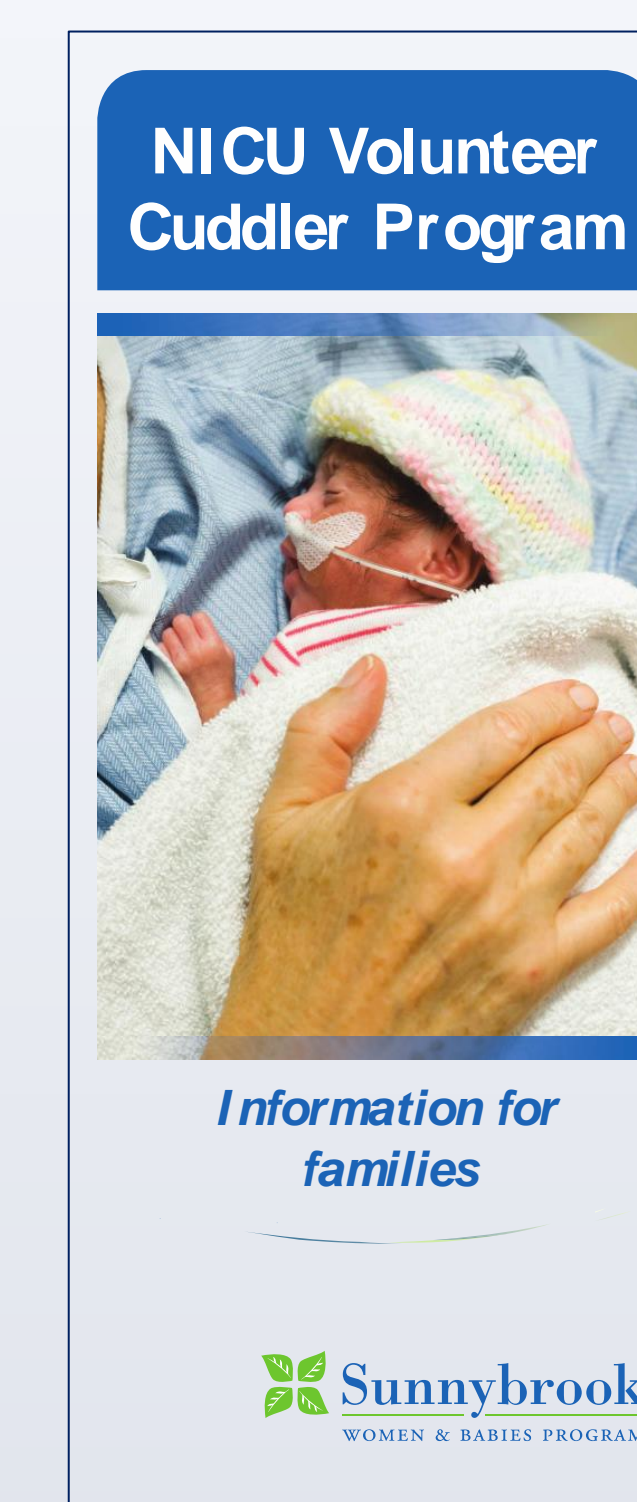
The purpose of this quality improvement project is to increase volunteer service provision in the NICU by implementing a formal cuddler program. Secondary objectives include:

- 1) Increasing staff knowledge regarding formal program implementation, including referral process
- 2) Increasing referrals to the program by 30% within 6 months
- 3) Increasing the number of infants receiving service from volunteers by 30% within 6 months.

Improvement

The following actions were taken to meet project objectives:

- External needs assessment through consultation with 6 NICU's across North America (two level II's & four level III's)
- Internal needs assessment through consultation with Volunteer Resources, program leadership, Legal Services, Clinical Ethics Center, Risk Management, & point of care staff
- Establishment of formal program components including role description, referral process, information pamphlets, and NICU volunteer cuddler orientation
- Provision of education to NICU staff regarding program formalization
- Conduction of semi-structured interviews with parents regarding their experience with Volunteer Cuddlers



Results

- 116 interdisciplinary staff members attended education sessions regarding the formalization of the program
- 77% identified an increase in their knowledge regarding the referral process
- There was a 28% increase in the number of referrals per total admissions (within 6 month period), whereby service was provided to all those referred

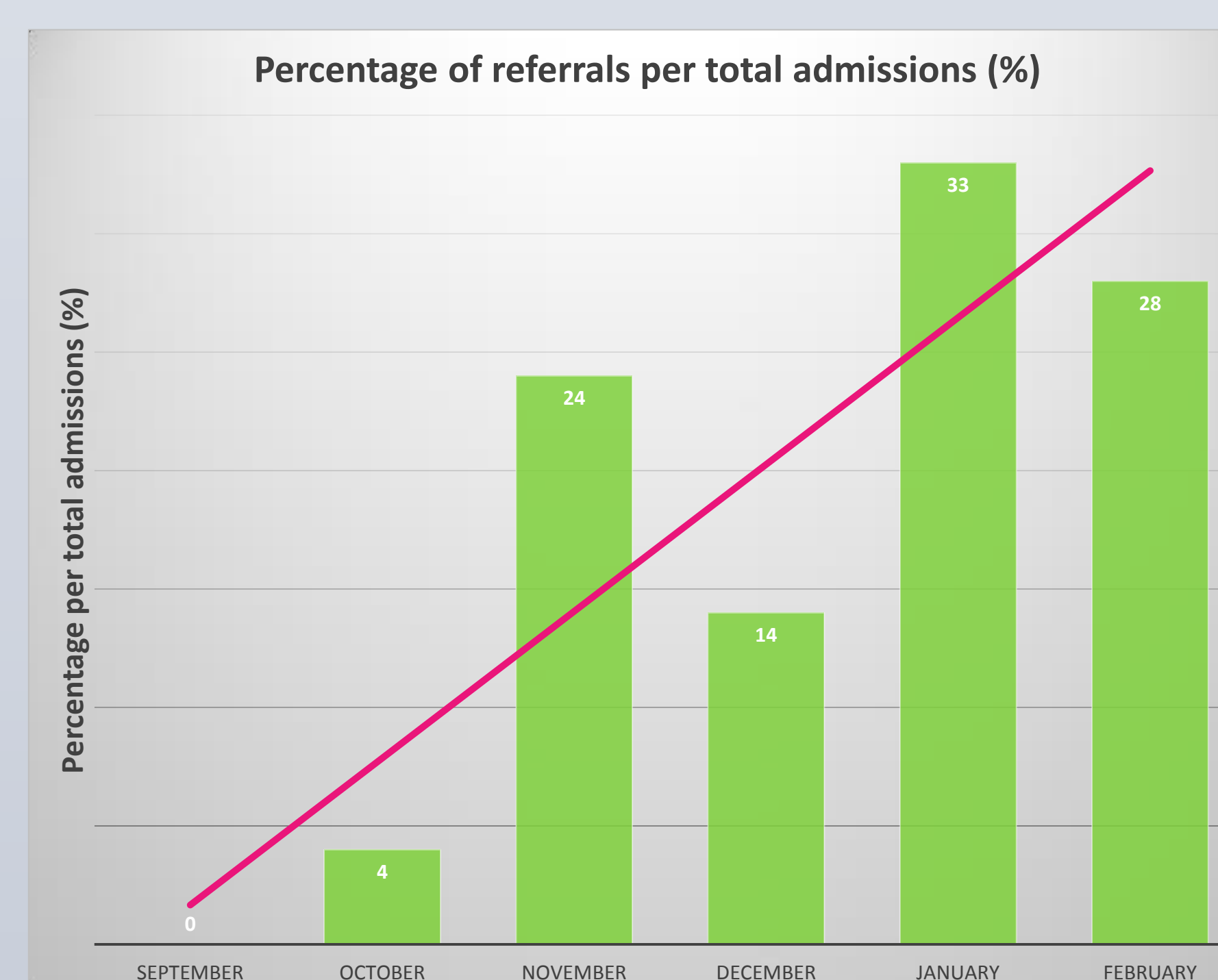
Staff Education:

Qualitative feedback from staff education sessions:

"I think this program has the potential for being a great asset to our unit and hope that it gets embraced by staff"

"We need cuddlers overnight. We need cuddlers to hold for longer than 1 hour."

Referrals and Service Provision:



Note: Service was provided to all infants referred, however, the time spent with each infant decreased as the number of referrals increased

All 4 parents that participated in interviews conveyed satisfaction with the program, and identified 2 aspects to be the most valuable:

1) An increased sense of "ease", "comfort", "relaxation", or a reduced sense of "guilt" in their absence

2) An appreciation for the journal written by the volunteers about the time spent with their baby

Project Impact & Plan for Sustainability

- Results indicate an increase in staff knowledge regarding the formalization of the cuddler program, with a likely association in the increase of referrals.
- Sustainability measures will include:
 - 1) Education sessions will be incorporated into new staff orientation
 - 2) Champions are being identified to assist with ongoing maintenance of the cuddler program



Next Steps

- NICU orientation of existing and newly recruited Volunteer Cuddlers
- Ongoing recruitment would allow for more time spent with each infant
- Explore possibilities for future research and evaluation

References

Jefferies, A. (2012). Kangaroo care for the preterm infant and family. *Pediatric Child Health*, 17(3), 141-143.

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- For more information on this project contact alison.mclennan@sunnybrook.ca