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***Media members: Photos of the graduation ceremony are available.**

New moms graduate from county program

It was not your typical graduation ceremony in Riverside on Thursday. There were the participates, of course, wearing the traditional cap and gown.

There were dozens of family and friends congratulating the graduates for their accomplishments, and speeches by officials, along with lots of hugs and tears. But this ceremony for the Nurse-Family Partnership Program included several diaper changes and a search for a lost binky before it could move forward.

The ceremony concluded a two-year journey that started for 24 first-time moms who joined the program operated by the Riverside University Health System-Public Health.

The Nurse-Family Partnership matches first-time mothers with nurses who help the mom through the months of pregnancy, childbirth then follow up

with assistance after the baby arrives. The mother and child are visited in their home regularly over two years by public health nurses.

The nurse visits include monitoring pregnancy for complications, providing information on what to expect at the time of delivery, and instructions on how the mother should care for herself and the child at home. The participants come from a wide section of western Riverside County, including Riverside, Moreno Valley, Corona and Perris. There were 25 children born during the two years (One mother had twins) of the program.

After some tiny battles with toddlers who stubbornly argued against donning the blue cap and gown, the ceremony started with the traditional procession of graduates into the conference room. There were speeches by nurses and graduates, some who tearfully recalled their struggles and accomplishments. More tears. More hugs.

“One of the keys to the success of the program is the bond that develops between the new mothers and the nurses,” said Stephanie Bryant, nurse manager who oversees the program. “That bond was clearly seen during the ceremony. The mothers work very hard during the two years and that hard work will pay off over the many years of being a parent.”

This is the 16th year for the program that targets low-income woman.

There is no cost to the participants. Information: 951-358-5438 or www.rivcoph.org

