

Governor's Council for Women and Girls
Health and Safety Subcommittee
November 7, 2022 - Meeting Minutes

Attendees: Commissioner Manisha Juthani, Commissioner Deidre Gifford, Commissioner Angel Quiros, Miriam Miller, Reverend Robyn Anderson (MHF), Brenda Rivera (PWP), Laura Morris (OHS), Chioma Ogazi, Chelsea Vozzolo, Anne Bonito, Abby Alter, Deborah Poerio, Jane Siegel, Pam Kelly (MHF), Valencia L. Bagby-Young, Catherine Rees, Megan Smith (CHA), Christine Jean-Louis, Yvette Young, Janet Alfano, Shelly Nolan, Maryann Smith (recorder)

Meeting Started at 10:02 am

I. Opening Remarks - Cmsr Juthani – Welcome everyone. Very excited to continue in our theme of maternal and reproductive health. We're excited to have Laura Morris championing this session and we'll turn it over to you Laura.

Laura Morris:

- Our speaker for today is Reverend Robyn Anderson, Pastor of Blackwell AME Zion Church and Associate Minister at Cross Street AME Zion Church. She is also Director of the Ministerial Health Fellowship (MHF).
- Reverend Anderson oversees the greater Middlesex Health Enhancement Community and her presentation today is on maternal health.
- The Office of Health Strategy was awarded a grant from the Office of Minority Health which funded this program which is called Pregnant with Possibilities (PWP).
- The goal of this program is to improve the nutrition and health of at-risk African American and Latina pregnant women by engaging community health workers and doulas in partnership with Middlesex Health. Goal is to decrease low birth weight and improve maternal child morbidity and mortality.
- We also have with us Catherine Rees and Pam Kelly from Middlesex Health. I'll turn it over to Reverend Anderson:

II. Presentation by Reverend Robyn Anderson:

- Good morning everyone on this beautiful warm Monday. Thank you for this opportunity to present this very important program to you. We are making a difference in the lives of pregnant women of color.
- We have one of our doulas who is on today, Brenda Rivera.
- We started working with women mainly in Middletown area because of the need, with referrals from Middlesex Hospital and Community Health Center.
- No cost for this service as it is grant funded
- Doulas are trained as community health workers who work not only with pregnant women but also their families providing emotional support, linking clinical services, and community-based programs. Also help obtain housing, food, help with doctor's appointments, and support services as some are dealing with substance use and mental health issues.
- Linking the women to breastfeeding and parenting classes, and training on SIDS.
- Worked with 36 women and their families to date. Most births over 7 lbs.
- Focus on nutrition and movement throughout pregnancy and at least one year postpartum including help finding jobs or a better job or going back to school.
- Turn over to Brenda Rivera

Presentation by Brenda Rivera, Doula with Pregnant with Possibilities (PWP)

- Reverend Robyn addressed all the resources we offer for our ladies, but one I specifically wanted to mention is Sleep Academy. Many women have different needs, but most do not have a crib. Sleep Academy is

where they can take a course to learn how to prevent SIDS for the first year, and they also get a free play pen at the end, delivered within 5 days to their homes.

- Hospital bills have been a big issue with our ladies, and a lot of them do not have insurance. We are able to help them get insurance, lower their bills, and/or get rid of them completely because of the hospital bed funds they weren't aware of.
- Breastfeeding a big thing as well. We give facts about breastfeeding, and it's been a blessing that every one of the moms in our program breastfed their babies.

Reverend Robyn Anderson: I wanted to add that we've had a couple of young moms just barely 18 or just under 18 that we have been receiving referrals for. Are there any questions?

Commissioner Gifford: Thank you to Brenda and all your team for the terrific work you do, and we look forward to working with you further as we roll out our maternity bundle and our supportive doulas in Husky. I'm particularly interested in the billing from hospitals for childbirth. This should not be happening, I would like to follow up with your organization to make sure we are helping from a DSS perspective, whenever we can, around emergency Medicaid billing. It should be a rare instance where there is not some type of coverage for the hospital portion of the birth in Connecticut as there is an emergency Medicaid program specifically for these instances. I will ask my team to follow up with you to make sure an outstanding debt is resolved.

Rev. Robyn Anderson: Thank you so much as that is one of the stresses that our project is trying to eliminate for the women. We look forward to hearing from you.

Christine Jean-Louis: I'm from the Lt. Governor's office. It's great that you are offering these services free of charge because doulas can be expensive, so providing this free of cost to the community and allowing the ability for pregnant women to move, which we know is important in pregnancy, is great. I could not find you online, and how do we promote this to the Community? And what are the eligibility requirements for the program?

Rev. Robyn Anderson: The website is [MINISTERIAL HEALTH FELLOWSHIP - Home \(mhfct.org\)](http://mhfct.org), and PWP is on the event page: [Events - MINISTERIAL HEALTH FELLOWSHIP \(mhfct.org\)](http://mhfct.org). The restrictions of the program is they are bipod women of color and Latin X and at least 18, but we've had women very close to 18 in the program, they must be pregnant, and we also take bi-racial couples if the father is of color but the mother is not, for example.

Megan Smith: Thank you Reverend Anderson and Brenda. I've also heard of this program from Catherine Rees at Middlesex Hospital for some time now. It's fantastic to hear the progress. Congratulations. I'm from Connecticut Hospital Association and the Connecticut Perinatal Quality Collaborative, and there has been a lot of discussion around safe sleep. Brenda, can you say a little more about the Sleep Academy—what's entailed, how many sessions, and particularly to have discussions around safe sleep that are culturally syntonc, compatible, congruent.

Brenda Rivera: Yes, it's a non-profit based out of New Britain, and I've added the link to the website on the Chat, [Safe Sleep Academy - Bright Start \(brightstartct.org\)](http://brightstartct.org). It's a course that takes 60 to 90 minutes, and they receive a crib at the end. It's simple yet very detailed and easy for them to read which helps them to understand how serious it is to not have the baby on the bed, and even smoking at home.

Reverend Robyn Anderson: I wanted to say also one of the most important things is that all the doulas are from the community as well, living and residing here. Also, many of the women in the program have special needs with at-risk pregnancies, and some have had stillbirths, using substances, or had mental health issues. We are a grassroots organization and do not have a large group of staff to keep up with administrative things, but we will update the website.

Commissioner Juthani: I want to thank Reverend Anderson and Brenda for your work and your presentation today. Do you have any testimonials that you can share?

(Reverend Anderson and Brenda shared a couple of testimonials with the group.) Reverend Anderson: we have lots of stories of women who don't go to their prenatal visits or never took it seriously, and its alarming. Thank you to Catherine Rees and the people at Middlesex and the doctors and they also had a Grand Rounds that talked about maternal health and the roles of doulas. This is key and important for these women.

Laura Morris: I put in the chat that we have for his project contracted with Data Haven and the Yale Equity Research and Innovation Center, who has been helping put together some metrics for this project, and we will share that data with the group. Thank you, Reverend Anderson, Catherine, and Brenda, for your presentation. It is always a pleasure to work with you.

Catherine Rees: I wanted to say from the hospital's perspective that we are so grateful for Pregnant with Possibilities, for Rev. Anderson's leadership, for the incredible work that Brenda is doing, and also Beverly as our second doula. It's been such an incredibly important program for our community, and we love this program as does our family practice sites, and the OBGYN sites. Pam Kelly is working behind the scenes running the data.

Rev. Robyn Anderson: Thank you. We're grateful to OHS for their investment in the community and this project. I also want to mention that we meet monthly with our referral sources and give updates through CHC and Middlesex Hospital.

III. Presentation by Oma Ogazi and Chelsea Vozzolo - Wise Woman program.

Oma Ogazi: Chelsea, who is program manager for the Wise Woman program will present and I'll join back to answer any questions.

Chelsea Vozzolo: Wise Woman program is a long acronym that stands for Well Integrated Screening and Evaluation for Women Across the Nation.

- CDC grant-funded program.
- Not every state has this funding as it is a competitive grant funding.
- Our performance has been great but about 24 different programs across the nation have this funding for cardiovascular disease prevention services and screening and lifestyle support for women
- CDC extended the breast and cervical cancer early detection program to include cardiovascular disease
- Wise Woman is a whole-body approach program, looking at the whole woman rather than fragmented parts including screening for cardiovascular risk factors
- Providing women with evidence-based health coaching and healthy behavior support services
- Working with low income uninsured or underinsured women between 40 and 64 years of age, with parameters defined by CDC.
- Well woman visit – looking at blood pressure, weight, height, BMI, checking cholesterol, fasting glucose, triglycerides, HDL, and LDL.
- Talking to participants about nutrition and lifestyle, stress level, mental health—very comprehensive screening.
- In addition to mental health support, we offer medication therapy management or MTM, which helps our participants when they are on medications to make sure they are taking meds how they were prescribed and if they have any side effects, etc. Participants meet with a pharmacist that's trained in medication therapy management to do a brown bag assessment to look at all the meds they are taking. Pharmacist will make recommendations back to Doctor prescribing with possible changes if something not working.
- Provide health coaching with self-monitoring blood pressure cuffs to regularly check blood pressure.
- Provide health coaching with diabetes prevention program (DPP).
- Health coaching is most popular with participants. We have an agreement with Planet Fitness so they can be enrolled at the gym for three months then we reassess, so up to six months total. Then we talk

to our community health navigators to see if we can support these participants to sustain their healthy changes

- Our St. Francis Hospital team have created community gardens over last four years. Participants are helping to plant and maintain gardens as well as take what is grown so they can have healthy fresh produce.
- Also, we are able to provide health coaching with Wellness Wins or formally Weight Watchers through our community navigators. We've helped participants receive correct walking shoes if they want to get out and walk.
- Our contracted health systems Hartford Healthcare, Prospect, Trinity Health of New England, and Western Connecticut Health Network, which is now called Nuvance, Yale New Haven Health Services and Day Kimball, the only independent hospital that we are working with.

Chioma Ogazi: I want to add that our community health navigators, who function as community health workers, are trusted members of their community so women are able to trust them enough to say anything like that they don't have sneakers or I like gardening but I don't have a plot, and then we are able to contact Knox Gardens to give us plots so these women are not only planting for their family, but are able to see some of those products. [The Connecticut Early Detection and Prevention Program CEDPP](#)

Commissioner Juthani – I want to thank Chelsea and Oma for putting this presentation together. We also heard from them last year around this time. It's an important program to highlight because it does great work in our community. Any Questions?

Commissioner Gifford: Thank you for that presentation and education. I'm impressed with the breadth of services you are able to provide. In both programs, how many women per year are you able to service?

Chelsea Vozzolo: This past program year, fiscal year 2022, we screened about 1200 women with the Wise Woman program, and we hope to surpass that in the future.

Reverend Anderson: We were able to serve about 35 to 40 women in the Pregnant with Possibilities program.

- IV. Closing Remarks – Laura Morris – that concludes our presentations for this meeting. Reminder that the next meeting is December 5 and the topic is young mothers and young families and the programs that work with them. Thank you everyone.

Meeting ended at 10:59 am.

Meeting Recording: [Governor's CoWaG Health & Safety Subcommittee \[not-secure\]-20221107_161114-Meeting Recording.mp4 \(sharepoint.com\)](#)