

Pittsburgh

A Safer Childbirth City



We are proud to be a Safer Childbirth City

PROGRAM REVIEW



JEWISH
HEALTHCARE
FOUNDATION

WHAMglobal



WOMEN'S HEALTH ACTIVIST MOVEMENT



Pittsburgh: A Safer Childbirth City is an initiative to transform the city into a safer, more equitable, and accessible place to give birth. The initiative is built on recognizing the importance of collaborating and listening to mothers and their families to address Pittsburgh's disparities in maternal health outcomes to build a better future for moms in Pittsburgh.

The finale event was the culmination of the collaboration of local nonprofits working to improve coordination and quality of care among Pittsburgh service providers, train midwives and other health professionals, and support the local maternal health movement.

History

The Safer Childbirth Cities Initiative was created by Merck for Mothers to foster local solutions that help cities become safer - and more equitable - places to give birth. Pittsburgh was selected by Merck for Mothers as their tenth grantee, part of the inaugural Safer Childbirth Cities cohort announced in 2019.

Through a \$1 million multi-year grant from Merck for Mothers, Jewish Healthcare Foundation (JHF), its operating arm, the Women's Health Activist Movement Global (WHAMglobal), and numerous community partners launched Pittsburgh: A Safer Childbirth City in December 2019, aiming to transform the city into a safer, more equitable and accessible place to give birth.



Perinatal Health Equity Champions Program participants gather on June 14, 2022 to kick off the program.

The Disparities

According to a 2015-2016 Community Health Assessment, the Allegheny County Health Department (ACHD) reported that of 3,348 births, Black women in Pittsburgh were more likely to:

- Not access prenatal care in the first trimester (12.7% compared to 10.8% reported on white women)
- Experience low birth weight (13.7% compared to 6.7% reported on births to white women)
- Not breastfeed (33.6% compared to 17.9% reported on white women)

Project Overview

The three-year plan for the *Pittsburgh: A Safer Childbirth City* initiative was designed around four pillars:

1. Care delivery model re-design and systems change
2. Workforce innovation and training
3. Local movement building
4. Community engagement and volunteerism



Programmatic Goals

- Narrow health disparities among mothers in Pittsburgh by improving access to comprehensive and high-quality evidence-based maternity care through the establishment of the WHAMglobal Community Fund.
- Build a community-driven campaign around safer childbirth to support regional efforts.
- Train and support local mothers as maternal and child health advocates, co-creators, and catalysts for change through the Community Advisory Group.
- Improve postpartum health outcomes for mothers in Pittsburgh and decrease incidence of maternal mortality and morbidity through the Mothers Supporting Mothers Program.
- Locally translate key interventions from the PA PQC by connecting the local healthcare facilities in the PA PQC to the city-wide coalition of community partners.
- Build local momentum, visibility, and support for maternal and child health issues and public policies.
- Support and promote health equity and multidisciplinary maternity care teams through the establishment of a Perinatal Champions Program and other workforce training and coaching initiatives.





Pittsburgh

A Safer Childbirth City



Community Fund

Smart Start



Perinatal Health Equity Champions



Community Advisory

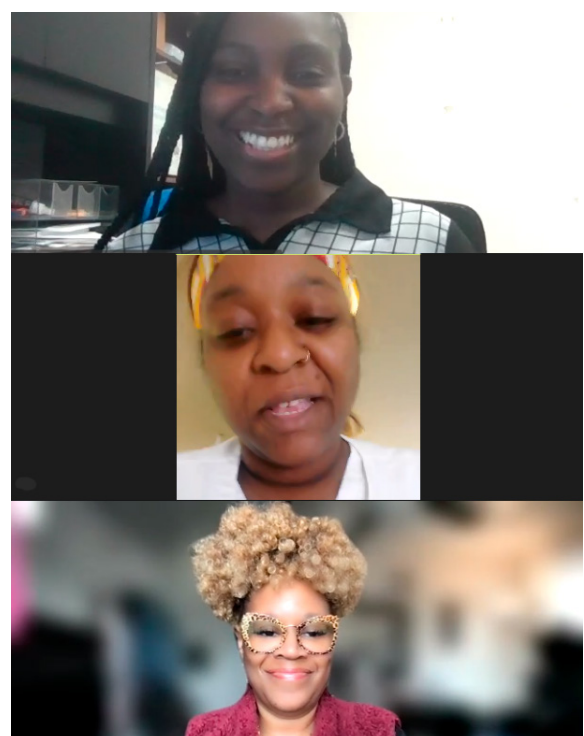


Birthing a Movement



Program Activities

1. **WHAMglobal Community Fund** improves collaboration and coordination among local service providers with individual organization projects, a collaborative project (The Shanga Collective), and creation of a shared resource hub.
2. **Community Advisory** listens and engages local mothers in collaboration with [Healthy Start, Inc.](#)
3. **“Mothers Supporting Mothers”** volunteer program with Hello Neighbor, now known as [“Smart Start,”](#) was created.
4. **Birthing A Movement** promotes awareness and support in the community.
5. **Perinatal Health Equity Champions Program** pairs community birth workers with hospital birth workers to complete a didactic Quality Improvement course then collaborate on community-led QI projects to improve perinatal care.



Partners

The Pittsburgh: A Safer Childbirth City coalition includes: The Mayor of Pittsburgh, Allegheny County Health Department and Department of Human Services, City and State Representatives, UPMC Magee-Womens Hospital, UPMC Health Plan, Highmark Health, Highmark Inc., Hillman Family Foundations, The Heinz Endowments, Gateway Health, Jewish Women’s Foundation of Greater Pittsburgh, Healthy Start, Kids Plus Pediatrics, and the American College of Nurse-Midwives PA Affiliate, among other partners.

Perinatal Health Equity Champions

*Iyanna Bridges, The Birthing Hut**
Montia Brock, Mind, Breast, Womb, LLC.
*Amber Edmunds, MAYA Organization**
*Kieashia Edwell, Elephant Song Doula Services**
*Aya Eliza-Christie, The Midwife Center**
*Selena Eisenberg, Igi Osè - Traditional Birth Services**
Jessica Forte, St. Clair Hospital
*Syreeta Gordon, Kangaroo Birthing**
Kimberly Graves, UPMC Magee*
Shawndel Laughner, St. Clair Hospital*
Alexa Morrison, UPMC Magee*
Bonita Pannell, UPMC Magee*
Abby Jo Perez, Hello Neighbor
Dionna Rojas Orta, Brown Mamas
Natalie Shovlin-Bankole, UPMC Magee
Ashley Whigham, Family Links

Note: Titles and credentials were intentionally left off throughout the Champs program as a way to minimize traditional healthcare power dynamics and to build meaningful, trusting and collaborative relationships.

PHEC Advisory Members

Chanel Allen
BeLinda Berry
Iyanna Bridges
Christy Cozby
Chaunda Cunningham, LSW
Amber Edmunds
Kieashia Edwell
Abimbola Fapohunda, Dr.PH, MPH, MS
Syreeta Gordon
Jodie Hnatkovich, LPC, PMH-C, CPLC
Rochelle Jackson
Kandis Mason, MPH, CLC, LCCE, CTTS, CHC
Emily McGahey, DM, MSN, CNM, FACNM
Muffy Mendoza
Tammy Murdock, MD
Mone’t Olivis
Debra Thompson, PhD, RN, NEA-BC, FAA

*Completed Full Program
Community Champion
Healthcare Champion



Funding for *Pittsburgh: A Safer Childbirth City*,
generously provided by:



[Merck for Mothers](#) is Merck's global initiative to help create a world where no woman has to die while giving life. Merck for Mothers commits resources to invent and enhance existing solutions to tackle some of the most critical obstacles standing in the way of delivering quality maternity care and contraceptive services in low- and middle-income countries.

THE HEINZ ENDOWMENTS

HOWARD HEINZ ENDOWMENT

VIRA I. HEINZ ENDOWMENT

[The Heinz Endowments](#) is a regional foundation formed from the Howard Heinz Endowment, established in 1941, and the Vira I. Heinz Endowment, established in 1986. It is the product of a deep family commitment to community and the common good that began with H.J. Heinz, and which continues to this day.

The Endowments is based in Pittsburgh, which they use as a laboratory for the development of solutions to challenges that are national in scope. Although the majority of their giving is concentrated within southwestern Pennsylvania, they work wherever necessary, including statewide and nationally, to fulfill their mission. That mission is to help our region become a just and equitable community in which all of its citizens thrive economically, ecologically, educationally, socially, and culturally.



Pittsburgh

A Safer Childbirth City

FINALE **THUR** **KELLY**
OCT 19 **STRAYHORN**
THEATER

The Finale Gala event provided a venue for community leaders, legislators, JHF Board members, and members of the philanthropic community to hear from these critical community organizations supporting Black mothers and their families, and network with allies and leaders working toward equitable Black maternal outcomes.

"The Pittsburgh: A Safer Childbirth City project is a testament to what can be achieved when we unite to prioritize equity and partnership, and it serves as a beacon of hope for maternal health care across the nation," JHF and WHAMglobal Board Chair Debra Caplan, MPA said. "It has shown that when individuals, community, health care systems, and community-based organizations come together with a shared purpose, extraordinary transformations can occur. The accomplishments over the past four years have not only preserved lives but have also kindled hope, inspiration, and empowerment among countless mothers and families across Pittsburgh."

During the Gala, community partners shared and reflected on their work, the support of the program and its impact, as well as the future for Black mothers and birthing people in Pittsburgh. Presenters included Kieshia DeShawn of Elephant Song Doula Services, Amber Edmunds of the MAYA Organization, Muffy Mendoza of Brown Mamas, who presented a clip from the "Brown Mama Monologues," and Syreeta Gordon of Kangaroo Birthing, who also presented a preview of the documentary film "Her Dreams: A Story of the Future of Black Birth."

Some presenters, like The Birthing Hut Founder Iyanna Bridges, shared personal experiences that led them to birthwork and advocacy. Bridges was led to this work by the traumatic experience of her fourth birth, during which she learned about doulas and why it is so important for Black birthing people to have nonbiased support to speak on their behalf during pregnancy and birth.

As a result of that experience, she created the Blacktivist Birthkeeper Training, her own curriculum, certification, and training program for Black woman inspired to be



birth workers in Pittsburgh to bring Black culture, traditional practices, ancestral wisdom and respect of the Black birthing experience. She recently certified the third cohort of Black birthworkers.

"A Black woman is four-times more likely to die from complications from labor and delivery than other women. Sixty percent of those deaths are preventable and it's horrific that this maternal health disparity has yet to be solved," said Bridges, outlining how The Birthing Hut works to combat these statistics with customizable birth services and birth and postpartum planning and support. "We are changing the birth climate within Pittsburgh. We are working to build the Black maternal health profession itself so that we can be side-by-side with our physicians and nurses and midwives and help combat the disparities."

State Representative La'Tasha D. Mayes, a decades-long advocate for Black maternal health and reproductive justice, highlighted forward legislative movement on maternal health issues with the launch of the Pennsylvania Black Maternal Caucus, introduction of the Dignity for Incarcerated Women Act, and SB 262, which would add "severe maternal morbidity" to the list of reportable events within the Pennsylvania Department of Health.

Rep. Mayes also highlighted the Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act, a bicameral bill with the goal of saving the lives of mothers and addressing every dimension of the maternal health crisis in the United States. The 13 individual bills included in the Act will make investments in the social determinants of health that impact maternal health outcomes, extend WIC eligibility, fund community-based organizations working to improve maternal health and promote equity, increase funding for maternal health care for veterans, grow and diversify the perinatal workforce, improve data collection processes and quality measures, support moms with maternal mental health conditions and substance use disorders, improve care and support for incarcerated moms, invest in digital tools to improve maternal health outcomes in underserved areas, and more.

"This work is your legacy. You're doing healing work. You're doing ancestral work. You're doing reproductive justice work. You are doing blessed work. You are doing powerful work. You are doing transforming, life-changing work. Never doubt the idea or the work that you're doing. I'm living proof that if you can do it in Pittsburgh, you can do it anywhere," Rep. Mayes said.



PITTSBURGH: A SAFER CHILDBIRTH CITY

Community Partners

Located across the Pittsburgh region, Pittsburgh: A Safer Childbirth City partners are programs whose work fills the gaps in maternal health delivery and provide crucial services to the community.

Many of these organizations are birthing-focused and prioritize Black birthing people and their support systems across the Pittsburgh region. Several partners offer training courses and skills-building opportunities, bolstering the maternal health workforce and assisting parents-to-be.

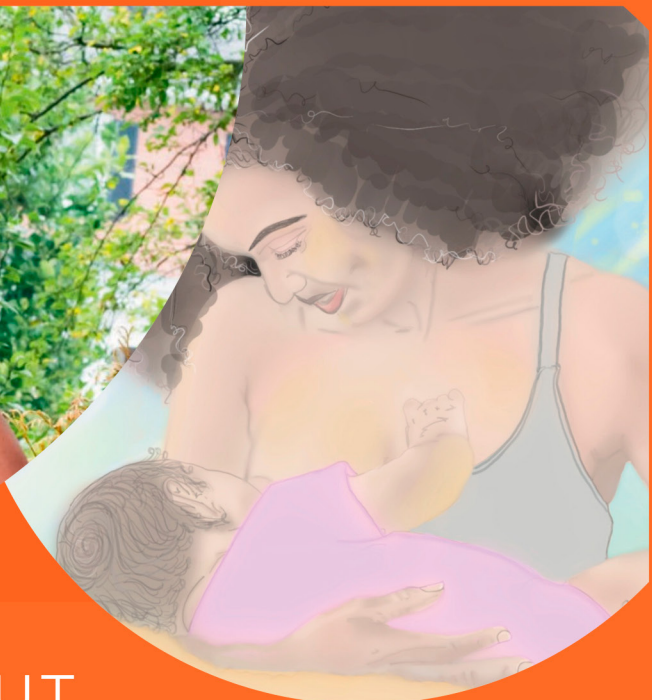


Perinatal Health Equity Champions Projects

The Jewish Healthcare Foundation and WHAMglobal facilitated collaborative projects through the Perinatal Health Equity Champions program between Igi Osé – Traditional Birth Services and St. Clair Hospital's Labor and Delivery Unit; Kangaroo Birthing and The Birthing Hut worked with Magee Women's Hospital, and The Midwife Center worked across fellow community and hospital partners in the Champs program.

The Champions program was a year-long engagement model to build capacity in the birthing workforce to help address racial disparities and improve maternal health care in the Pittsburgh region. The Champions program built trusted working relationships among community and hospital birth workers in which common goals drive solutions to holistic care, strengthen continuity of care, and bridge resources across the maternal care continuum.

The following pages describe the various Champions program projects.



THE BIRTHING HUT

Iyanna Bridges CEO \ Founder

“The Birthing Hut doulas are unapologetically graced with Black excellence & purpose, impacting birthing experiences ...”

Leta S.

- ✓ We offer an array of services, including Child Birth Education, Labor & Delivery Preparation, Breastfeeding Support, Belly Birth Basics, Daddy Doula and Birth and Postpartum Planning.
- ✓ We are dedicated to implementing a community-based intervention that effectively reduces the disparities in black maternal health outcomes. Our ultimate objective is to establish a healthcare system that prioritizes fairness, safety, and equity for all individuals.
- ✓ We aim to fortify the Pittsburgh maternal child health professional workforce by providing intensive training, certification, and mentorship. Our ultimate goal is to guarantee that only competent, knowledgeable, and highly skilled doulas are accessible to collaborate with hospital providers and support birthing families.
- ✓ PGH Black Birth Workers - a supportive local birth workers group that fosters growth both professionally and personally, our space is a safe haven where you can confidently share your journey with others.



MISSION

community

collaborate with local organizations

training

evidence-based intensive curriculum

work force development

equitable culturally competent doulas

engagement

bridge gaps of support in communities

empowerment

families birth in confidence

DATA

PARTNERS

- ✓ Duquesne University School Of Nursing
- ✓ Allegheny County Jail Doula Program
- ✓ Oli's Angels
- ✓ UPMC
- ✓ Healthy Start INC.
- ✓ Allegheny County Health Dept.

IMPACT

- ✓ 14 trained doulas
- ✓ 62 member birthworker network
- ✓ 92 birthing families supported
- ✓ 47 postpartum families supported
- ✓ 47 postpartum families supported
- ✓ 23 impacted zip codes
- ✓ 10 hosted community evented

“... listened thoroughly and empathized with my past traumatic birth story.”

Demi R.



www.birthinghut.com

More Information :iyannabridges@birthinghut.com



Socializing nearly **7,000 Black Moms** in Pittsburgh toward better health and economic outcomes.

OUR STORY:

In 2012, Brown Mamas started out as a group of moms meeting in a living room and has grown into a community of nearly 7,000 moms in the Pittsburgh region that has figuratively and literally changed the social perspective on Black mothering in Pittsburgh.

Today, it is an entryway for Black mothers looking to connect with other moms, share resources and vent about the day-to-day trials of motherhood. It is a vehicle for amplifying the voices and lived experiences of over 60 Black women through the Brown Mama Monologues. Most importantly, it is an organic, grassroots community created to ensure that Black mothers can lead in the communities they care for.

OUR SAFER CHILDBIRTH CITIES WORK:

As members of the SCC Community Fund, Brown Mamas has established its unique power in Pittsburgh's mothering ecosystem: positive impact through socialization and leadership. Brown Mamas' piloted its Social Impact Program in 2023 with two aims (1) socializing Black mothers toward better health and economic outcomes through meetups, events and support groups and (2) provide a part-time, entry-level, tech and community outreach position for mothers in the Brown Mamas community.

This year, we hosted 10 events and served over 300 Black moms. In 2024, we will graduate two out of the three Social Impact Ambassadors we began with in 2023. Today, we look forward to the second iteration of this program with your help.

7000

Brown Mamas Network

300+

Moms Served in 2023

25%

Moms between Ages 25-34

65%

Single Moms

OUR ENGAGEMENTS:

Brown Mama Meetups

Micro-events designed to connect moms based upon common needs and pain points.

The Brown Mama Monologues

An annual production that amplifies the stories of Black mothers on-stage.

Social Impact Ambassador Program

A part-time, entry-level, tech-focused employment opportunity for moms transitioning toward the workplace.

Brown Mama Mindset Healing Circles

A monthly support group designed to reduce and prevent instances of mental illness in the Black mothering community.

Womb, Wealth & Wellness Conference

The first annual conference that focuses on the holistic health of Black mothers in Pittsburgh and surrounding regions.



CONTACT:

hello@brownmamas.com



CHILDBIRTH EDUCATION FOR THE CULTURE

Kieashia Deshawn

Email: ElephantSongDoulas@gmail.com Instagram: [@elephantsongdoulas](https://www.instagram.com/elephantsongdoulas)



INTRODUCTION

In 2019, The Pittsburgh Gender Equity Commission helped shed brilliant light on Black Birth in the Steel City. In "Pittsburgh's Inequality Across Gender and Race," the findings confirmed what Black families have known for generations: Pittsburgh's birth hospitals are unsafe for black families. With a Black Maternal Mortality Rate higher than 97% of similar-sized cities, it is fair to say the maternal health systems in this region have failed Black Birthing People.

This staggering evidence moved Elephant Song Doula Services (ESDS) to become a part of the solution. Our dedication to supporting Black families through life's most delicate times has allowed us to offer services and programming that are trauma-sensitive and culturally appropriate.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Black and Brown families have been less than satisfied with the prenatal care provided by Pittsburgh area hospitals, and they often feel disrespected, unheard, and misunderstood by their prenatal providers.

There is a lack of education, support, and communication about the natural birth process for Black and Brown families, leading to increased fear and anxiety. Families share that they were not informed of their rights as patients, nor were they offered adequate help during the postpartum period and breastfeeding process.

The support and education resources available to expectant families are often lacking cultural relevance and do not consider those who have experienced perinatal trauma.

ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that 20% of reported experiences of mistreatment during pregnancy and delivery care with the highest rates being reported by Black, Hispanic, and multi-racial women.

Hospitals and healthcare providers often lack cultural competence and diversity in their staff, which can exacerbate the mistrust felt by black families. A lack of understanding of cultural nuances and specific needs can result in misunderstandings, inadequate care, and communication breakdowns during the birthing process.

METHODS

Culturally Relevant Parent Education:

Our Current Perinatal Programming includes:
"Preparing for your Birth" Childbirth Preparation
"Postpartum Care & Wellness"
"Breastfeeding Your Baby"
"Newborn Care Basics"
"Birth Partner Prep"

Both in-person and virtual programming that acknowledges and embraces the cultural experiences, values, and traditions of Black mothers. By doing so, ESDS creates a safe and welcoming space where Black expectant mothers can feel understood and respected. This cultural resonance fosters trust, encourages engagement, and empowers mothers to take an active role in their healthcare decisions.

Addressing Historical Trauma:

Our Trauma-informed Doula Care recognizes the historical trauma experienced by Black communities due to systemic racism and discrimination. Our childbirth education programs incorporate trauma-informed approaches to create a supportive environment that acknowledges past trauma and helps participants cope with any emotional or psychological challenges they may face during pregnancy and childbirth. This reduces the anxiety and stress that contribute to adverse outcomes.

Promoting Self-Advocacy:

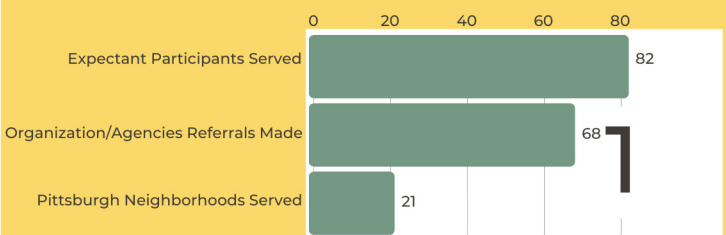
Culturally relevant and trauma-informed education empowers Black expectant mothers with the knowledge and skills to advocate for themselves within the healthcare system. This includes understanding their rights, asking questions, and making informed decisions about their care. Such empowerment can help bridge the communication gap with healthcare providers, leading to more personalized and respectful care.

Community Building and Peer Support:

Our programs foster a sense of community and peer support among Black mothers. Sharing experiences, fears, and triumphs within a culturally sensitive environment can reduce feelings of isolation and provide a vital support network. The strong bonds formed in these groups can continue postpartum, ensuring ongoing emotional support.

SUCCESSES

The following graph reflects our results since January 2021



CONCLUSION

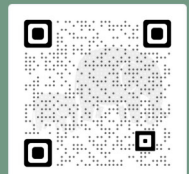
The fear of giving birth in Pittsburgh area hospitals among Black families is a multifaceted issue deeply rooted in historical trauma, systemic racism, and current healthcare disparities. To address this crisis, not only must cultural competence be improved, healthcare staff diversity be addressed, bias be addressed, and equitable access to quality prenatal care be promoted, but innovative approaches must also be utilized to support the cultural and emotional needs of Black expectant mothers.

HOW YOU CAN HELP?

Your contribution will make a meaningful difference in the efforts of Elephant Song Doula Services' efforts to reduce maternal healthcare disparities and improve birth outcomes for Black mothers. We believe that every family deserves access to the education and support necessary for a healthy and safe childbirth experience.

To donate, please follow the QR code or contact us directly at ElephantSongDoulas@gmail.com.

We are immensely grateful for your support, which enables us to continue this essential work.





The mission of Healthy Start is to improve maternal and child health and to reduce poor birth outcomes and infant mortality in Allegheny County.

SAFER CHILDBIRTH CITY WORK

- ✓ Throughout this partnership, we **continue to engage** our Community Advisory Committee (CAC) in various projects, including but not limited to our larger research studies, Black Birth Expo, and Legislative Breakfast.
- ✓ Through these events, our CAC is not only **furthering** the mission of Pittsburgh: A Safer Childbirth City, but **gaining** valuable skills and networking opportunities.
- ✓ We **received** a grant to finish our work by funding a trip to attend a legislative session in Harrisburg, where participating community members and advocates can realize the impact of their voices being heard by meeting directly with policy makers.

NEXT STEPS

SURVEYING NEEDS



In the coming weeks, we will close our SCC project in collaboration with our Community Health Advocates (CHAs) by developing and distributing a survey within Allegheny County to assess the experiences of Black birthing people delivering in local hospitals. We will view this data through a racial equity lens and use it to create accountability within the medical system.

PROMOTING ADVOCACY



Through the AMCHP SCC mini grant, we are partnering with the Black Women's Policy Center to host a virtual advocacy bootcamp for 10 CHAs. Through this skill building opportunity they will further their advocacy skills and receive guidance in developing a specific policy ask. We will then fund a trip for participants to deliver this ask at a legislative session.

NINTH COHORT



Our ninth CHA cohort is underway, ensuring that Black moms continue to be empowered to be advocates for their communities.

SUSTAINABILITY



Grants and fundraising ensure organizational sustainability. In recent years, Healthy Start's portfolio of both direct service and systems change initiatives have grown rapidly and we've expanded program staff to meet community needs. Now we're seeking funding to expand organizational capacity in the finance, marketing & IT areas.



GIVE NOW

DOWNLOAD THE NURTURHER APP!



Unshakeable Motherhood

AFFILIATIONS | PARTNERSHIPS

In 2021, Kangaroo Birthing and Maternity c/o Unshakeable Motherhood's outreach marketplace called the NurturHer App has partnered with Allegheny County Health Department's with Family Health over the past three years. Also, we have partnered with Health Start Pittsburgh by beta testing the app with fifteen families alongside their birth doula program starting in 2022. We partnered with Allen Place Community Services & Chi Eta Phi Nursing Sorority to contribute to training and developing birth doula careers.



DONATE HERE!



SYREETA GORDON

Founder, CEO & Lead Certified
DONA Birth Doula
Kangaroo Birthing & Maternity/ Unshakeable Motherhood

“THE IDEA OF A PROGRAM LIKE THIS IS AMAZING. AS A SINGLE MOM THE IMPACT HAS BEEN HUGE. I FEEL LIKE I GOT THE LIFT I NEEDED TO HELP ME BE THE BEST MOM I CAN BE.”
-PASHA F.



INTRODUCTION

In 2021, Kangaroo Birthing & Maternity partnered with the Allegheny County Health Department to beta test (15) families with the NurturHer app project in partnership with the Pittsburgh: A Safer Childbirth City project. The Jewish Healthcare Foundation (JHF) and its operating arm, Women's Health Activist Movement Global (WHAMglobal), recently launched Pittsburgh: A Safer Childbirth City, an initiative that aims to transform the city into a safer, more equitable, and accessible place to give birth.

OBJECTIVE

The NurturHer app/ Unshakeable Motherhood project was birthed out of the pandemic after seeing the need to serve moms and support them while they are recovering postpartum. While managing to offer contactless service and education that could ease them into motherhood after birth. We expected that taking the helm of an organization during an unprecedented year like 2020 would be challenging. What we didn't expect was to be welcomed by such an engaged, passionate community and a motivated team who desire to leave a lasting impression on the neighborhoods that we serve.

OUR VISION

Our organization seeks to invest in African American mothers, aspiring African American birthworkers, and community leaders to create solutions that improve resilience in work conditions, developed and tested through postpartum maternal technology that aims to solve the challenge underemployed black women while giving access to trainings and mentorship. We aim to train mothers and doulas who are unemployed and underemployed by empowering them with flexible work opportunities. As well as, opportunity to transition to become trained and certified birth doulas to serve our community to further fill the wealth building gaps.

REFLECTIONS

Results show the outcome of the data reveals that doula and community worker support can provide improved care outcomes for birthing persons in the fourth trimester period.

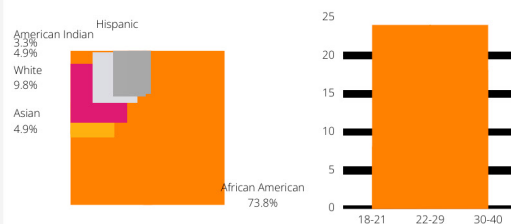
- These services are extremely valuable to postpartum mothers, and access to the NurturHer app should be universal to expectant patients
- In October 2023, Launching App on iOS & Android Stores to make more accessible to patients and families
- Developing partnership with UPMC's Department of Pediatrics & Newborn Medicine
- Potential partnership with the 4th Trimester team at UPMC to offer NurturHer services to mothers at early postpartum visits

CONCLUSION

Our technology base mom support marketplace has been useful towards connecting our families with postpartum services. Providing this form of access to the families allows them to seek the postpartum assistance to support their specific needs. Families are connected with a mommy concierge or birth doula who helped with errands, laundry, meal delivery, transportation, lifestyle support and more. The NurturHer app served as a resource of information, as it contains educational tutorials and information created and produced by our internal staff of birth workers, community leaders and educators.

ANALYSIS

In the analysis of the survey information and the data collected from 2012-2023 it allowed us to see who we are serving specifically, the neighborhoods that we are frequently impacting and the services that are the most in demand with the African American women that we are serving within high poverty communities that are hit with persistently with inequities in birth outcomes and lack of fourth trimester support.

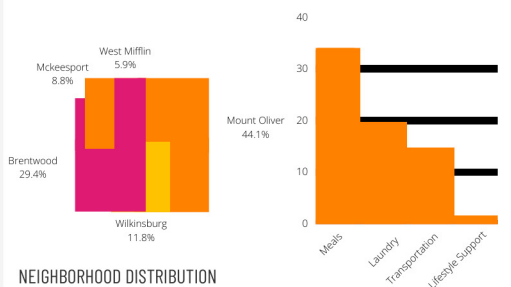


RACE/ETHNICITY

As calculated through survey submission on the app

AGE

As calculated through survey submission on the app



NEIGHBORHOOD DISTRIBUTION

The Neighborhood's Most Frequented with Services

APP SERVICES USED

As calculated through survey use from app

SCC WORK

MAYA's Director of Civic Engagement Amber Edmunds, co-founded the Shanga Collective, a new partnership of **local Black birthworkers**, including representatives from Elephant Song Birth Collective, Kangaroo Birthing, The Birthing Hut, and MAYA.

Shanga participants:

- **Create standards of practice**
- **Break down barriers for Black birthworkers**
- **Promote social change in the area of birth equity**



MAYA became a participant in **Allegheny Health Network's First Steps & Beyond project**,

working to eliminate racism from obstetric spaces in the Pittsburgh area.

MAYA's Director of Civic Engagement was invited by the **Duquesne University School of Nursing** to design curricula for their **Equity Fellowship**, which promotes social change by preparing the next generation of nurses to be socially aware and resist internal and external pressures to channel racist attitudes.

CONTACT US

welcome@mayaorganization.org

412-945-7670



OUR WORK

MAYA exists to serve Black and marginalized birthing people and ease their way through pregnancy, delivery, and early parenting. We help our participants grow their confidence and knowledge, and we give them the support they need to feel safe, encouraged, and empowered.

MAYA is invested in just and equitable treatment for birthing people and works to make Pittsburgh a safer place for Black moms to carry, deliver, and raise their babies.





SHANGA WELLNESS COLLECTIVE

IMPACT STATEMENT

To inform, empower, educate and support by providing holistic care to black families to train community wellness keepers to provide a positive motherhood entrance experience through continuous workforce development, mentoring, education and support that address clinical determinants of health while building a confident birth and motherhood outcomes to meet the community need to have one hub for holistic maternal care.

CORE GOALS

MENTORSHIP AND TRAINING COMMUNITY WELLNESS KEEPERS THAT ABIDES BY THE COLLECTIVES SET STANDARD OF PRACTICE & CARE.

LAUNCH A POOL OF DOULAS AND COMMUNITY WELLNESS KEEPERS THAT COULD BE USED TO PULL FROM EVERY INDIVIDUAL, DOULA PROGRAM AND BUSINESS.
LAUNCH A MIDWIFERY TRAINING CO-HORT THAT WILL LAUNCH WITH IN THE NEXT YEAR.

DEVELOP A CENTERING & HEALING CARE PROGRAM THAT WILL HELP COMMUNITY HEALTH KEEPERS HEAL WHILE DEVELOPING SELF-CARE PRACTICES THROUGHOUT MATERNAL HEALTH CAREERS

THE COLLECTIVE STANDARD

We offer mentoring as a fundamental and essential part of the Shanga Wellness Village Collective. Our seasoned certified doulas and trained professionals serve as mentors to community wellness keepers serving the community while furthering their education beyond birth doula training to the likes of midwifery education advancement. This relationship and work begins with community wellness keepers who are new to serving women in the maternal health space and/or experienced doulas join to learn, give and grow in a collective of like minded womb servants.

We come together through special events for pregnant women, ongoing professional development, membership meetings, active mentoring, business mastermind sessions, weekend retreats and a commitment to giving back to the community through educational workshops. Our collaborative of community wellness workers, offers families in the Pittsburgh (Allegheny County) Region and beyond professional prenatal, birth, postpartum support. We aim to empower everyday women to transition from displaced and underemployed to health pioneers that can foresee and build a career base for their families while serving as a means of greater connection.

ABOUT US

The Shanga Wellness Village aims to build a maternal health hub forging ways to create a space for aspiring health leaders to learn, connect and lead.

VISION

A world where united community health keepers are educated, connected and serve while building health equity one family at a time.



LEARN
MORE



PERINATAL HEALTH EQUITY CHAMPIONS PROGRAM

2022-2023



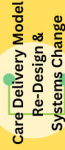
BACKGROUND

The 2019 City of Pittsburgh's Gender Equity Commission report found that in the City of Pittsburgh, and Allegheny County at large, Black birthing women are dying at a rate three times higher than white women compared to 12 demographically similar cities. "Despite the fact that Black women begin prenatal care earlier than in similar cities, Pittsburgh's Black maternal mortality rate is higher than Black mortality rates in 97 percent of other cities. It is important to note that this disparity exists regardless of educational or economic differences."



APPROACH

The year-long Perinatal Health Equity Champions program applied four pillars to engage communities in maternal health improvements, and work with perinatal birth workers to build workforce capacity to help address racial disparities and improve the maternal health care support system around birthing people and families during pregnancy, childbirth, and the months after. This pilot program provided an opportunity to model collaboration and relationship building between community and hospital birth workers for shared quality improvement initiatives.



RESULTS

Perinatal Champion Quality Improvement Project Ideas

- Education: Provider/Staff, Doula Integration, Women's Health
- Policy & Best Practices: Religious Community and Hospital Services
- Care Coordination: Resource Referrals
- Doula Integration/Team-Based Care: Culturally Specific Lactation, PPD, etc.
- Consumer Advocacy: Community Leader, Consumer-Focused Care
- Transitions of Care: Discharge Planning, Handoff/Document

BUILDING TRUST

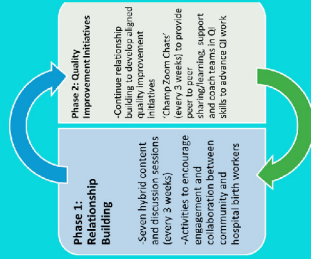
Building trust was a critical component from the beginning of the program. To assess progress toward creating a common space for discussion, two statements were posed and tracked during each session: This feels like a common/brave space and I feel more comfortable participating in this group compared to the Kick-off. By session four, the Champions responded 4.9 and 4.6 out of 5, representing a significant improvement in the space they created.

ONGOING COLLABORATION

The ongoing collaboration and peer-to-peer sharing between community and hospital birth workers enabled the development of significant quality improvement initiatives; ranging educating hospital providers on the role of doulas, their scope of practice and how to incorporate them as part of the care team, to policy change and best practice reviews to address root causes contributing to poor black maternal care outcomes

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

Designed for two phases, the Perinatal Health Equity Champions program began with intentional relationship building across the program participants, followed by collaboration on community birth worker led quality improvement initiatives. As the program progressed, the phases became repeated cycles of improvement for the participants, emphasizing the critical role of ongoing relationship building throughout the stages of their quality improvement initiatives to advance this challenging work.



CHALLENGES

The Perinatal Health Equity Champions Program presented expected and unexpected challenges from which the Champion participants and JHF project team learned and grew. We expected difficult and uncomfortable conversations around black maternal health issues and the lived experience of community birth workers. For our project team and many of the white Champion participants though, the lack of knowledge on the dynamics of structural racism and impact of microaggressions on black maternal health created additional discomfort in group discussions. As a project team, we initiated a Racial Equity Book Club: Moving from Discussion to Action to educate ourselves and develop individual skills in the ability to be 'comfortable with the uncomfortable'. This challenging experience in the Champions Program has resulted in a better understanding of community partner perspectives, and ways we can help address the root causes of microaggressions and systemic racism in the medical system. Our project team continues this journey.

PERINATAL EQUITY CHAMPIONS OPPORTUNITY

Since 2019, JHF and its Women's Health Activist Movement Global (WHAMglobal) operating arm have facilitated the Pittsburgh: A Safer Childbirth City initiative with seven partner organizations across the region, whose programs fill gaps and provide crucial services to the community. Many of these organizations are birthing-focused and prioritize Black birthing people and their support systems across the Pittsburgh region.

As one of 20 Safer Childbirth Cities across the U.S. through the Merck for Mother's network, JHF and WHAMglobal developed a three-year plan for the Pittsburgh: Safer Childbirth City, with the aim to address racial/ethnic disparities in maternal mortality and morbidity rates across our city. In response to Pittsburgh's Gender Equity Commission report, review of existing community collaboration models for improving Black maternal health, and applying lessons learned from our prior Champions Programs, the Perinatal Health Equity Champions program was created to address silos between community and hospital setting birth workers, and drive holistic care solutions to strengthen and bridge resources across Pittsburgh's maternal care continuum.

SUCCESSES

The development and launch of the Perinatal Health Equity Champions Program has demonstrated the need to create spaces for community and hospital birth workers to have honest, ongoing discussions in order to impact black maternal health outcomes. The efforts made by the community and hospital birth workers in this program to develop trusted and innovative working relationships to drive quality improvement initiatives to strengthen continuity of holistic Black maternal care in Pittsburgh is a model that can be disseminated to other cities and communities for a broader impact on addressing poor maternal health outcomes in the United States.



Everyone benefits when we ensure respectful care to marginalized people. We are gender-affirming, BIPOC-loving, polyamorous-friendly care providers. We believe you when you tell us who you are and what you need. We support people of all faiths, no matter where those beliefs were born.

*We See You,
We Respect You,
We Support You*



Hello, I'm Selena Eisenberg

Traditional Midwife, CLD, CPD, Childbirth & Postpartum Professional Association (CAPPA) faculty

I'm a midwife and traditional birth worker committed to improving birth outcomes, bringing joy back to birth for 16 years. My day-to-day work focuses on advocacy and equity in birth spaces. I do this by providing education and a supportive environment where pregnant people can advocate for their birth choices.

Traditional Midwives, who I hope to honor in my work, believed in serving their community trusting that when they were in need, the community would be there.

As a way to further align my practice with those historical midwives I am creating a non-profit arm of Igi Osè. We are seeking dedicated board members who wish to put their energies into raising funds to serve those in the community that are unable to afford our services. The vision is that all low-risk pregnant people can select our services without pause, knowing that the non-profit will provide a grant or no interest loan for all services and supplies. We will also be raising funds to ensure everyone in the community who wants to be trained in birth work or receive lifesaving skills training will be able access education.

Trainings Offered Through Igi Osè

- CAPPA* Postpartum Doula Training
- CAPPA Labor Doula Training
- Midwife Assistant Application
- Helping Babies Breathe

Looking Ahead

To further align my practice with historical midwives, I am creating a nonprofit arm of Igi Osè.

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*Childbirth and Postpartum Professionals Association (CAPPA), an international certification organization for Doulas, Childbirth Educators, and Lactation Educators (CAPPA) provides trainings designed to educate and equip the contemporary perinatal professional for a successful career in a fun, supportive, and collaborative environment. Trainings are evidence based and comprehensive and are designed to appeal to all learning styles. Instructors have in depth knowledge and follow standardized curriculums to ensure the highest quality training and most comprehensive perinatal education for CAPPA Certification programs. As one of the first and most comprehensive perinatal organizations in the world, CAPPA is respected for its longevity, stability, and its commitment to excellence in both education and unsurpassed student and member support.

Contact info:



pghmidwife.com



selena@igiose.com

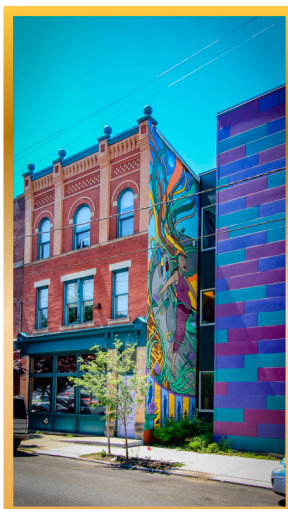
***“As a midwife, I am not there to manage birth;
I am simply a guest with a useful skill set.”***

Perinatal Support Program

In 2019, this program was started to increase contact with pregnant and postpartum clients of The Midwife Center who were experiencing increased stressors and/or barriers to care. The purpose is to increase access to birth center birth, especially for individuals and families who have experienced marginalization and disparate health outcomes.

Increased contact with clients included:

- Calls in between appointments to ask how clients are doing, listen, and assisting with follow-up on any pregnancy needs, especially any care that can prevent increased risk in pregnancy (screening for and follow-up on anemia or gestational diabetes, for example)
- Longer appointments (40 rather than 20-minute prenatal visits)
- Flexibility if someone is running late for an appointment or adding Telehealth at a time that is convenient for them to supplement in-office visits.
- Setting up transportation assistance to get to appointments and to have a plan for when in labor.
- Reviewing doula services (MAYA, Healthy Start, Birth Circle) and the accompanying classes and birth planning that are available at no cost.
- Encourage TMC care following birth: Milk Makers group at no cost, individual lactation appointments, Postpartum Support group for first year postpartum at no cost, in-house therapist, as well as gynecologic problem visits, contraception, and annual care for continuity.
- Meeting with the Community Health Worker after routine prenatal and postpartum visits to coordinate pregnancy, postpartum, newborn care, and parenting resources and referrals



We have sought feedback and guidance from clients about the PSP program through:

- Anonymous Survey December 2021
- Focus Group January 2022

From the survey and the focus group, we heard that the main themes of PSP that were helpful were:

CENTERING the CLIENT: making time for listening without needing to teach or present recommendations

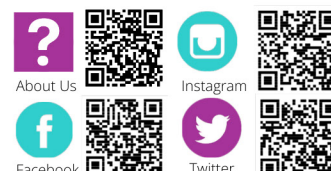
CONSISTENCY IN COMMUNICATION to BUILD RELATIONSHIP AND TRUST: longer appointments, getting to know care providers and client services staff, and contact in between appointments

ACCESS & AWARENESS OF SERVICES & RESOURCES: referrals that include assistance in making contact with a specific person at another care or service provider and follow-up afterward to ask if it went well or any other assistance needed

Starting November of 2019 through September 2023, 271+ TMC clients have received increased contacts and longer visits with a midwife through the Perinatal Support Program, and an additional 29 are currently being contacted by TMC midwives and our Community Health Worker. We are looking at how PSP impacts The Midwife Center overall.

Client demographics that we are tracking include:

- age
- first or subsequent birth
- number of times outreach was attempted
- number of time contact was made
- formal referrals completed
- self-identified race
- zip code
- birth site
- if a transfer of care occurred during pregnancy or during birthing process



Changing Minds & Changing Outcomes: St. Clair's Road to Embracing Community Partners



St. Clair Health

St. Clair Hospital

PROBLEM STATEMENT

St. Clair Hospital has seen a reduction in the number of pregnant people using doula support during labor. Evident in comments made by many local doulas, pregnant community members, and their families on social media platforms, within community birthworker groups, and verified by community partners participating in the Perinatal Health Equity Champions program, St. Clair is not considered doula "friendly," meaning hospital staff is not welcoming to the doula, and the doula has not been considered part of the patient care team. This negatively impacts all stakeholders.

- Pregnant people who want to utilize doulas choose other locations to birth, even though they would benefit from the low nurse to patient ratio found at St. Clair Hospital.
- Doulas recommend other hospitals and providers to their clients reducing the number of births at the hospital.
- The patients at St. Clair are not hiring doulas despite a national increase in labor doula utilization and the benefit birthing people could experience from the scientifically proven benefits of labor doula support.

ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS

Surveys of the St. Clair Family Birth Center team identified a lack of understanding from staff and providers on the role of the doula. Also noted was the difference in the models of care followed for labor and birth between medical in the hospital setting and non-medical focus by doula care providers.

CHALLENGES

Time is always a challenge - day to day operations and limited staff in a hospital setting make improvement efforts difficult to manage. But, with the current state of maternal health disparities in the US, **we had to make the time**. Patients with doula care have been proven to have better birth outcomes.

Culture surrounding a medical model of care has also posed a challenge for us in the hospital setting. Doulas have not been commonplace in our hospital setting, resulting in staff difficulties to share space. **Changing the focus** to a more holistic model of care **and embracing the doula** as a collaborator on the care team will help lighten the nursing load and promote a better patient experience.

SUCCESSSES

Through community-based organization partnerships, engaging with and learning from community partners, a new awareness and opportunity for St. Clair Family Birth Center staff to engage and collaborate with doulas has begun.

ON THE HORIZON

A Doula Open House for the Community Doulas will be held in Spring/Summer 2024. The meet and greet will provide an opportunity to learn how a doula can enhance birthing experiences throughout the continuum of pregnancy.

SURVEY

To initiate education on the role of a doula, St. Clair Hospital hosted an internal virtual education event for the Family Birth Center Staff led by one of our community educators, Laura Bowman, RN, a concierge doula.

Our Community Education Department has also provided virtual classes led by Lauren and free of cost, to patients and families on Empowering Your Birth Experience: Understanding the Role of a Doula.

Through participation in the Perinatal Health Equity Champions program, we met Selena Eisenberg, Midwife and Founder of Igi Osè - Traditional Birth Services, CLD, CPD a community-based organization and partnered with her to help the Family Birth Center staff develop a deeper understanding of doula care and how we could build trusting relationships.

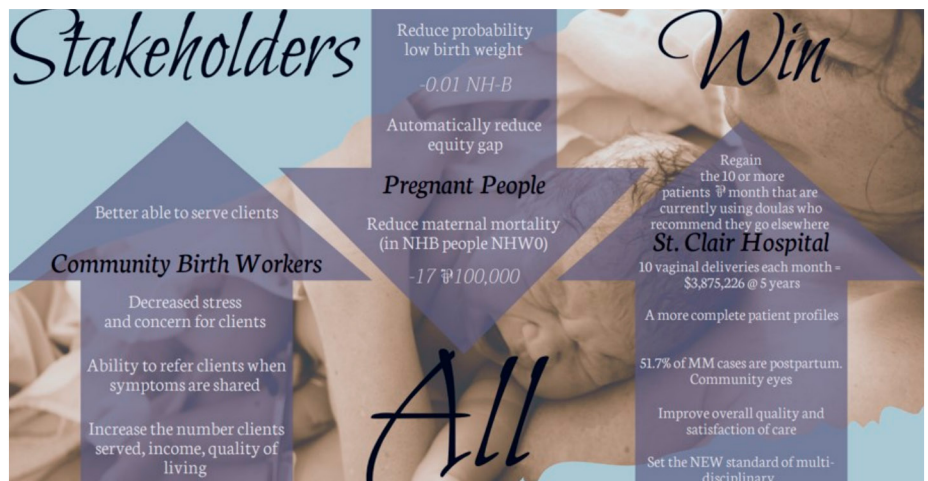
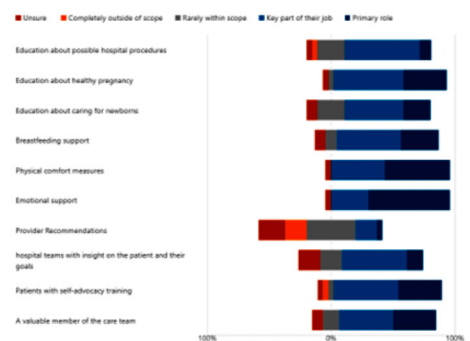
To customize a program specific to St. Clair's needs, Selena surveyed hospital staff, Family Birth Center nurses and obstetric providers. From the 30 anonymous responses, Selena tailored our education to directly address questions, misunderstandings and compliment responses that were spot on. The surveys identified the need for education on doula training and scope of practice (graph below) and provided an opportunity to discuss what a true partnership with a doula as part of the Family Birth Center care team could look like within St. Clair hospital.

ADDRESSING IDENTIFIED NEEDS

The customized program consisted of an initial in-house formal education and discussion session, followed by two in-person organic discussion sessions centered on understanding the roles that support pregnant people, and ensuring all participants were heard, questions addressed, and information received to support their understanding. The goal of these sessions was to build confidence in St. Clair's staff's ability to engage community birth attendants and foster a positive working relationship, creating a better patient birth experience.

To continue building on the discussions with Selena, implicit bias education was provided for the Family Birth Center (FBC) nurses and obstetric providers, as well as journal article reflections on racial bias, addressing institutional racism's impact on maternal and child health, and applying a trauma-informed lens. This created a safe space for staff self-reflection and open dialog on topics experienced everyday in their work. The OB care providers discussed the thought provoking articles at their July Department meeting, appreciating the insight the materials provided.

Doulas provide... (there are five options)



"This [Perinatal Health Equity]Champs program has been an amazing experience to connect healthcare organization and community birth workers to join forces to enhance the birth outcomes for our families we serve."

Shawndel Laughner

Shawndel Laughner, MHA, BSN, CNML, RNC-OB, C-EFM, C-ONQS, Director Women & Children's Services at St. Clair Health

Amanda Molano, MSW, LSW, Perinatal Social Worker/Care Manager at St. Clair Health

Selena Eisenberg, Midwife and Founder of Igi Osè - Traditional Birth Services, CLD, CPD, Faculty for Childbirth and Postpartum Professional Association (CAPPA), advisor for The Pittsburgh Birth Project

SYSTEMIC EQUITY & BIRTH WORK:

A PILOT INITIATIVE FOCUSED ON COMMUNITY DOULA ORGANIZATION & BIRTHING HOSPITAL RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

A PERINATAL HEALTH EQUITY CHAMPIONS PROGRAM QUALITY IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVE

PROBLEM STATEMENT

OUTCOMES

BLACK BIRTHING WOMEN ARE DYING at a rate **3X higher than white women in Allegheny County** according to a 2019 report published by the City of Pittsburgh Gender Equity Commission that assessed equity across gender and race in Pittsburgh, compared to 12 demographically similar cities [Howell, et al]. Studies have shown "that the expectant mothers matched with a doula had better birth outcomes, were **4X less likely to have a low-birth-weight baby**, were **2X less likely to experience a birth complication** and were significantly **more likely to initiate breastfeeding** [Gruber, et al]. However, the integration and partnership of community doulas into intrapartum care teams in hospital settings is lacking. The role of a community doula on a care team is not understood and there is a lack of respect for their training. Black doula birth workers in particular experience discrimination.

APPROACH

Through the Perinatal Health Equity Champions program, our team gained knowledge in applying quality improvement skills to determine the approach for our model. Based on the use of a root analysis tool, shared lived experiences from community doulas, community organizations and hospital providers, our team decided to create two survey tools to collect representative data; one for community doulas and one for hospital providers. The survey questions were designed to learn respondent experiences working with each other's roles in the hospital setting, their challenges and opportunities, and ideas for educational and organizational policy changes.

OPPORTUNITY

Navigating the medical healthcare system is challenging and complex for most patients. For Black birthing women, the support of a doula can help them through the hospital birth experience. The lack of community doula integration in hospital care presents challenges for the care of Black birthing women, including communication and relationship building barriers which can lead to conflict and distrust among birth workers.

From this observation, our team identified initial areas of opportunity for our Perinatal Health Equity Champions Program Quality Improvement Initiative:



Build trust between community doulas & hospital providers to create a safe & supportive work environment

Create positive birth experiences and maternal outcomes for birthing people in Pittsburgh

Expose community doulas to hospital actions, behaviors & expectations

Increase positive working relationships between medical staff and community doulas

KEY POINTS WERE SIMILAR BETWEEN COMMUNITY DOULAS AND PROVIDER SURVEY RESPONDENTS:

- A need for understanding the role, scope of work, and benefits of working with community doulas as part of the patient experience, including trauma Black women experience.
- Interest for "meet and greets" between doulas and providers to establish mutual trust.

Alexa Morrison, MD

OB/GYN Resident
Physician at UPMC
"This is my why!"
(article from *New England Journal of Medicine* (Sept. 23, 2021): *Points of View, Pathology of Racism: A Call to Desegregate Teaching Hospitals*)

Syreeta Gordon

Founder, CEO & Lead Certified DONA Birth Doula
Kangaroo Birthing & Maternity/Unshakable Motherhood
"I am here to help move the needle in changing the way Black women are perceived, heard & believed from the time of prenatal care to the delivery room."

Iyanna Bridges

CEO/Founder
The Birthing Hut
"I am here because Black birthing women deserve a voice."



"Some people understand that we are part of the care team, while others think we're a 'support person' and they're sometimes unclear about which rules apply to us."

"A physician and a doula should speak together on a panel describing ways that we work together and showing supportive research about better outcomes for multidisciplinary care."

REFERENCED RESEARCH:

Howell, Junia, Sara Goodkind, Leah Jacobs, Dominique Branson and Elizabeth Miller. 2019. "Pittsburgh's Inequality across Gender and Race." Gender Analysis White Papers. City of Pittsburgh's Gender Equity Commission. Gruber KJ, Cupito SH, Dobson CF. Impact of doulas on healthy birth outcomes. J Perinat Educ. 2013 Winter;22(1):49-58. doi: 10.1891/1058-1243.22.1.49. PMID: 24381478; PMCID: PMC3647727. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24381478/>

Pittsburgh

A Safer Childbirth City

