

The Children's Home Society of New Jersey Receives March of Dimes Grant to Help Reduce Premature Births in Mercer County

The March of Dimes has awarded a \$29,000 grant to The Children's Home Society of New Jersey (CHS of NJ) in support of its Body & Soul program. These funds will help CHS of NJ continue its work helping African American women of Mercer County who are at risk of delivering a baby prematurely to reach a full-term pregnancy and deliver a healthy baby. This grant is one of many that the March of Dimes awards in pursuit of its mission to prevent birth defects and infant mortality.

Mercer County faces the highest infant mortality rate of New Jersey's 21 counties, and Trenton fares far worse than the rest of Mercer County in factors affecting the health outcomes of babies including lack of prenatal care, prematurity, low birth weight, and use of alcohol, drugs and tobacco. CHS of NJ's Body & Soul program offers a holistic approach to prenatal health designed to reduce stress and encourage healthy lifestyle choices, both before and during pregnancy, to reduce the risk of premature delivery. The program provides resources, education and services related to preconception and prenatal health, and increases linkages to early prenatal care to improve positive birth outcomes. Women who participate in the Body & Soul program learn about prevention and early signs and symptoms of premature labor such as contractions, changes in vaginal discharge, and pelvic pressure, as well as the risks associated with delivering prior to the pregnancy's 37th week.

A total of 219 women participated in Body and Soul related prenatal support groups and/or prenatal health education seminars and case management from January 2010 to June 2013. "We are very excited about the March of Dimes grant because it will help us provide the necessary support to even more mothers in Mercer County who are considered high-risk for premature delivery," said Maritza I. Raimundi-Petroski, Director of Maternal Child Health, Family and Community Support Services for CHS of NJ. "We are so grateful to those who support the March of Dimes, as their volunteer efforts and generous donations have helped to make this grant possible, and will help mothers of our community deliver healthy, full-term babies," she said.

For Raimundi and her staff, the opportunity to partner with the March of Dimes in support of the Body & Soul Program is an important step toward fulfilling CHS of NJ's mission; **saving children's lives and building healthy families** starting at pregnancy, and helping to reduce the number of premature births in the community.



Participants of CHSofNJ's Body & Soul Program were on hand with Program Assistant Shahera N. Hutchinson (right), to accept an award of \$29,000 from March of Dimes representatives Addy Bonet, State Director (third from left) and Kitara Garner, Senior Community Director (center).