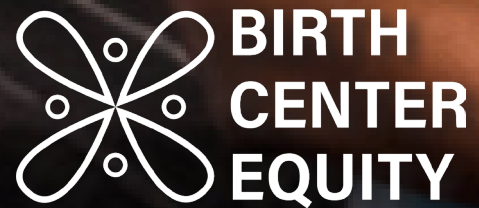


OUR IMPACT



A close-up photograph of a woman with dark hair wearing a brown hat, smiling warmly while holding a baby. The baby is wearing a light blue patterned shirt. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

Imagine A World

"Imagine a world where birth is safe, sacred, loving, and celebrated for everyone. Imagine giving birth with midwives in a community birth center designed in response to the dreams, hopes, and needs of the community it calls home. We believe that when Black birthing people are centered, healthcare is transformed—and the experience of birth has the power to transform and heal individuals, families, and communities. Mere survival is not the goal; we are creating birthing environments where so much more is possible."

- Leseliey Welch & Nashira Baril



Community birth centers provide safe, culturally-reverent midwifery care for all. Community birth centers are crucial to creating a world where families, communities, and midwives thrive. This is the impact that Birth Center Equity is making real.

It's time to recenter midwifery, educate and train aspiring midwives, and restore the safe, sacred and social nature of birth in our communities. To do this, we must invest in tangible, trusted, sustainable community birth infrastructure. Birth center care is high-quality, value-based care that saves lives and money. Midwifery care in community birth centers results in improved outcomes, enhances the birth experience, increases rates of breast/chestfeeding and parent engagement, reduces racial disparities, and is cost-effective. Moreover, cost analyses project “an annual savings of \$189 million with a shift of 1 percent of births from hospital to birth center.” (Source: [Community Birth Settings](#))

Midwives — especially midwives of color — are overcoming significant barriers to leading birth centers. Of the nearly four hundred birth centers across the country, most are for-profit entities started by white midwives with resources from private practice, personal funds, loans, and family gifts (Source: [AABC Birth Center Report](#)). In a policy and medical reimbursement context that has historically devalued midwifery, opening birth centers and ensuring that birth center care is accessible to families who need it most is challenging for everyone. Centuries of racialized economic exploitation and inequitable access to capital make it even more tenuous for Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color (BIPOC) to build birth centers—

especially because our commitment is to design with the most marginalized birthing people at the center.

Community birth centers build beloved economies. Birth Center Equity nurtures the values, practices, and structures that are the heart of community wellness and the foundation of a caring economy. BCE supports BIPOC birth center leaders' self-determination to secure land, structures, and resources that serve communities today and are owned by communities for generations.

With targeted, values-driven investment and removal of policy and reimbursement barriers to midwifery care, community birth centers offer a liberatory economic model through which midwives, families and communities can thrive.

BCE was founded on the values of safety, abundance, and liberation, to grow and sustain birth centers led by Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color. Today, we are a network of more than 40 birth center leaders of color who—despite entrenched inequity and in active defiance of it—have successfully opened or are opening birth centers in our communities.

Please join with us as we build community among birth center leaders of color, nurture efforts to transform the culture of birth, and steward capital to seed vibrant and lasting community birth infrastructure for generations to come.

– Leseliey Welch & Nashira Baril, Birth Center Equity Co-Founders

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Vision & Mission

VISION: A world where midwives, families, and communities of color thrive.

MISSION: To invest in Black, Indigenous, people of color led birth centers to grow and sustain community birth infrastructure for generations.

Values

SAFETY

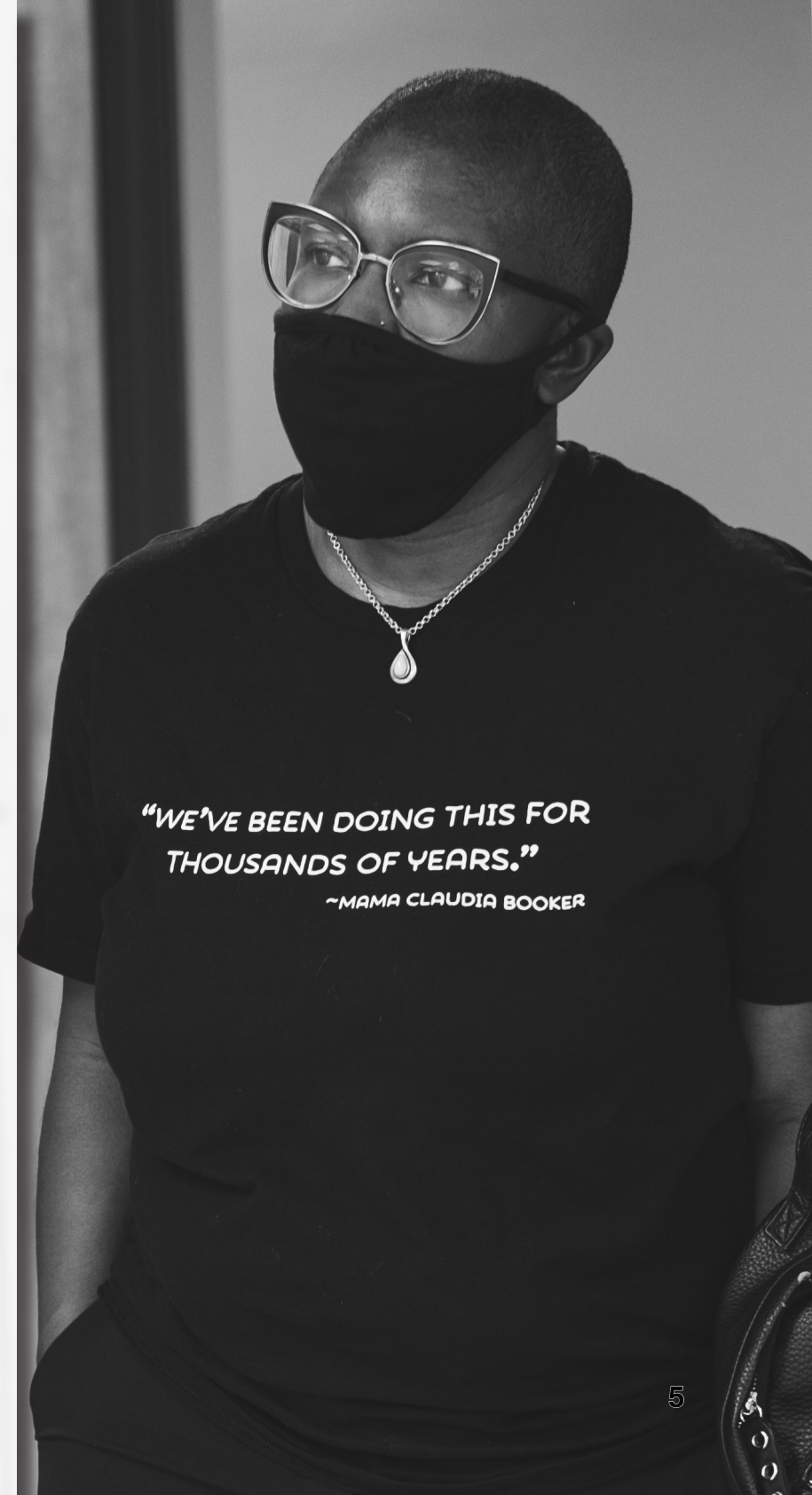
All Black, Indigenous, people of color deserve safe birth spaces and safe birth care, as well as safe spaces that support their growth, leadership, and relationships. Ensuring our safety requires healing and reparation of harm and inequity in maternal health practices, structures and systems, including inequitable access to capital, that have oppressed our communities. Ensuring our safety also requires healing and reparation within our networks and organizations and treating one another with respect, grace, and kindness.

ABUNDANCE

With trusted relationships and solidarity come abundant resources to grow and sustain BIPOC community-owned and led birth infrastructure.

LIBERATION

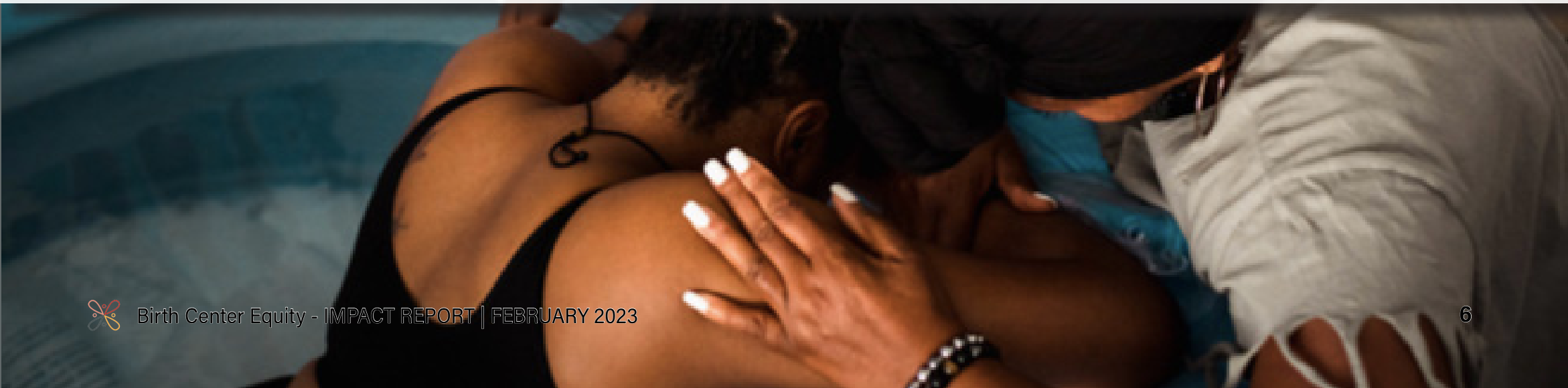
Safe, loving, and liberatory birth for all birthing people is essential to racial, gender, and reproductive justice. BCE honors the human right to bodily autonomy, to have and to not have children, to parent in a safe, healthy, nonviolent environment, and the rights to self-definition and sexual freedom. (See Sister Song Reproductive Justice declaration). We believe that leading together in our own care is an act of liberation, and that honoring birth as a chosen sacred transformative experience at every level (individual, organization, community, culture) will transform birth culture for all.





Birth Center Equity Impact

Since our founding in spring 2020, Birth Center Equity has achieved four major impacts:



1.

BCE infused more than \$1.4M into community birth centers



2020

- ◆ BCE distributed \$336,173 in COVID-19 rapid response and general operating grants to 25 BIPOC-led birth centers.

2021

- ◆ BCE distributed \$547,455 in grants/recoverable grant investments to community birth centers.
- ◆ BCE distributed \$5,000 in rapid response grants to Texas birth centers impacted by flooding.
- ◆ BCE launched Open Doors Initiative with goal of helping 10 Black, Indigenous, people of color led-birth centers open by the end of 2023. In first year distributed \$107,000.

2022

- ◆ BCE distributed \$421,500 in grants /recoverable grant investments to community birth centers.
- ◆ BCE Open Doors initiative grants supported the development of new birthing services in 6 communities.

2.

BCE grew a powerful & loving community birth center network



2020

- ◆ During COVID, BCE held our first virtual gathering of BIPOC birth center leaders.

2021

- ◆ BCE held 4 virtual Wisdom Circles with birth center leaders speaking on topics such as "How We Got Started."

2022

- ◆ BCE held 12 Power Hours for BCE members, offering open space for members to connect and provide peer support.
- ◆ BCE traveled to Atlanta for first in-person BCE member visit.

2023

- ◆ BCE Network grew from 14 community birth centers in 2020 to 40 in 2023.
- ◆ In partnership with New Moon Collaborations, BCE staff Leseliey Welch & Marinah Farrell traveled to Puerto Rico for a birth ecosystem listening and learning tour.
- ◆ BCE will hold our first national gathering of Black, Indigenous, people of color-led birth centers in April.
- ◆ BCE will lead the first annual Birth Center Week: Midwifing Justice, September 14-20, 2023.

3.

BCE elevated community birth centers at national scale

2020

- ◆ BCE published "Birth Centers Are Crucial for Communities of Color, Especially in a Pandemic" in ReWire.
- ◆ 100,000+ viewers of BCE member story videos.

2021

- ◆ BCE conducted 1st comprehensive survey assessment of Black, Indigenous, people of color-led birth centers and used data to inform program development, grant making and investments.

2022

- ◆ BCE co-published national report "Improving Maternal Health Care Now: Community Birth Settings" with National Partnership for Women & Families.
- ◆ BCE featured in Forbes magazine article about BCE & Birth Detroit co-founder Leseliey Welch.
- ◆ BCE launched monthly BCE newsletter, Abundant Times, to highlight powerful stories from our network.
- ◆ BCE published Birthing Words: Narrative Challenges and Opportunities based on interviews with 19 leaders in the birthing ecosystem.
- ◆ BCE's Marinah V. Farrell awarded Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Culture of Health Leaders Award and published Why Restoring Birth As Ceremony Can Promote Health Equity.
- ◆ Leseliey Welch awarded 2022 Ascend at Aspen Institute Fellowship on building intergenerational family wellbeing.

2023

- ◆ BCE co-directors Leseliey Welch and Nashira Baril publish "Birthing Black: Community Birth Centers as Portals to Gentle Futures" in Nonprofit Quarterly.



4.

BCE inspired & strengthened innovative economic strategies & investments



2020

- ◆ From fall 2020 to spring 2021, BCE piloted our Catalyst by offering investment & business development technical assistance (TA) to Commonsense Childbirth.

2021

- ◆ BCE co-directors Leseliey & Nashira worked with Full Spectrum Capital advisors to prototype sustainable financial approaches to local birth center real estate and capital planning.

2022

- ◆ BCE created Community TA grants & consultation, piloted with Breath of My Heart, the only Indigenous-led community birth center in US.
- ◆ BCE built partnership with Orchid Capital Collective to create investment opportunities for community birth centers at scale.



Birth Center Equity Impact Stories

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BCE Supports Texas Birth Center Toward Opening



Serenity Midwifery & Birth Center, Forrester, TX

BCE Investment: 2021 Capital Circle Grant; 2021 & 2022 Open Doors Initiative Grants

With support from Birth Center Equity, Ashley Greene, a Certified Nurse-Midwife with an established home birth practice, is poised to opening a birth center in rural Texas in spring 2023. Ashley was moving toward opening a birth center for years, but faced a big setback during COVID. Then, a year ago, Ashley received a \$50k Open Doors Initiative grant from Birth Center Equity. "That's when I said, 'I gotta do this,'" recalls Ashley. "I thought, 'BCE believes in me. My clients believe in me. My community believes in me.'"

With the 2021 Open Doors grant plus a bank loan and direct fundraising, Ashley began working with a builder on plans to construct a birth center on a half acre of land next to the larger "homestead" that her family had purchased in rural Ellis county.

"BCE believes in me."

Today, Ashley takes selfies in front of a 2,400 square foot birth center structure under construction that will house [Serenity Midwifery & Birth Center](#). The center will feature two birth suites (complete with private bathrooms, full showers, and birth pools), exam rooms, office space, and a large open floor plan with a full kitchen for families to use.

"It has been such a blessing to be a part of the BCE community," says Ashley. "It's been incredible to be a part of this network of amazing people of color, to have those in my circle who support me and my vision."

(Click [here](#) for more about this story)

BCE Values Inspire Atlanta Birth Center



Atlanta Birth Center, Atlanta, GA

BCE Investment: 2022 Rapid Response Grant

In 2021, [Atlanta Birth Center](#) began attending BCE's online wisdom circles, and later joined BCE's Capital Circle of community birth centers led by Black, Indigenous, People of Color.

"BCE has been an inspiration," says Midwife Director Anjli Hinman. "I met Leseliey and Nashira before we joined the Capital Circle and have been amazed by all the people I've gotten to know through our gatherings." "Midwifery can be a lonely job," she continues. "There's power in this community that helps me continue my work."

"BCE's core values have transformed how Atlanta Birth Center does our work," observes Anjli. "We've been stuck in a spinning wheel of scarcity. Hearing the word 'abundance,' and learning ways to apply it, has been transformational."

"BCE's commitment to abundance shifted the conversation."

In 2022, Atlanta Birth Center achieved outcomes that eliminated health disparities between Black and white

birthing people in Atlanta. But despite its shining success in serving communities, Atlanta Birth Center faces the low reimbursement rates that plague community birth centers that serve Medicaid, along with the high rent needed to stay centrally located and accessible by public transportation in Atlanta. Factors such as these are leaving the center deeply financially vulnerable.



...continued

Amanda Mullen, Director of Operations, sees potential for new approaches. "BCE's commitment to abundance shifted the conversation here at ABC. We've been renting space. Now we're shifting to a vision of long term sustainability in our communities. We have four years left on our lease and we're asking, 'Can we get land?' 'Can we get a building?' BCE stoked a fire of liberation in our organization. We know that if we're financially free and fiscally sustainable, we can focus on the care our community deserves."

Ultimately, says Anjli, "BCE is about creating a new health care system by growing what midwives provide. Right now Black women's lives are treated as expendable. We need to free ourselves from those systems by uplifting the midwifery model of care."

"If we can't take care of people as they are born into this world," concludes Anjli, "What kind of society are we?"

(Click [here](#) for more about this story)

BCE Grows Strength & Visibility in Washington State



Community Birth Center, Lacey, WA

BCE Investment: 2021 Rapid Response & 2022 Open Doors Initiative Grants

"My vision was always to open a community birth center," says Terri Chi Lee, who began her career as a birth worker a decade ago, and completed her Master's of Science in Midwifery in 2019. "I was ready to get going when I finished grad school, but no one would give me the time of day," remembers Terri. When I heard about BCE and reached out to them they said, "We love your story and your experience. How can we help?"

"BCE is making birth centers visible."

Today, Terri is co-founder and owner of Community Birth Center (CBC), one of only three birth centers in Washington State that is Black, Indigenous, people of color-led.

CBC's programs include full spectrum doulas, perinatal mental health services, lactation support, chiropractic services, massage, acupuncture, herbal medicine and other holistic and culturally supportive healthcare. Their latest program, Perinatal

All Access Program (PAAP), provides scholarships for services that may not be covered by state funded insurance programs.

...continued

"There are so many birth workers of color who could be leading birth centers," says Terri. "But sometimes we don't fit the mold, we don't look like what the system expects. We just need someone who believes in us. When I was starting out, banks wouldn't even look at us. Now we're out here saving lives!"

With a \$10k grant from BCE in December 2020, Community Birth Center was able to start the construction of the birth center, and go on to complete the rigorous licensing process by the end of November 2021.

In December 2021, with a \$57k BCE Open Doors Initiative grant and CBC's own fundraising efforts, CBC was able to bring on another midwife, a medical assistant, and administrative staff. A year later, BCE's support helped CBC grow to double their birthing capacity, bring their clinic and birthing services under one roof, and increase the space they can offer for community programming.

"BCE is making community birth centers visible," says Terri, "and that visibility is generating a stronger voice in the health care system. I've experienced it first hand. BCE makes dreams come true."

(Click [here](#) for more about this story)

"There are so many birth workers of color who could be leading birth centers."



BCE Heeds Call of Indigenous Led Birth Center



Navi Pin Haa Un Muu/Breath of My Heart Birthplace, Española, New Mexico

BCE Investment: 2022 Community Technical Assistance Grant and Organizational Development Support

In 2022, Birth Center Equity piloted a new form of support in response to the needs of a community birth center that recently transitioned to Indigenous leadership. In fact, [Breath of My Heart Birthplace](#), located in Española, New Mexico, is the only Indigenous-led birth center in the country. The organization's name comes from the Tewa language, "Navi pin haa un mu," meaning "you are the breath of my heart."

"BCE provided a helping hand."

Breath of My Heart Birthplace was founded in 2010, growing out of a community-driven strategic planning process to create a community solution to the health disparities and challenges experienced in the region.

When Beata Tsosie Peña (Santa Clara Pueblo) and Glenna Belin (Ohkay Owingeh) became co-directors of Breath of My Heart in 2021, they put out a call for support "as new Indigenous leaders." "I was floored," says Beata "that BCE was the first place to come to us offering support."



...continued

"BCE provided a helping hand and a listening ear," says Beata. "We received immediate financial support and a consultation visit from Marinah Farrell," BCE's director of organizational wellness and a midwife with nearly three decades of midwifery and birth center experience.

"One of the most important conversations we had was around finding midwives who would be willing to relocate to Española. We realized that this was an issue of pay equity, and of making midwifery and birth centers sustainable for the long term."

"BCE provided a helping hand."

"We realized that we needed our budget to show midwives that we value them," says Beata. Reflecting their values, Breath of My Heart took the bold step of raising their midwife salaries, with the hopes of raising directors and other salaries someday. With the new salaries in place, and outreach support from Birth Center Equity and others, Breath of My Heart succeeded in hiring two additional midwives.

A lot lies ahead for Breath of My Heart, including how to continue to ensure that no one is turned away for lack of funds, and that their economic model allows them to sustain their staff. As part of their next steps, Breath of My Heart has put out another call to action for further support.

Still, thanks in part to BCE, Beata and Breath of My Heart feel stronger now, and ready to face the future. "What BCE did really stands out. It means a lot to us as new Indigenous leaders."

BCE Invests In Midwife-Led Innovation



Commonsense Childbirth, national

BCE Investment: 2020 Catalyst Recoverable Grant, Coaching and Business Development Support

Birth Center Equity made its first catalyst investment in September 2020, honoring the long-standing leadership of midwife and educator Jennie Joseph, and supporting her work with Commonsense Childbirth to grow toward greater scale.

BCE chose to make its largest investment to-date, and to provide business development support, in order to strengthen the community birth ecosystem overall. "Community birth centers need a vibrant flow of trained and experienced midwives of color, as well as access to knowledge and models of care that are based in deep experience in our communities," observes BCE co-director Leseliey Welch. "Our

"BCE is leading the charge."

investment in Commonsense Childbirth was an investment in wellness for the whole birth ecosystem."

"BCE made an early investment in my work,"

says Jennie. "It was refreshingly different. Before BCE we had only philanthropy, with loyal foundations who stood with me for decades. But I didn't have a vision for growth and sustainability. BCE opened up the idea of investing in our work, of using funds not just to cover costs,



...continued

but to generate more resources and community wealth, which was a whole new way of thinking."

"Like so many midwives, I was working in scarcity, in pain and suffering," says Jennie. "BCE said, 'No, that's not okay.' BCE talked about shifting from accepting scarcity to believing that midwives could have, and deserved to have, all the resources we need to do our work. BCE modeled abundance and it really made me pause.

"BCE is leading the charge," Jennie asserts. "Together we are building strength in communities. We are taking back communities structurally, with investment and reinvestment. Communities are buying land and buildings, property that has equity that can be invested back into the community."

"BCE recognized my work," says Jennie. "Because of that I was able to delineate my role in a broader movement to build and strengthen perinatal infrastructure, birth center infrastructure, and an overall infrastructure of care. It's inspiring to work alongside BCE as they grow birth centers as community care hubs that honor, grow, and celebrate the midwifery model of care."

"Today I'm feeling very wide open, with audacity," concludes Jennie. "Partnering with BCE feels different than anything I've experienced in all my years in the nonprofit world."

Seattle Birth Center Thrives With BCE Grants & Public Funding

Rainier Valley Midwives, Seattle, WA

**BCE Investment: 2020 COVID Rapid Response Grant;
2021 Capital Circle Grant; 2022 Open Doors Initiative
Grant**

By 2021, the rising cost of rent in Seattle had forced Rainier Valley Midwives (RVM) to relocate three times. In fact, their third move was to suburban Renton, putting them outside the city limits.

**“BCE was a bright
light.”**

At the time, recalls Rainier Valley Midwives director Tara Lawal, the community and financial support from Birth Center

Equity was crucial to their financial and emotional stability. “BCE was a bright light,” says Tara,, “for financial support and gatherings that are a safe space to lean on other community birth center experts.” With a \$75k Open Doors Initiative grant from BCE, RVM was able to address and elevate community birthing needs and voices in Renton.

And, RVM’s local situation was about to turn around, thanks to the the city of Seattle’s newly created Equitable



...continued

Development Initiative, which provides public funding to help people of color communities and institutions stay in Seattle.

"We told the city how we had been displaced," says Tara, "and that we wanted to serve the people of Seattle." Tara believes this is why the city granted them \$200k for predevelopment to work with two people of color architects to

hold listening and design sessions with community members, midwives, and others. Their guiding question was, "What kind of birth center do we want to build?" in Seattle's 98118 zip code, one of the most ethnically diverse areas in the country.

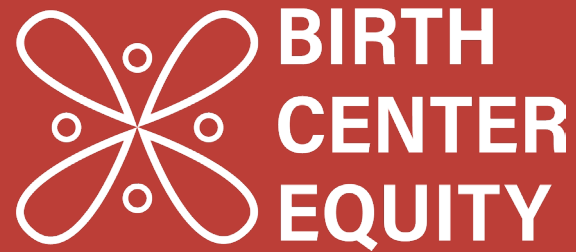
With their co-created vision in place, Rainier Valley Midwives then received a \$1 million grant from the city. "We were over the moon," says Tara, "until we started looking for properties and realized that \$1 million could barely buy anything in Seattle's housing market." Inspired by BCE's invitation to overcome a scarcity mindset, Rainier Valley Midwives told the city, "This just isn't going to work." To their astonishment, the city responded by asking, "Tell us what you need." When Rainier Valley answered "\$3 million", they agreed, and Rainier Valley went on to purchase their own building and solidify their role in Seattle's health care system.

Rainier Valley Midwives' newfound stability paved the way for growth. In December 2022, Tara learned of an opportunity to buy another birth center and increase RVM's services in Seattle and deepen its financial sustainability. "The city was excited to see us leveraging our existing assets in service of our mission," says Tara. Rainier Valley quickly raised the money to purchase the second site and, with a BCE Open Doors Initiative grant, covered the down payment.

"BCE has been with us every step of the way," says Tara. In fact, when BCE emailed its network to let them know about federal dollars becoming available through the federal omnibus appropriation bill, Tara and the RVM staff stayed up past midnight to send in the two page application. "We asked for \$300k and got \$225k," beams Tara. "That happened," she adds, "because BCE is a real network!"

(Click [here](#) for more about this story)

**"BCE has been
with us every
step of the way."**



**Birth Center Equity wishes to
thank all the foundations and
donors who have strengthened us
with their generous support.**

Birth Center Equity Team: Leseliey Welch, Co-Director; Nashira Baril, Co-Director; Marinah V. Farrell, Director of Organizational Wellness; Jessica Gutfreund, Director of Solidarity and Resource Generation; Julie Quiroz, Narrative Strategist; Hoai An Pham, Social Media Coordinator. Birth Center Equity Advisors: Rachel Burrows & Taj James, Full Spectrum Capital; Ruben Hernandez, Dev Labs; Tenesha Duncan and Cass Osei, Orchid Capital Collective. Graphic Design: Quita Ortiz

birthcenterequity.org

***Quote on page 1 from "Birthing Black: Community Birth Centers as Portals to Gentle Futures", Nonprofit Quarterly, January 10, 2023.**

