

Group Perinatal Care By, For, and With Black People



2020 Impact Report

A Program of

Alameda Health System- Highland Hospital & Alameda County Public Health Department



Highland Hospital



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This report describes our novel adaptation to the CenteringPregnancy model of care, a registered trademark. We are licensed by the Centering Healthcare Institute to provide their trademarked model of care. However, our adaptations to the model, namely our virtual program home feature and Black-centered program design is completely original work, and our protected intellectual property.

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Our Birth Story

Alameda County's BElovedBIRTH Black Centering project was born out of the shared commitment to achieve perinatal health equity by both the Alameda Health System's Department of Obstetrics, Midwifery and Gynecology (AHS) and the Alameda County Public Health Department (ACPHD), more specifically the Alameda County Healthy Start Initiative (ACHSI). As one of the original federal Healthy Start Initiative's demonstration projects over twenty-five years ago, Alameda County has continuously evolved to respond to the need for reducing infant mortality and improving the health and well-being of birthing people, infants, and their families. Initially, as Oakland Healthy Start, then the Improving Pregnancy Outcomes Program (IPOP), and currently ACHSI, the project has resiliently adapted to everchanging research, best practices, and demographic shifts within the context of persistent racial health inequities among its priority community—pregnant and parenting African American families residing in Alameda County. In every iteration, the project has innovated interventions, grappled with complex challenges, and learned invaluable lessons from its response to reduce Black infant mortality rates.

A chance meeting between AHS and ACPHD staff in 2018, fused the destinies of AHS's CenteringPregnancy and ACHSI's EmbraceHer programs. AHS sought to increase their engagement and retention of African American families participating in CenteringPregnancy prenatal care groups, and a group of AHS's Black midwives wanted to provide racially concordant group care to better meet the needs of Black families. Meanwhile ACHSI was embarking on expanding its service model to meet client demand for more group-based programming options, particularly to enhance service continuity during and between pregnancies for African American participants. By early 2019, AHS and ACHSI had met continuously to re-conceptualize the evidence-based CenteringPregnancy model for which there are data to support equitable birth outcomes and the elimination of racism-based perinatal health disparities. A model that would 'flip the script' from one of risk-based stigmatization and irrelevance masked as culturally neutral practice to an intentional community model 'by, for and with' Black people that celebrates the birth of Black infants by supporting and fortifying Black families.

Furthermore, members of the BElovedBIRTH Black Centering collaborative met several times with UCSF National Center of Excellence in Women's Health staff who were the first to pilot a CenteringPregnancy project targeting Black women in San Francisco in 2018. Discussions focused on technical assistance on curriculum design, garnering support for a Black-centric model, and launching a successful project. Notably, UCSF's model added a mental health component to their program, specifically a clinical social worker who attended groups

and was available to meet one-on-one with participants. ACHSI's EmbraceHer followed suit by offering individual care coordination services and linkages to mental health services, in addition to co-facilitating BElovedBIRTH Black Centering prenatal groups. Discussions with UCSF have proposed learning from our collective efforts to create a regional network of Black CenteringPregnancy programs that could leverage resources for research and evaluation on best practices and outcomes.

Several factors postponed the project's launch in 2019. Initially, AHS's rationale for postponement stemmed from the need for AHS leadership to determine the most feasible cost neutral project structure with a looming budget shortfall of \$72 million. Subsequently, Alameda County was in the nation's first region to issue shelter-in-place (SIP) orders and social distancing restrictions in March 2020 to mitigate COVID-19 community spread. Both ACPHD and AHS prioritized their local pandemic response, reassigning staff and resources to the effort. Planning for in-person group implementation in June 2020 was halted. This period was also marked by nation-wide Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests demanding justice and reform in light of the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police, and countless other killings of Black people including Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbury. At the same time, the COVID 19 virus was killing Black Americans at twice the rate of white Americans, and exacerbating the existing racism-based health disparities related to pregnancy. With the legacy of racism and its current impact on the Black community more salient than ever, the collaborative began reorganizing its structure and focus with the momentum generated from the BLM movement.

ACPHD and AHS partners formalized the collaborative through a contractual agreement to use Healthy Start dollars as well as California's Perinatal Equity Initiative dollars to directly fund the Black-centric CenteringPregnancy prenatal groups. These successful negotiations resulted in a revised launch date for Fall 2020 and implementation planning activities ensued. As the lead organization licensed to deliver CenteringPregnancy in Alameda County, AHS staff began outlining it's internal enrollment process and registering pregnant participants for Black Centering groups in Fall 2020. Meanwhile, ACHSI's EmbraceHer team quickly pivoted and began developing the infrastructure for a virtual group care model due to the continued SIP restrictions. Through the quick adoption of telehealth approaches, CenteringPregnancy groups could now be offered online through a private course and community building platform that fosters interactive team-based care, continuity, and long-term continuous client engagement and participation. The BElovedBIRTH Black Centering collaborative launched its first Black Centering prenatal care group on October 1, 2020. This impact report describes this unique and innovative model of care, and outlines the significant accomplishments made in 2020.

Our Guiding Truths, Vision & Mission

Our Guiding Truths

- We are in crisis! Every day Black mothers, birthing people and their babies are experiencing disproportionately high rates of traumatic experiences and preventable morbidity and mortality in pregnancy and birth. This crisis is now being exacerbated by the crisis of the COVID 19 pandemic.
- Race is a social construct, not based on real biological or genetic differences.
- There is nothing wrong with Black birthing people. We are not inherently predisposed to ill health or birth complications. "Racial disparities" in birth experiences and outcomes are caused by racism, in all its forms. (So we call them "racism-based disparities")
- Structural racism creates materno-toxic zones and suffering from the social determinants of health. Obstetric racism results in bias and discrimination from providers during healthcare interactions. The inter-generational, toxic stress of racism "weathers" our bodies, increasing our risk for illness.
- It doesn't have to be this way. Black people are strong and resilient, and perfectly capable of healthy birth outcomes.
- The answers to this crisis are in the Black community. We are the experts in our needs. Any
 interventions to address this crisis must be led by us.



Our Vision

We envision a world where Black people have all the support, loving care, and resources needed to have happy, healthy, and safe pregnancies, births, and postpartum recoveries; free from obstetric racism.



Our Mission

We believe in the strength, resilience, and power of Black people. And we believe that prenatal and postpartum care for Black people needs to be rooted in birth justice and be antiracist. Guided by fierce love for Black families and communities, we aim to provide a holistic, culturally and racially attuned gold-package of group prenatal and postpartum care by, for, and with Black people that:

- Honors and celebrates Black people, Black birth, and Black community
- Lifts up the community wisdom, voices, experiences, and expertise of Black birthing people
- Acknowledges and activates the power and potential of Black birthing people
- Embraces Black birthing families in a village of community support
- Lessens the impact of racism on maternal and infant health care experiences and outcomes



Program Design



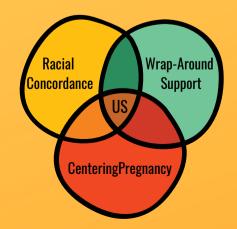
BElovedBIRTH Black Centering is a gold package of racially concordant & culturally attuned group prenatal and postpartum care, by for and with Black people. Put more simply, it's a gold-package of Black love!

Our program is a midwifery-led, team based model of care grounded in the frameworks of health equity, antiracism, birth justice, holistic wellness, and shared decision making and informed consent. We are a group of passionate Black midwives, family support advocates, doulas, and lactation consultants that work collaboratively with our obstetricians.

Trifecta of Evidence-Based Strategies

BElovedBIRTH Black Centering utilizes 3 evidence-based strategies for addressing racism-based disparities.

- 1. **Racial Concordance**: Model featuring care providers of the same race as patients; shown to lesson the impact of racial bias in healthcare interactions, and improve understanding, communication, relationships, and health outcomes. ¹⁻³
- 2. **CenteringPregnancy**: At the start of pregnancy people are matched with 8-12 other pregnant people with similar due dates, and do their prenatal visits in 2 hour group sessions, as opposed to the 15 minute one-on-one visit typical to the medical model of care. CenteringPregnancy provides more time with the healthcare providers, and allows for peer-to-peer support. The model is shown to improve care experiences and pregnancy outcomes, and reduce racism-based disparities in perinatal health.⁴⁻⁷
- 3. **Wrap-Around Social Support**: All of our groups are co-facilitated by an ACPHD family support advocate who provides group participants with one-on-one, individualized care coordination as needed. This allows our program to better address the social determinants of health disproportionally impacting our Black families as a result of structural racism. ^{2,5}





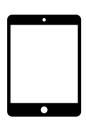
Telehealth Adaptation

Our Virtual Model

In response to the COVID 19 pandemic, we have adapted the CenteringPregnancy model of care to a telehealth format. Groups meet online for a total of 15 sessions, using Zoom for Healthcare. Participants join the program between 12-20 weeks of pregnancy, and continue up until 6-8 weeks postpartum. The first two sessions are once a month, then every other week, for the remainder of the program.

Eliminating Barriers to Access

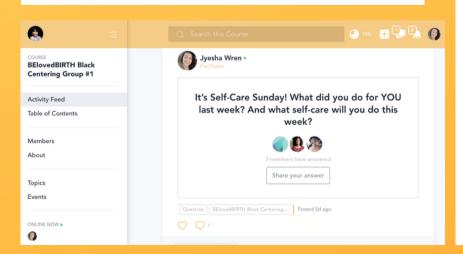
All participants who don't have access to a computer/tablet and internet connection are provided with a tablet that they keep. Tablets come with a 1 year data plan, and can be used to access other virtual support services.





Virtual Program Home

The magic of Centering group care is in the community connection and peer support. One of the many things that sets our Centering program apart from any other in the country is that we use technology to build community outside of group. Our use of Mighty Networks, an online course and community building platform, provides a "virtual program home" for our participants. This innovation leverages tech tools to facilitate continued engagement, connection, learning, and support between group sessions.





Group #1
Due Dates Feb/March 2021



The Power of Self-assessment

We provide program participants with supplies for checking their vital signs and monitoring the health of their pregnancy at home. Before each group session participants fill out their pregnancy log, then review it privately with their midwife in a Zoom breakout room during the group session. Participants are supported to actively engage in their healthcare, and have ownership of their health information.





Features & Functions of Our Virtual Program Home

On Mighty Networks participants can:

- Access the link to their Zoom group sessions in the "Events" tab
- Access their Black-centric, antiracist, birth justice childbirth education topics in their "Table of Contents" tab
- Build community and stay connected to their group members and care team 24/7 using the "Activity Feed" and "Chat" features

Antiracist, Birth Justice Childbirth Education

Session 1- Welcome & Introduction

- F Your Group Facilitators
- Race, Racism, Risk & Resilience
- Reproductive Justice, Birth Justice & Legal Resources
- Black Birthing Bill of Rights from NAABB
- F Your Right to Informed Choice
- JUNE TO Exercise Your POWER
- Black Midwifery & Our Grand Midwives
- Today's Affirmation
- Pregnancy Danger Signs & Emergencies

Our program includes black-centric, antiracist, birth justice childbirth education, created by our team. For example, the image to the left provides a snapshot of the topics covered in session #1.

Our childbirth education:

- Centers racism as the root cause of racial health disparities, and breaks down how racism harms our health
- De-pathologizes and de-stigmatizes Blackness
- Affirms our right to informed consent & refusal
- Provides tools for getting the information needed for making healthcare decisions, and practicing "shared decision making"
- Supports the holistic wellness of Black birthing people
- And more...

Focus on Holistic Wellness & Goal Setting

BElovedBIRTH Black Centering approaches wellness from a holistic perspective, focusing on preventative health. We have created four "weekly wellness" questions to provide our program participants with regular opportunities to focus on their holistic wellness; mind, body, and soul. These questions post to the activity feed in our virtual program home on their corresponding day of the week. Participants are then able to respond to the questions, create health & wellness goals for themselves, and support each other in achieving these goals.



Weekly Wellness **Questions**

- Movement Mondays
- What Are You Eating Wednesdays
- Thankful Thursdays
- Self-Care Sundays



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Interactive Learning Activities & Challenge Points

Interactive Learning Activities In & Out of Group

Consistent with the CenteringPregnancy model of care, our program is full of interactive activities covering a variety of topics related to pregnancy, birth, and postpartum. However, our unique program includes an interactive virtual home, which allows participants the opportunity to do learning activities during group AND anytime they want between groups. For example, our "Meal Plan Challenge" activity is done during group, while our "Belly Mapping Challenge" can be done between groups. When participants do challenge activities between groups, they share their experience and pictures on Mighty Networks. This interaction helps build collective learning and strengthens community.

Challenge Points

Participant interaction is critically important for learning and building a supportive community, so we incentivize and reward engagement.

Participants receive "challenge points" for everything they do on Mighty Networks, including posting on the activity feed, doing challenge activities, reading and reflecting on childbirth education, and creating events for their group.

At the final session the participant with the most points will be celebrated as our "Queen of Community Building", and get a special prize.









Serena - member of group #1, got creative and mapped her baby's position with tape!

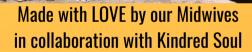
Tote Bags Full of Pregnancy & Postpartum Essentials With our Signature Herbal Wellness Supplies

We believe in the importance of traditional herbal practices to support wellness. Unfortunately, herbal supplies are often financially out of reach for our patients. We have created our very own collection of herbal and aromatherapy supplies for pregnancy and postpartum care. Our collection includes a 4 pack of aromatherapy roller balls, belly butter, booby balm, and postpartum herbal sitz bath. Participants receive a tote bag full of these items, free of charge. In addition to our signature supplies, our tote bags include other pregnancy essentials, such as, a hydration tracking water bottle, feminine hygiene wipes and postpartum pads, epsom salts, lactation cookies, breastfeeding pillow, and more!

"Oh my Goodness!!!! It feels so good to be loved upon! Just wow. These bags are EVERYTHING! I literally shed a few tears once I looked inside. Thank you for getting it, for recognizing our worth as mothers, for really fueling us with genuine care and resources to assist us during this sensitive time! I couldn't ask for a more supportive group of caregivers to help usher in new life with. Thank you so much!!"*

"You can feel the love put into these"* "That body butter is DIVINE!"*





Healing Postpartum Sitz Bath

A sitz bath is a warm soothing soak for the perineum and bottom area. Sitz bathes are very therapeutic after birth, especially with the addition of a strong "tea/infusion" made from dried herbs. Our signature sitz bath blend is packed with a powerhouse of beneficial herbs to speed the healing of the perineum after childbirth. These herbs can help support the repair, tightening, and toning of the tissue, as well as, decrease swelling and pain, and have antiseptic properties to prevent infection.





*Quotes from BElovedBIRTH Black Centering participants

Book Drive



Sample book pack (includes 8 items)

As our program launched, we were approached by the wonderful Dr Ricci Sylla, an OB-GYN passionate about supporting the cause. She sponsored a book drive for our BElovedBIRTH Black Centering participants. Thanks to the immense generosity of all who contributed, the book drive was able to purchase over 600 books for our program! For the entire first year of our program, we will be able to provide each participant with 8 books! These book packs include mini-sized and "touchy feely" books for infants, hide and seek books for toddlers, as well as, a story book and phonics book for older children. They feature gorgeous illustrations of Black babies, children, and families. These beautiful books will support family bonding and early literacy.



Big thanks to Dr Ricci Sylla and everyone who contributed!



Prenatal & Postpartum Nourishment

Nutrition is the foundation of our health and is critical to preventing medical complications in pregnancy and postpartum. Due to structural racism, far too many Black birthing people are living in food deserts, without access to the nourishing foods they need to be healthy before, during, and after pregnancy. BElovedBIRTH Black Centering approachs our program with the understanding that food is medicine, and food justice is racial justice. Supporting nourishment is a key component of our therapeutic plan for improving birth outcomes and supporting the overall wellness of our Black birthing community. To help us acheive this goal we've established two invaluable community partnerships.

Prenatal Produce Boxes with Mandela Partners

Mandela Partners is a local Oakland based non-profit organization that provides produce boxes as part of it's work to support health and economic growth in low-income communities.

This partnership will provide our program participants with boxes of fresh produce delivered to their homes over the course of their pregnancy. Thank you Mandela Partners!





Postpartum Meal & Snack Delivery with NOURISH!

Mothers for Mothers Postpartum Justice Project is a local community organization dedicated to sharing cross cultural postpartum recipes, traditions and wisdom, exposing current postpartum realities, and promoting Postpartum Justice in Black and Indigenous communities.



This partnership will provide our participants with restaurant prepared meals and snacks, delivered weekly to their homes for 6 weeks postpartum. Deliveries will include 8 meals total for the week. Deliveries are made by a local Black woman-owned delivery service, and BIPOC owned restaurants are priotitized.





Holiday Gift Drive with the NOURISH!- Village



Of the Mothers for Mothers Postpartum Justice Project

We are beyond grateful to our community partners, the NOURISH!-Village, a program of the Mothers for Mothers Postpartum Justice Project. For the 2020 holiday season they generously sponsored a spectacular gift drive for our BElovedBIRTH Black Centering families.

"...I am so grateful for the contributions and the hard work behind making sure my baby has what he needs." *

In 2 short weeks this gift drive:

- Fulfilled 17 family wish lists!
 (17 pregnant moms + 16 kids)
- Organized over 60+ donors who bought 450+ items or gift cards
- Contributed over \$10,000 worth of toys, books, baby essentials, and gifts for moms!!!
- And even helped cover a security deposit to get a mother and daughter housed!!!

Thank you NOURISH! - Village!

"My family and I are so grateful....The thing that really touched me was the handwritten note with our sweet baby's name. It was the first time I was able to see our baby's name in writing." *

"... I have no income but still have gifts to put under the tree!! How amazing is that! I was really stressed about Christmas this year too. I am completely overwhelmed by the generosity. The gifts for my children restored my faith in the power of community and was just the reminder I needed to know that bad times don't last always! Thank you for keeping our families close during this holiday season!" *

"...I love that we can all feel supported during these unstable times!" *

"...I really wasn't expecting all the love they shared and it was much needed I'm so greatful thank you." * "Your Gifts Mean More Than the Items Within, Before I received any gifts from NOURISH I wondered how I was going to get my daughter something for Christmas. I thought I may be able to afford at least one nice toy. I now stare at our little Christmas tree and almost begin to cry due to the abundance of gifts and my thankfulness. My daughter, along with my unborn daughter, has gifts this year and we are all thankful... I hope to someday bless a family, above and beyond their expectation, like you have blessed mine! Thank you, Thank you, Thank you!" *



*Quotes from BElovedBIRTH Black Centering participants

Pregnancy Photo Shoots with Linda Jones Photography

We are thrilled to partner with Linda Jones Photography, to offer pregnancy photo shoots to all of our group participants, free of charge. This is another part of how we "love up" our participants, and honor and celebrate Black people, Black pregnancy, and Black love. Through these photos we hope to uplift our strength, resilience, and beauty, as Black birthing people. Below are some of these special photos of our beautiful program participants.













Quantity & Quality of Groups

Quantity

We launched our first BElovedBIRTH Black Centering group on October 1st, 2020, for people with due dates in February & March of 2021. We then launched group #2 on November 25th, 2020, for people with due dates in April & May, 2021. We had a total of 2 groups, serving 24 patients, with 8 sessions in 2020! Below are some details on enrollment and attendance by group.

Enrollment & Attendance By Group

Group #1

- Enrollment: 12 patients
- Number of Sessions in 2020: 6
- Average Attendance Per Session: 10 patients

Group #2

- Enrollment: 12 patients
- Number of Sessions in 2020: 2
- Average Attendance Per Session: 5 patients (both sessions were immediately before major holidays, Thanksgiving & Christmas)

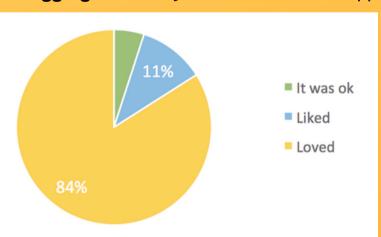
Quality

Participants are provided with a link to a short post-session feedback survey at the end of each group (pictured bottom left). This survey enables participants to share their assessment of group quality and make suggestions, it also allows our team to be responsive to participant needs. In 2020 we received 36 survey responses, providing invaluable quantitative and qualitative data. See below for an aggregate of the quantitative data, and see the next page for patient quotes from the qualitative data.

Session Feedback Survey

How much did you like the session?
Old not like
◯ It was ok
○ I liked it
○ I loved it
What did you like about the group?
Long answer text
What did you not like about the group. What would you change?
Long answer text
Any other comments?
Long answer text

Aggregate Survey Results for 2020



We are happy to report that the vast majority (84%) of participants loved the sessions, and zero participants selected "did not like"! Check out the next page to learn more about what participants loved about group.

What Participants Are Saying About BElovedBIRTH Black Centering

The most important measure of quality is our participant's experience. We've received some very powerful feedback from our program participants, which has affirmed that our program is on the right path. Below are some participant responses to the question, "What did you like about the group?", from our anonymous post-group feedback surveys; and feedback that was shared on our online portal. Thank you to all of our wonderful group members for sharing their experience!



Fundraising & Partnerships

In addition to our original grant from the California Perinatal Equity Initiative, we are so happy to have recieved additional funding to help launch our program. Our additional funding included a telehealth mini-grant from the Centering Healthcare Institute, as well as, grants from the Roots & Wings Foundation, The Bella Vista Foundation, The California Nurse-Midwives Foundation, and the Marks Family Foundation. We are also overjoyed to have developed a partnership with Mothers for Mothers Postpartum Justice Project's NOURISH! Initiative. This community partnership allows all of our program participants to receive meal and snack delivery for 6 weeks postpartum, and much more!

Big Thanks to our Supporters & Community Partners!









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Plans for 2021...

Groups



Based on increasing demand, we plan to increase from 6 groups/year to 12 groups/year in 2021.

This will allow us to serve 144 patients/year, twice as many as our current 72 patients/year.

Nourishment



In 2021 we hope to raise enough funds to ensure that all of our

participants can receive nutrition support. And we hope to increase the postpartum nourishment service from 4 days of meals per week to 7 days of meals per week.

Apparel & Swag



This year we plan to create a collection of program apparel and swag to be shared with

our participants. We hope to include baby onsies, maternity tops, nursing tops, sweatshirts, mugs, tote bags, and more.

Community Engagment



This year we hope to hire one of our program participants to serve as

our community engagement coordinator. This role will involve designing community dialogue and accountability strategies, event planning, social media communications, and more!

Program Materials



In 2021 we aim to build out our program materials to include:

- More childbirth education, in digital & print formats
- Custom participant notebook
- Educational & inspirational coloring books for expecting parents and older children

Doula Care



To address the needs of Black birthing people, racially concordant doulas must be part

of our "gold-package" of care. With the support of ACPHD's Perinatal Equity Initiative, we are creating a collective of Black doulas to support our group participants.

Herbal Wellness Supplies



In 2021 we plan to expand our collection of signature herbal wellness supplies.

Exciting items coming soon, including a pregnancy tea, massage oil, and postpartum perineal/bottom mist!

Research



We will continue tracking pregnancy and birth outcome data in

the national CenteringCounts database. In addition, we will work with researchers to measure participant experiences of respect, autonomy, and racism.

Custom Illustration



High quality childbirth education materials featuring images of Black

people is critically important, but scarce. We have hired a fabulous Black woman illustrator to help us create a large portfolio of images to feature in our program materials and childbirth education.

Exercise & Dance

We are excited to begin providing weekly exercise classes taught by a certified pre/postnatal fitness specialist, in addition to our Centering group sessions, to support holistic wellness, reduce stress, and facilitate birth preparation and postpartum recovery.

Lullaby Project



This year we hope to partner with the "Lullaby Project", a program out of

Carnegie Hall that pairs expecting parents with musicians to write and record a lullaby for their baby. This special program supports maternal health, childhood development, and bonding.

Fundraising



To continue our program development, and make all of these exciting plans

possible, we are working to create a funding portfolio that includes:

- 1. Foundation grants
- 2. Corporate partnerships
- 3. And a large base of grassroots community supporters

Get In Touch

Contact Our Program Coordinator

For general questions and program enrollment, contact our program coordinator.



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Follow Us On Social Media







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Visit Our Website

http://www.alamedahealthsystem.org/f amily-birthing-center/black-centering/





Become a Supporter

Join us in the movement for birth justice!

Join us in this movement to transform perinatal care for Black people, and say "enough is enough" to racism-based disparities in birth. Your support will help us grow this innovative gold-package of care, and ensure our Black birthing community has everything they need to thrive in pregnancy and beyond. Thank you!

https://www.classy.org/campaign/belove dbirth-black-centering/c315301





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