

SOUTH SIDE



SANKOFA
REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH & HEALING
CENTER

2021

AN INITIAL YEAR OF COLLECTIVE
ACTION & CARE

OUR COMMITMENT TO OURSELVES AND THE COMMUNITY WE SERVE:

- BLACK WOMEN HAVE THE POWER TO HEAL AND TRANSFORM THEIR FAMILIES THROUGH LIBERATED BIRTH PRACTICES.
- WE HONOR AND UPLIFT THE STANDARD OF CARE PASSED DOWN FROM BLACK AND INDEGENIOUS GRAND MIDWIVES AND BIRTHWORKERS.
- WE BELIEVE THAT TRUST, SOLIDARITY, AND SISTERHOOD MUST BE CULTIVATED
- WE HONOR ALL BIRTH AND REPRODUCTIVE IDENTITIES.
- WE BELIEVE THAT LOVE IS AN ACTION THAT CREATES GENERATIONAL HEALING AND WELLNESS
- WE BELIEVE THAT COMMUNITY-LED REPRODUCTIVE CARE IS CENTRAL TO RECLAIMING BIRTH AS A SAFE, HUMANE, & LOVING ACT OF RESISTANCE.
- HEALTHY FAMILIES ARE CREATED AND MAINTAINED THROUGH COMMUNITY SUPPORTED BIRTH, BREASTFEEDING AND WELL-WOMAN CARE.



VILLAGE
BIRTH
INTERNATIONAL



FOUNDING STORY

The Sankofa Reproductive Health and Healing Center is an official perinatal safe spot dedicated to providing community-led reproductive healthcare and healing. We uplift ancestral practices to promote healing and wellness for reproductive justice. Sankofa Healing is about returning to practices of birth and parenting that sustain and nourish families. We are intentional about maternal and reproductive healing that center individuals while honoring intuition, personal power and love. We envision a world where Black women & birthing people are able to actualize full liberation through sisterhood, sexual wellness, education, and ancestral practices of intuitive care work.

The Sankofa Reproductive Health and Healing Center is a partnership with Village Birth International, Doula 4 a Queen and zenG Yoga. The healing center reflects the years of collaboration, birth work and reproductive wellness brought to Syracuse by these organizations. In 2010, Birthworkers in Syracuse began to formalize community efforts and address long standing infant and maternal mortality & morbidity for Black families. Our efforts revealed an underground, undervalued, and under-resourced group of individuals from Black, Latinx and African communities who assisted families in birth across the childbearing year. These individuals were essential components for women as they accessed care and often struggled to sustain healthy, full term babies. This collective of Black, Latinx and African women formed the Sankofa Doula Collective.



SANKOFA REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH & HEALING

Over the years our collective has worked together for doula back up support, mentorship, childcare, advocacy, and resource/food assistance. The collective model has allowed birthworkers to organize, serve families and learn from each other. In 2015, our collective received the official Perinatal Safe Spot designation for doula care provided at multiple locations around Syracuse. Four members of the Sankofa Doula collective worked together to actualize their vision of a physical Perinatal Safe Spot as outlined by Midwife Jennie Joseph of Commonsense Childbirth. In fall 2020, we formed the Sankofa Reproductive Health and Healing Center.

The Perinatal Safe Spot designation is a nationally recognized model of care to reduce disparities in birth and parenting in areas where health inequities in the childbearing year are persistent and alarming. The Perinatal Safe Spot Model allows for self-determination in reproductive healthcare for families and individuals most at risk for poor outcomes and death during this sacred time. The goal of a Safe Spot location is to provide immediate and judgment-free access to community-led pregnancy and reproductive care. We are excited to continue this work virtually and in person at the Southside Communications Center-2331 S. Salina St. Syracuse, NY.



418

FAMILIES SERVED IN 2021

COLLECTIVE ACTION & CARE

At Sankofa, we center families of African descent, including individuals identifying as Black, African-American and/or African refugees. In the US, maternal mortality and morbidity are rising. According to the Center for Disease Control, Black women are 3-4xs more likely to die in birth than white women. Black mothers and Black birthing individuals are also more likely to experience serious injury or illness during birth. These “near misses” have real consequences for families. Death and illness in childbirth are preventable. Racial disparities are a consequence of long-standing structural and social barriers, including medical racism, which keep families from thriving. As COVID rates increased in our community, pregnant and parenting individuals faced more barriers in reproductive healthcare.

In 2021, our goal was to reach as many families for doula care as possible while centering the healing and community-led reproductive wellness we deserve. Birthworkers and families needed more support after extended periods of isolation, job loss and family crisis. With the help of funders and donations we were able to offer free and reduced priced doula care, pay birthworkers, launch online education and support groups, support tech needs of our birthworkers for virtual care and open a resource room for families.



OFFERINGS OFFERINGS OFFERINGS

FULL SPECTRUM DOULA CARE

Sankofa Doulas are skilled birth workers trained in a comprehensive knowledge of birth and the postpartum period. They understand the importance of seeing a birthing person, baby, and partner as a connected unit. They support by responding to the whole birth experience and consider how a person's physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual experience is impacting their pregnancy, labor, birth, and postpartum period.

Sankofa Doula Care is vital during a pandemic year where families are experiencing extreme circumstances and isolation. In 2021, we offered hybrid, virtual and in person doula care during prenatal, labor and postpartum periods for families most in need. Covid education and informed decision making became paramount as families prepared to bring forth life in uncertainty and changing policies for infectious disease and laboring at local hospitals.

At Sankofa we understand what it means to give birth and parent in medical systems that often can not hold the full experience of this sacred time. Black women, African refugees and Indigenous people in our city continue to birth and raise families in the harshest inequality in our country. For our community, having a doula means you are loved, cared for and listened to. Doula Care is Sankofa Healing.

“ Every woman, especially Black women, should have a doula. SeQuoia was so calm, and strong and really advocated for me. ”



CHILDBIRTH EDUCATION

This year, Sankofa Community Childbirth Education classes were led by Doula 4 a Queen & offered weekly from February - April. These classes were free to Black, Latinx and Indigenous families during their childbearing years. The topics discussed during the virtual class included: rights of a birthing person, informed decision making, prenatal care, childbirth preparation, postpartum care, doula services and many more. Sankofa is dedicated to supporting families and helping our community members enter into labor knowledgeable and birth with confidence!

“

These classes were amazing!
You ladies are truly doing
amazing work for the
community!

”



CoMothering

A Black Woman's Healing Space

Creating wellness through community!



CoMothering is a safe space for new moms and Black women across the reproductive lifespan to be in community, share wisdom and love each other.

CoMothering is intergenerational and created so that we do not have to face transitions of parenthood and reproductive milestones in isolation. CoMothering is our practice of postpartum self-care and collective healing after birth and beyond.

This year CoMothering became a vital space for many of us. Every month Sankofa opened a virtual space of connection and healing for Black women in Syracuse and some from across the nation. CoMothering is held monthly virtually or in person.





BIRTH SONG

Birth Song is a literacy community created by and for women of African descent to hold space for each other, our reproductive journeys, and the many ways we creatively transform life—whether we decide to physically give birth or not. Participants are invited to share in open and honest conversations about how Black women navigate reproductive health and wellness.

In the spring we hosted a virtual series of four workshops. Each workshop focused on topics related to sexual health, menstruation, childbirth, and menopause.





YOGA AND REPRODUCTIVE WELLNESS

We offer yoga sessions and wellness consultations that center the mind, body, and spirit for a Black woman's journey to healing and liberation.

Each yoga offering is appropriate for any stage of reproductive wellness, including pregnant individuals. This year we offered prenatal yoga, womb wellness yoga, and yoga nidra. Each session was hosted virtually and included meditation, breathwork, gentle movements, and restorative poses.

Wellness consultations were made available to individuals interested in designing plans to support their reproductive wellness journey. Each plan includes intention and goal setting for areas of focus, a breathing meditation, a yoga sequence, prompts for journaling and reflection, goals for diet and daily routines, and reading recommendations.

BLACK MATERNAL HEALTH WEEK 2021

Sankofa proudly honored Black Maternal Health Week in collaboration with one of our founding organizations, Village Birth International, who is a Kindred Partner in the Black Mamas Matter Alliance. The theme for 2021 was Claiming our Power, Resilience and Liberation. What better way to bring our community together during a pandemic than a virtual healing space for reproductive justice and love.

INVEST. TRUST. LEARN. PROTECT.

**BLACK
MAMMAS
MATTER**

LEARN MORE AT BLACKMAMASMATTER.ORG/BMHW



Black Maternal Health Week

April 11-17, 2021



Black Maternal Health Week

April 11th - Sankofa & Black Maternal Health Week!

April 12th - Parenting in a Pandemic

April 13th - 10 Things to Know about Childbirth

April 14th - Postpartum Kiki w/ The Cuse Curlfriend

April 15th - Unpacking Racial Disparities in Maternal Health Outcomes and Identifying Solutions

April 16th - Options VS Access: Doulas, Midwives & Unassisted Births

April 17th - Claiming Our Power, Resilience and Liberation



INTERNS INTERNS INTERNS INTE

SANKOFA SUMMER INTERNS

During Summer '21, Sankofa served as a Mercy Works Workplace Partner and accepted three Synterns (synergy interns) to join our team over the course of 9 weeks. Hadeel (Colgate University '25), Hawa (Syracuse University '24), and Flo (Tuskegee University '22) cultivated skills within the following areas: event planning and coordination, social media management, content creation, and community engagement. The highlight of our time together was the success of Sankofa's 2nd Annual Community Give Back which provided free and essential items for families impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.





REACHING FORWARD. GIVING BACK.

SANKOFA COMMUNITY GIVE BACK

85

FAMILIES SERVED

- DIAPERS & WIPES
- CLOTHING
- CAR SEATS
- BREAST PUMPS
- FEMININE HYGIENE PRODUCTS
- POSTPARTUM GIFT BAGS
- FRESH FOOD





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SANKOFA DOULA TRAINING



In the fall of 2021, Sankofa hosted its very first Doula Training for 7 new doulas to join our collective and serve families in Syracuse. Sankofa Doulas are trained as Community-Based, Full Spectrum Birthworkers. Doulas are trained and certified by Village Birth International.



HAPPINESS STARTS WITH YOU
NOT WITH YOUR RELATIONSHIPS.
NOT WITH YOUR JOB.
NOT WITH YOUR MONEY.
BUT WITH YOU.

FUTURE GOALS FUTURE GOALS

This is an Official
Perinatal Safe Spot



www.PerinatalTaskForce.com



In 2022, we move forward by honoring the collective vision, reproductive justice, and inherent need for Black women to create equitable spaces of community engagement.

- Syracuse needs safe spaces for Black & Indigenous families to process, heal and come together to birth new life, sustain families and build for future generations.
- We deserve cultural humility in birth, breastfeeding & reproductive care.
- We need more Black midwives working in a variety of birth settings to serve families in spaces that are self-determined and sacred.
- We deserve informed decision making, not coercion or surveillance.
- We need providers and medical institutions to trust and listen to concerns and wishes for reproductive wellness.

Safe, dignified and respectful maternal care saves lives. It is a human right, not a luxury.

Our future demands that we ALL are reaching forward, while giving back.

With Gratitude & Love

From the Sankofa Founders,
Village Birth International
Doula 4 a Queen
zenG Wellness



Thank you to everyone who supported our work this year. We are grateful for your generosity and faith in Sankofa. Blessings and love for more collective action and care in 2022.

