

# Healing & Practical Supports to Address Maternal Health Disparities



## Liberty's HomePlace

### The Need

We know that African American mothers and babies face alarming rates of death and morbidity, and that these health disparities are just the beginning along a continuum of disparate social outcomes connected to historical and present-day systemic racism and trauma.

- U.S.-born African American mothers are 2.8 times more likely to experience maternal death than white mothers.
- 29-44% of U.S. born Black women experience postpartum depressive symptoms (PDS), yet few are properly identified and/or connected to mental health services.
- Black women are more than 50% more likely to have a pre-term birth and nearly twice as likely to have a low-birth weight baby compared to white mothers. And, black infants are 2.3 times more likely to die within their first year of life.

### Our Vision

Liberty's HomePlace is a vision that is coming to life, imagined and planned out by the African American community participating in the Birth Justice Collaborative supported by Hennepin County's investment to address maternal health disparities. Our vision for Liberty's HomePlace is to bring forth our *HomePlace* ancestral way, through a holistic retreat center for birthing families in North Minneapolis at Liberty's Northside Healing Space. We will surround families with culturally responsive healing and connection, as we support preventive practices in collaboration with responsive providers.

*This will be  
their  
HomePlace.*



### *African American HomePlaces*

Historically, African American people believed that the construction of a HomePlace (the slave hut, the wooden shack) had a communal dimension that promoted healing. We could be affirmed in our bodies, minds, and hearts despite poverty and hardship. We could restore our wellbeing through connection and celebration.



# What we will do at HomePlace

HomePlace will be a retreat space for African American birthing families within the Northside Healing Space building at 2100 Emerson Ave N.

## 1. Increase felt sense of connection, healing & belonging

- Establish healing experiences that mitigate the impact of racism and trauma.
- Reduce stress through protective factors (ie therapy, groups, cultural connection).
- Monitor and support well-being.

## 3. Reduce impacts of economic hardship

- Provide concrete economic supports in times of need.
- Financial and economic counseling
- Support access to resource navigation and/or job support (housing, benefits).



We will utilize learnings from lived experts to support systems-change for equitable health outcomes for African Americans.

## 2. Providing practical support & knowledge

- Culturally rooted approach to learning about early parenting and postpartum support.
- Tailored support, such as transportation and access to essential supplies.

## 4. Pathways to responsive providers

- Connect responsive providers to HomePlace participants.
- Support education and capacity of medical providers and cultural birthworkers to work in tandem.



**Interconnected supports for African American birthing families at HomePlace.**

**Economic Continuum:** Our goal is to have blend of economic experiences within the HomePlace community, including: those in the lowest poverty levels, the “floating families” who make too much to receive services but not enough to get help, and more resourced families who still face the impacts of chronic stress of being an African American birthing family.

# Pilot & Opening in 2025

As we continue planning with funding from the State of Minnesota, we are launching pilot efforts to try out and evaluate our solutions in 2025, including: 1) engage up to 10 pilot families, 2) host communal offerings, and 3) invite African American birthworkers into a satellite space. All of these efforts will be held within the Northside Healing Space. We will build our implementation plans and begin our evaluation as we work toward a soft opening of HomePlace in the fall of 2025.

	<p><b>1. Interconnected wrap around supports with 10 pilot families.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pregnancy &amp; parenting support</li><li>• Economic supports &amp; engagement</li><li>• Therapy and healing services</li></ul> <p><b>A birthworker (ie Doula) and Liberty Healing Guide will walk with the family 1:1 throughout the process.</b></p>
	<p><b>2. Hosting Communal Offerings</b></p> <p>We will begin to host classes and gatherings with pilot families and the community. Sample offerings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Healthy mother, healthy baby group</li><li>• Financial and economic education</li><li>• “Joseph” sessions for Dads</li><li>• Celebrations and ceremonies</li><li>• Grief groups</li></ul>
	<p><b>3. African American Birthworker Satellite</b></p> <p>We will start to offer space and support for African American Doula's and birthworkers. We will create a satellite space for gathering, connecting, and engaging with birthing families. We will provide capacity-building support and work on tools to support collaboration with responsive providers.</p>

# Lived expertise & research drive our plans

## When we listened to families, a shared story emerged.



We listened to stories from mothers and families across generations which illuminated a common thread: an African American birthing experience that is disconnected from culture and reveals the strain that racism puts on the African American body.

## The research affirmed this lived experience.

For African Americans, chronic stress from impacts of racism exacerbated by economic hardship result in negative health outcomes, including those associated with pregnancy, birth, and postnatal health. The literature also points to epigenetics, historical racialized trauma from slavery and its aftermath carried forward as a memory imprint in the genetic make-up of Black bodies.

## Understanding root causes and evidence-based ideas helped establish our model.

With these root causes in mind, we explored research supporting the idea that cultural and communal connections along with organizational healing strategies contribute to reduction of chronic stress and impacts of epigenetics on marginalized communities. Simply put, we found that asset-based, communal, and cultural healing strategies can become protective factors. We examined loneliness as it impacts health outcomes, and how intentional connection can be an antidote.

*Liberty's HomePlace was developed in partnership with:*



### Some of our sources:

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- Thayer, Zaneta M., and Christopher W. Kuzawa. "Biological memories of past environments: epigenetic pathways to health disparities." *Epigenetics* 6.7 (2011): 798-803.