

Neighborhood navigators fight infant mortality one mom at a time

Community Health Improvement Plan | Year One Spotlight

Ohio Equity Institute (OEI) is a statewide program, run locally by Hamilton County Public Health, to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in infant mortality. Three neighborhood navigators are working in 22 priority ZIP codes to identify at-risk pregnant women and connect them to needed health and social services.



OEI neighborhood navigators Jamaica Gilliam, Brittani Schwab, and Danyelle Bush identify pregnant moms at an event.

MEET OUR NEIGHBORHOOD NAVIGATORS

OEI neighborhood navigators are in a unique position – the work they do isn't being done by anyone else in Hamilton County.

Danyelle Bush says being an OEI neighborhood navigator “basically requires every part of my degree,” which combined African American studies, women and gender studies, family and child development, and communications. She covers Roselawn, Walnut Hills, Reading, Lockland, Lincoln Heights, Carthage, Hartwell, Northside, and parts of Bond Hill and Elmwood.

Jamaica Gilliam has a bachelor's degree in maternal and child health. She is a doula, a certified lactation consultant, and mom to five-year-old twins. Jamaica covers downtown Cincinnati, Fairmount, St. Bernard, Madisonville, and Price Hill.

Brittani Schwab has a bachelor's degree in public health with a focus in community health. She covers Anderson, Forest Park, Mt. Healthy, Mt. Washington, North College Hill, Westwood, and Western Hills.

IDENTIFY

The navigators go out into the community to find women who are pregnant and live in Hamilton County. They visit neighborhood grocery stores, restaurants, and libraries – wherever moms might go. “We talk to people and see if they know anybody who's pregnant,” Danyelle said. “We're connecting with the community and trying to figure out what it is we need to do to get moms to be drawn to us.”

“At first it was a lot of trial and error,” Brittani said. “Now we don't even think twice about going up to people and telling them what we do and seeing if they are interested or know a mom who might be.”

The navigators are becoming known and trusted in the communities they serve. They also reach moms through the OEI Hamilton County Facebook page (@OEIHamCo), a hotline, events, and referrals.

CONNECT

When a navigator identifies a woman who qualifies, she sets up an in-person visit at a place wherever the mom chooses. At this visit, the navigator does an assessment to determine what services the pregnant woman needs. They connect moms to everything from housing, food assistance, education, and employment to clothing, car seats, diapers, and cribs.

Assessing and connecting is more than just checking items off a list. “At least with some of my clients, if I was just like ‘I'm here to give you resources or get you connected,’ they would say, ‘no, I'm ok, it's fine,’” Jamaica said. “It's a pride thing. Over 80 percent of who we're reaching out to are African American women, and that's what I am. So, I know they're not going to say ‘I need help.’ We'll only learn what they need from listening to them.”

She added, “I usually offer to people, ‘let me listen to your story, I'd love to know what's going wrong and what's going right in your pregnancy.’ And usually through this we learn what resources they need.”

IMPACT

After the assessment, navigators follow up with moms, continuing to provide support and connections for up to 21 days.

“I think a big thing about what we do is that when we are offering them these resources, we don't just say ‘here you go, you figure it out,’” Jamaica said.

“We might be really short term, but I think we're able to build this relationship where we get to listen and really hear them. For a body of women who feel invisible and feel unheard, this is what makes us different.” -Jamaica Gilliam

“What we do can travel through their whole pregnancy and afterwards,” Brittani said. “We might only be present for three weeks, but what we give them can last a lot longer.”



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