



## The Tara Meyer Story

When she first heard about a new position as a service coordinator for Cook Children's STAR Kids program, Tara Meyer, BSN, RN, couldn't help but be intrigued.

She'd already worked in surgery, labor and delivery, high risk pregnancy care, home health and school nursing, but this was something different.

"It wasn't like any other nursing I had done. Being a service coordinator sounded like a new challenge for me," Meyer said. "As a Level 1 service coordinator it's very important to have a nursing background. This position has to coordinate care and services for some of our most medically complex children and adults. In addition, part of the screening assessment tool we use must be completed by a registered nurse."

STAR Kids provides Medicaid benefits for children and young adults under the age of 21 who have disabilities. Meyer currently has 41 Level I STAR Kid members on her caseload. The majority of the Members enrolled through the State's Medically Dependent Children Program (MDCP).

The MDCP waiver is for children and young adults who have the most complex medical conditions. Unlike other Medicaid programs, MDCP eligibility waives the income of the family and only considers the income of the child in recognition of the extreme financial burden families of these children face.

The ultimate goal is to keep the medically complex children and young adults at home and in the community and out of the hospital. Meyer helps do this by identifying services or resources that the family and child need to stay safe and be healthy at home. That may be through coordinating private duty nursing, therapies, in-home medical equipment, etc.

"Our families need to know that they can trust us to arrange the best care for their children," Meyer said. "I don't feel like I have just their child on my caseload. I feel like I have the entire family. It's not uncommon to sit in the home and have a sibling



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crawl up in your lap. Or the family dog lick you like crazy. Once you get to know the whole family, you start to understand what it's going to take to develop a good plan of care. One of the things I like to tell parents is, 'I may be the professional in this relationship, but you are the expert. No one knows your child like you know your child.'"

Meyer hopes that simple phrase lets parents know she's not going to go into their home and tell them how to run the show. Every family is at a different point in their journey and she said it's her job to meet them where they are and assist them in getting everything their child needs to thrive.

"STAR Kids families are amazing! A typical day for many of our families involves a revolving door of people in and out of their home...therapists, attendants, nurses, case managers, medical equipment deliveries," Meyer said. "Can you imagine? There's not a day goes by that I am not reminded of how strong our families and children are. Even when they feel tired and weak they are far stronger than I can ever dream of being. They are doing such a good job and they deserve a lot of credit."

After nursing school and even all of her professional nursing experience, service coordination and case management isn't at all what Meyer envisioned for herself. But now she says she wouldn't want to be anywhere else.

"I wanted to be where the action was ... starting IVs and pushing meds. But I can see that this role challenges you every day and you learn to develop different critical thinking skills," she said. "I'm definitely growing as a nurse in this role!"



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