Ann Stadtler, DNP, RN, CPNP: Leaving a Lasting Legacy

Ann Stadtler, DNP, RN, CPNP, knew early in life what she wanted to be when she grew up. As the oldest of four girls, Ann recalls the value placed on family and education, and serving as a strong role model for her younger sisters. “We were an amazing, busy, wonderful family,” Ann says, adding that she learned early on one thing she wanted for herself and her future – to be a mother.

Her family’s emphasis on education led Ann to another aspiration, that of being a nurse. “I loved the idea of taking care of people,” she says, with that love leading her to many new and unique opportunities throughout her storied career. Starting out as a charge nurse in an emergency room, Ann immediately gravitated to helping families navigate difficult and stressful situations. “I loved the crisis of the ER, and the relational aspect of helping families and taking care of them,” she adds.

Moving seven times in eight years following her marriage to John Stadtler, then an active duty Marine who served in Vietnam shortly after their first son was born, Ann found strength in her family, which carried her through uncertainties and fears. Perhaps no one more than her Grandma Minahan embodied Ann’s powerful and supportive family dynamic, cultivating Ann’s inner strengths as a new parent, and the confidence that her baby would help guide her forward and show her how to be a mom, a parent, and a caregiver.

As Ann’s self-awareness of her strengths as a parent empowered her as a mother, so too was she empowered as a provider in her role as a nurse who believed that primary care could be more supportive of families. Joining a private pediatric practice after settling down with her family in Maryland, Ann immediately became an advocate for partnering with parents, and of the importance of working with families to help them discover their own strengths. Among her responsibilities were to see newborns in the hospital following delivery, and meet with parents on their two week visits.

Always the trailblazer, Ann was the first Pediatric Nurse Practitioner in Montgomery County, MD and found herself visiting newborns and their families in a hospital where a sign outside the nursery read “No NPs in the Nursery.” Not the least bit discouraged, Ann seized the opportunity to model the change she wanted to see in the world, and after much diligent advocacy, persuaded the hospital to let her volunteer to teach newborn assessment to the nurses in the nursery. Ann’s familiarity with the Neonatal Behavioral Assessment Scale and her application of it in her interactions with nurses and families was an immediate success, and set the stage for her later work on family engagement.

After eight years in private practice, Ann and her family moved to Greater Boston, where she became the associate director of the Developmental Medicine Center at Boston Children’s Hospital, the leading pediatric hospital in the United States. It was here that Ann’s life goals and passions converged and helped catalyze a transformation in the fields of pediatrics, early care, and family engagement. Having watched Dr. Brazelton on television, studied his books, and very much lived a strengths-based approach to her parenting and professional practice akin to what Dr. Brazelton encouraged in parents, Ann suddenly found herself interacting with him on a daily basis. An inspiration in her life was now a colleague and thought partner – a gift Ann feels blessed for every day. While working in clinics with parents, Ann pioneered a family-centered approach to toilet training called Toilet School, which has since helped hundreds of parents and families navigate the challenges of toilet training, and proved so effective that it inspired a book Ann and her colleague Claudia Quigg published in 2017.

In the mid-nineties, Dr. Brazelton invited Ann to join him in founding the Brazelton Touchpoints Center, and with just enough funding to cover their work in the very beginning, she seized the opportunity and hit the ground running. Ann played a critical role early on, helping to design the first professional development programs offered by the Center, piloting them with nurses in Boston, and then scaling them through programs in Illinois, California, and South Carolina.
Through Ann’s leadership and vision, those initial programs grew to become what today is the Touchpoints Site Network, which brings organizations actively practicing Touchpoints together to share knowledge, solutions, and strategies for family-centered care and engagement.

The Touchpoints Site Network and Professional Development Program are legacies Ann leaves as she retires from a career spent making a real and tangible impact on thousands of families, children and providers. And that legacy carries on through the Network, which, just as Ann’s grandmother embodied her strong supportive family environment, the Network embodies Ann’s commitment to Touchpoints and the transformative outcomes it has for providers, and the children and families with whom they work.

Reflecting back on a career spent with children and families, Ann has much wisdom to share, even as she has stayed true to Dr. Brazelton’s ethos of never giving advice unless asked for it (we asked!). Ann shares that “For parents, I always encourage them to be willing to learn from your mistakes, and find people who are willing to partner with you, listen to you, and come along side you” on the parenting journey. For providers working with children and families, Ann espouses the value of “not assuming you know all the answers and in helping parents see solutions as their own, and not something someone has given them.” And having completed her Doctor of Nursing degree from Boston’s prestigious Northeastern University as an adult learner much later in life, Ann also encourages everyone to “never stop learning.”

As Ann settles into a new routine in retirement, she knows she will never be far away from her work and colleagues, watching every step everyone takes on their own journeys, and always there for support. And, there are six grandchildren and a host of new pursuits, including serving as co-chair of the DNP Advisory Committee at her alma mater, and a new game called pickle ball she’s discovered while enjoying the Florida sunshine as a newly minted retiree. But that’s a story for another time…