



School of Allied Health Professions

THE FLOURISH PROJECT

GROWING HOPE FOR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES IMPACTED BY POOR BIRTH OUTCOMES



In 2008, 12.3% of live births—over 540,000 infants—were born prematurely

Preterm birth is the leading cause of infant mortality in the U.S.

The U.S. goal is to reduce the preterm birth rate to 7.6%

Economic Impact of Preterm Birth in the U.S.

- \$26.2 billion annually
- \$51,600 for each preterm infant
- Average first year medical cost for preterm infant is 10 times that of a full term infant. (*Institute of Medicine, 2006*)

The Flourish Project in the UNMC School of Allied Health Professions facilitates the health and development of infants, families and communities impacted by poor birth outcomes. Faculty conduct family and community-centered research to develop solutions aimed at improving birth outcomes, and are committed to community outreach programs that are responsive to the concerns of family and communities impacted by poor birth outcomes.

Vision Statement

The health of families and communities will be optimized to support healthy birth outcomes and infant development.

Mission Statement

- ◆ Conduct community-based participatory research to reduce disparities in birth outcomes.
- ◆ Conduct family-centered research to grow healthy maternal-preterm infant relationships.
- ◆ Provide education and outreach to advance the knowledge and skills of families, communities, healthcare providers and scholars caring for preterm infants.

For more information contact

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Preterm Births in Nebraska

- In 2009 11.9% (3,000) of Nebraska's infants Nebraska were delivered preterm
- In some Nebraska counties the preterm birth rate is 15-18% of all births
- Nebraska ranks 19th in the nation for its preterm birth rate
- Nebraska recently received a "D" on the March of Dimes National Report Card for Prematurity
- During an average week in Nebraska, 64 babies are born preterm



Research and Outreach Projects

Synchrony Project

There is great concern regarding the impact of preterm birth on the development of maternal-infant attachment, and the impact this may have on the infant's future cognitive and emotional development. Preterm birth is a traumatic event that results in an increased risk of acute mental health problems for the mother, and increased early life stress for the infant. Both of these outcomes are known to impact cognitive and emotional development.

For newborn infants, the maternal voice represents a unique and potentially critical contribution to attachment and subsequent neurodevelopment. Likewise, maternal song stimulates the infant to attend and respond to the mother, thus helping her learn her baby's behavioral cues and develop a sense of parental competency. Preterm birth causes an interruption in the steady input of maternal voice to the developing fetal brain.

We are studying the effects of a maternal sound/music intervention on the well-being of preterm infants and their mothers. We predict that infant directed singing will:

- 1) Produce beneficial effects on preterm infant physiological state, behavioral development and growth.
- 2) Improve maternal-preterm infant attachment and maternal mental health.



This family-centered work is initiated in the NICU and continues to support the maternal-infant relationship following discharge to home. Our team provides important help as the family makes the transition from NICU to home.

Connections Project

A research and outreach effort consisting of three community-based programs that work synergistically to form vital connections at individual and community levels to support healthy African American pregnancies and families, and thus reduce disparities in birth outcomes.

The three programs are:

- ◆ A WIC-based peer support program for pregnant women aimed at improving the mental health of pregnant women and their peer supporter.
- ◆ A community-based lecture/discussion series that allows community members to identify and prioritize problems and potential solutions associated with poor birth outcomes in their community, and learn solution strategies.
- ◆ Engaging local African American female community leaders in a community health advocacy leadership training program as a means of promoting project sustainability.



Our organized implementation and thorough study of these programs will result in community tailored efforts that improve birth outcomes and promote healthy families in African American communities.

Giving Opportunities

These gifts will advance the **Flourish Project** to improve the lives and health of mothers and infants in Nebraska

Endowed Chair
\$500,000

Endowed Professorship
\$250,000

Preterm infant cognitive neuroscience assessment equipment
\$500,000