

## **AMAR: Training Community Doulas**

On Friday, December 10th, 2021, we graduated the second cohort of Health Connect One (HC1) AMAR Community-Based Doulas. From the inception of the AMAR Community Doulas, one of the most critical aspects of our work has been creating an ecosystem of prenatal, parenting, and maternal support for our community from within our community. This has successfully allowed us to provide the most culturally-relevant, respectful, compassionate, and competent care to all the families and mothers we serve.

Under the direction of doula supervisor Teresita Carrasquillo, who began her journey with CHSofNJ as a volunteer doula, twelve women from the local community became HC1 Certified Community-Based Doulas over the course of twenty training sessions. All of our doulas are trained to serve birthing people and their families in English and Spanish. As community doulas, these women have the opportunity to help the community by providing services as a per-diem support staff, when funding is available, and they can provide their own services following their completion of their required clinical observations and Medicaid Reimbursement Application. We have hired three full-time or per-diem doulas from our first graduating cohort to support our program!

Women who provide services under the AMAR program carry a caseload of up to 15 birthing people at a time. On average, our doulas provide six prenatal home visits and eight postpartum home visits. During these home visits, doulas support and empower expectant mothers by providing emotional, physical, and informational support before, during, and after birth. They may offer hands-on coping strategies, methods for coping with stress, offer resources and information to the mother and facilitate constructive communication between the birthing person and their health care providers. First and foremost, our doulas support our expectant mothers in achieving their birthing and parenting goals. As a result, we have significantly improved maternal and infant health outcomes within our community. As of September 30, 2021, AMAR Community Doula interventions have reduced preterm births by 69.7% and reduced c-sections by 60.1% among our birthing mothers. Only 2.7% of AMAR babies were born preterm, 3.3% weighed less than five pounds, eight ounces at birth, 6.7% were admitted to NICU, and only 10.1% of our mothers had low-risk c-sections. Furthermore, 66.7% of our mothers breastfeed exclusively at 6 weeks and 65.1% breastfed exclusively at three months.

AMAR Community Doulas have radically shifted the birthing experience of Hispanic women in Mercer County by empowering them and supporting them in achieving positive birth experiences. Vice President of Strategic Initiatives, Prevention Programs and Community Engagement at the CHoNJ Maritza I. Raimundi-Petroski describes the impact as: *“Being a witness to how our concepts become life changing opportunities to improve birth outcomes and close the gap in terms of birth and health inequities simply fuels my passion for short and long term initiatives that are rooted in empathy and compassion and where our communities are not just the recipients of the intended services, but are true partners and collaborators. Each baby is a story, each story is filled with hope.”* The work undertaken by

our community doula is unparalleled and cannot be celebrated enough. Every day, they engage and support Hispanic women in successfully preparing and coming into parenthood in a culturally supportive, relevant, and compassionate manner.