

Birth in Color

2023 Impact Report



Birth
in Color



RVA

Prepared by Birth in Color

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Introduction

Birth In Color was created due to the astounding disparities surrounding maternal, reproductive, and infant health as a consequence of structural and institutional racism. Our goal is to use maternal and reproductive justice to advance our human rights.

By using the Reproductive Justice framework, our work will continue to intersect with several sectors. Intersectionality through a Reproductive Justice lens offers a theoretical and practical approach that accounts for this interlocking matrix within systematic racism structures. The importance of our voices, concerns, and health will not continue to be dismissed.

In 2023, Birth in Color operated in 8 areas comprised of over 20 cities addressing reproductive injustices through, but not limited to, birth support, reproductive health education, birth and labor education, pregnancy, postpartum, and newborn support for low-income recipients, doula training, and free and low-cost classes and education for expecting and postpartum families.

This report will highlight the organization's achievements in 2023, present statistics and rates of the birth outcomes of the clients served and supported by Birth in Color, discuss the challenges the organization faced as well as the areas of learning the organization experienced, review our fundraising efforts and grant received, and discuss our future goals for 2024.

Achievements Highlights

Expansion to New Areas

Our doula collective has witnessed notable growth, expanding our reach and impact across Virginia. Through dedicated efforts, we've successfully trained and integrated doulas into three new areas: the Eastern Shore, the DMV (DC, Maryland, Virginia) region, and Farmville. This expansion reflects our commitment to bridging critical gaps in maternal healthcare access. By training doulas in these previously

underserved regions, we've not only empowered local communities with essential support during pregnancy, birth, and postpartum periods but also strengthened our collective ability to advocate for equitable and compassionate care statewide. This strategic growth signifies our unwavering dedication to ensuring that every birthing person receives the holistic and inclusive care they deserve, regardless of geographic location.

Doula Trainings, Continued ...

Launching new cohorts is something we certainly pride ourselves on, but we are also dedicated to sustaining the cohorts that we've launched within the last 5 years of Birth in Color! Every time we host a doula training, we are growing the **"FAMILY OF DOULAS"** within our collective. In 2023, we hosted trainings for more new doulas in Richmond, Hampton Roads, Southwest Virginia, and Central Virginia (LYH Project).

As of 2023, Birth in Color has trained over 200 since 2018. We have over 100 active doulas and over 40 doulas who are Medicaid licensed.

Professional Development of Our Doulas

Our doulas' professional development remains a cornerstone of our commitment to offering comprehensive and informed support to expectant families. This year, we hosted two impactful sessions to enhance their expertise: one focused on oral health during pregnancy with Dr. Sha-Vashtiy Young-Ufeli, providing invaluable insights into this critical aspect of maternal well-being. Additionally, our session on Sickle Cell empowered our doulas with a deeper understanding of this condition's implications in pregnancy and birth, equipping them to better support individuals navigating these challenges. We are also thrilled to announce the successful completion of a cohort of new Certified Breastfeeding Specialists, further increasing our capacity to provide expert lactation support. As we continue to prioritize ongoing education and skill development, a new class began their training in November 2023, ensuring that we are adding to the number of Certified Breastfeeding Specialists of Color.

In addition, eight Birth in Color Doulas are now trained to offer traditional Malay Belly Binding Services to postpartum clients! We are so grateful to The Birth Matron for training a group of our doulas in the traditional postpartum practice of Malay Belly Binding. Our doulas learned so much and are excited to offer this service to our clients and community. This practice is proven to support and improve postpartum recovery. Belly Binding is a Malaysian practice that has started to spread around the world due to its benefits, and now Birth in Color RVA is offering these services.

Collective Support – Doula Mentorship

Our doula mentorship program is among our commitments to nurturing and empowering new doulas within Birth In Color. Led by esteemed senior doulas, including Amber Heiskill, Dana Williams, Nataki Hill, Latoya Barnes, Alexis Jackson, and Latifah Crenshaw, our mentorship offers invaluable guidance and support.

Through monthly meetings and specialized training sessions spanning 12 months, these mentors provide a nurturing environment for our new doulas to grow, offering expertise, insights, advice, support, and wisdom gleaned from their extensive experience. This mentorship not only cultivates a strong sense of community across our collective but also ensures that each new doula receives personalized guidance, fostering their confidence and skill set as they embark on their journey of supporting families.

Partnerships

2023 has been a year of continuing to invest in the strong relationships we have with providers and hospital administrations around the state. Our relationships with Centra, Sentara, VCU, and St. Francis hospitals have been pivotal in fostering a collaborative environment that prioritizes holistic maternal care. These relationships enable better communication and collaboration between doulas and medical professionals, ensuring a cohesive and supportive experience for expectant families and birthing people. By working closely with healthcare providers and administrations, we can bridge gaps in care, advocate for the preferences and needs of our clients, and facilitate informed decision-making during childbirth. This synergy not only enhances the quality of care but also cultivates an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding, ultimately leading to improved birth experiences and better outcomes for birthing individuals and their families.

Programs

Our classes and programs have been in high demand in 2023. Specifically, our Childbirth Education classes, Dad's workshops, and Lactation Clinics have grabbed the attention of many pregnant people, new fathers, and lactating individuals. This summer, a class of Childbirth Education attendees went from classmates to companions to friends and we saw a group of new parents connect in ways they never would have if they had not attended Childbirth Education at Birth in Color. We are seeing our classes transform from informational and educational spaces to spaces that foster community, develop trust between clients and our doulas, and truly prepare attendees for the realities of birth, parenthood, lactation, postpartum experiences, and more.

With the rapid growth of our Hampton Roads cohort, we've been able to launch some of our most highly requested classes in Hampton and Suffolk! We now host Childbirth Education at Sentara Careplex and Sentara Obici, as well as our Father's Workshop and Prenatal and Postpartum Yoga at Sentara Careplex.

Our Lactation Clinic meets monthly in-person and virtually, giving our clients the opportunity to connect with our Certified Breastfeeding Specialists no matter where they live, learn from our experts about different topics related to lactation and breastfeeding, and ask questions to our specialists and to one another.

This year, we started offering our PMAD (perinatal mood and anxiety disorders) support group virtually and immediately welcomed more clients looking for support on their maternal mental health journeys.

In our future goals section, you can read more about where these classes are going and how we plan for them to grow in 2024.

Reproductive Justice and Policy

As a Reproductive Justice organization, Birth in Color is always busy in the policy and advocacy space. In January, we participated in an advocacy day at the Capitol during General Assembly and visited the offices of legislators with a group of Birth in Color staff, doulas, and supporters. Our group was also recognized in the House and Senate. Our team was present sharing about their experiences in birthwork and reproductive health work and advocating for the bills that Birth in Color brought to the 2023 session.

[You can read our full four-page update about our priority legislation from 2023 here!](#)

Birth In Color also launched a Telehealth Listening Sessions project to engage in conversations and listening sessions across the state with a variety of populations to gain a better understanding of the utilization and access to telehealth services, including reproductive and maternal healthcare. Our policy team led numerous listening sessions this fall and is currently creating a comprehensive report answering questions about people's experiences with telehealth access, both from the provider and consumer perspectives to give us better insight.

This fall, we also hired our first Policy Fellow who joined our team and immediately began adding to the important policy work we do. Chelsea Dade has a background in developing strategic communications, outreach, and engagement within the health and education sectors. She has also served as a Health Communication Specialist for her own business. With a strong passion for the creative aspects of policy development, Chelsea is a staunch advocate for various forms of health justice.

Black Maternal Health Week 2023

#BMHW is the annual week in April where we highlight Black Maternal health history, victories, disparities, advocacy work, and more. This year, our cohorts hosted community baby showers in Hampton Roads, Lynchburg, and Richmond and prepped gifts that were later sent to baby shower recipients in Danville. Thousands of wipes, hundreds of diapers, lactation support items, mother's self-care products, and numerous other newborn supplies were distributed to over 160 families in Virginia. We also hosted screenings of the impactful and award-winning documentary Birthing Justice in Lynchburg and Richmond, and we invited Taratibu Youth Association to perform their beautiful dance tribute to Anarcha, Betsy, and Lucy at our Lynchburg screening.

The pinnacle of #BMHW for Birth in Color is always our Black Maternal Health Summit. This year, the Summit was an extraordinary event that featured two keynote speakers, Jennie Joseph and Harriet Washington, who are both well-known in the Reproductive Justice space for their work. Also in attendance were powerhouse

legislators who champion the Reproductive Justice fight in Virginia like Congresswoman Jennifer McClellan, former Delegate Jennifer Carrol Foy, and Mayor Levar Stoney.

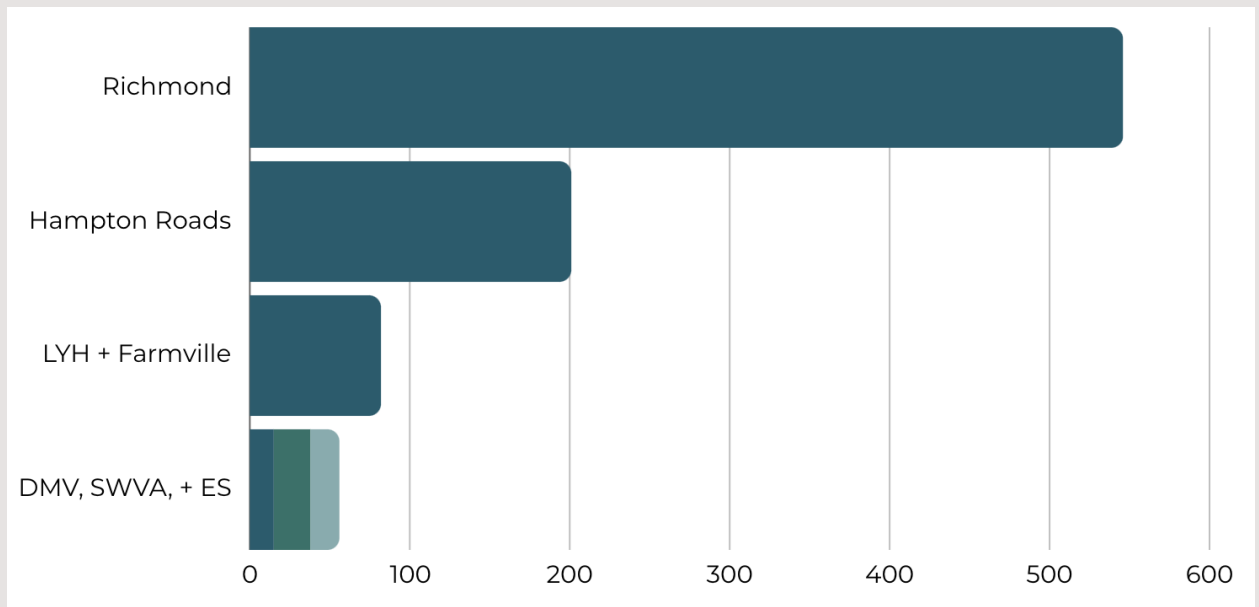
The summit aimed to celebrate Black maternal experiences and bring incredible speakers to the stage to raise awareness of the disparities in maternal health outcomes among black women, to provide insights on how we can address them, and to highlight other important topics like oral health during pregnancy, abortion access, the state of Reproductive Justice in policy in Virginia, and more! The insights and presentations of the speakers were invaluable, and we look forward to continuing the conversation and taking action to improve the health and well-being of black mothers and parents.

Impact Highlights: Statistics and Metrics

Birth in Color Outcomes

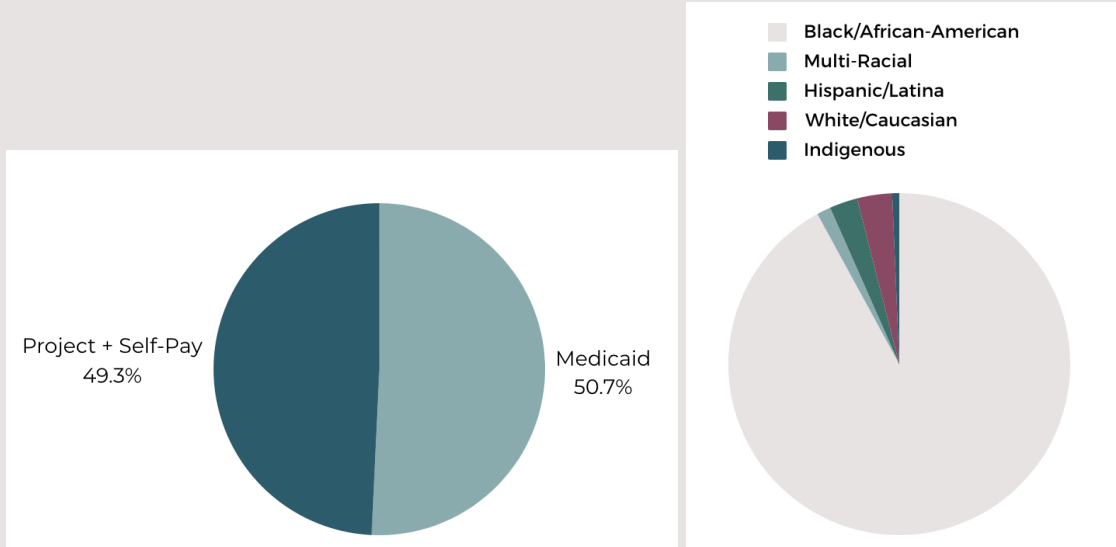
Birth in Color doulas are trained to provide their clients with thorough education and evidence-based information to support their informed decision-making during their pregnancies, births, and postpartum experiences. We are proud of our outcomes and have seen positive trends in the experiences of our clients compared to state and national averages.

Over 885 Birth in Color Clients Supported in 2023 – Our community-based doulas are trained to provide support to their clients *and* their families, [like Brittany Dale, Terrence, and Bella-Amore. You can hear their story here!](#)



Our clients are able to receive free or low-cost doula services depending on eligibility. Just over half of our clients this year were able to benefit from doula services fully covered by their Virginia Medicaid insurance!

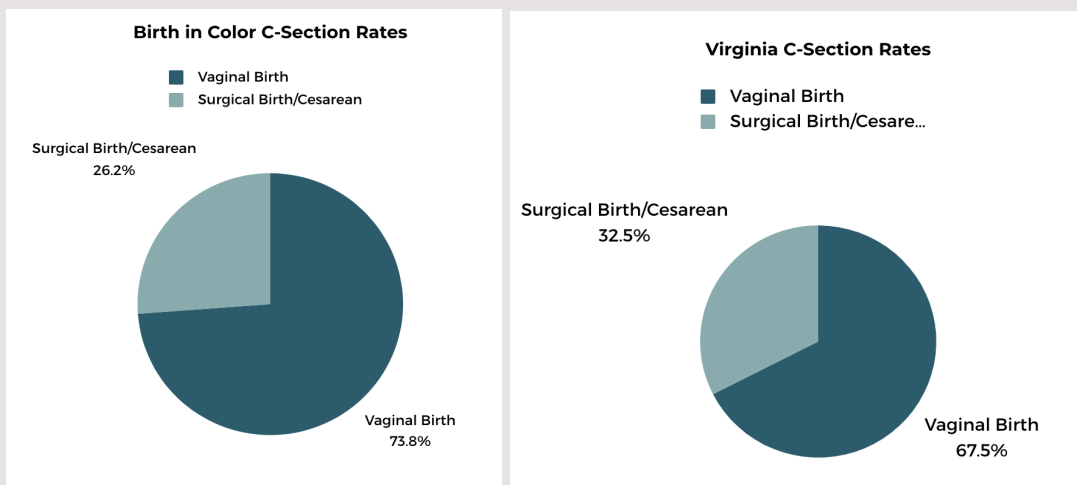
And our Birth in COLOR clients represent multiple racial demographics.



Cesarean Section Rates

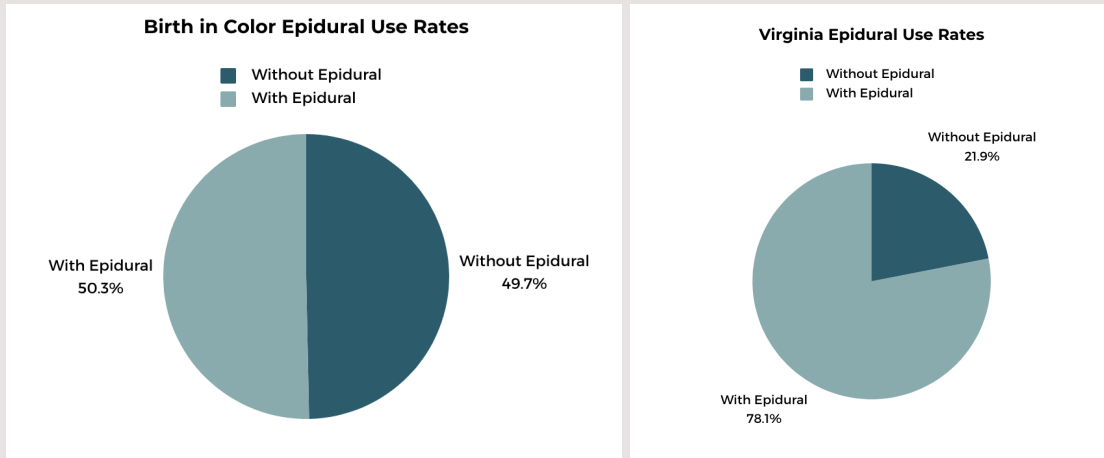
Across all of our cohorts, **Birth in Color clients are having Cesarean Sections/Surgical births at 6.3% less than the State and National rates.**

In Virginia, 32.5% of births are via Cesarean Section. In 2023, 26.2% of Birth in Color clients had their babies via Cesarean section.



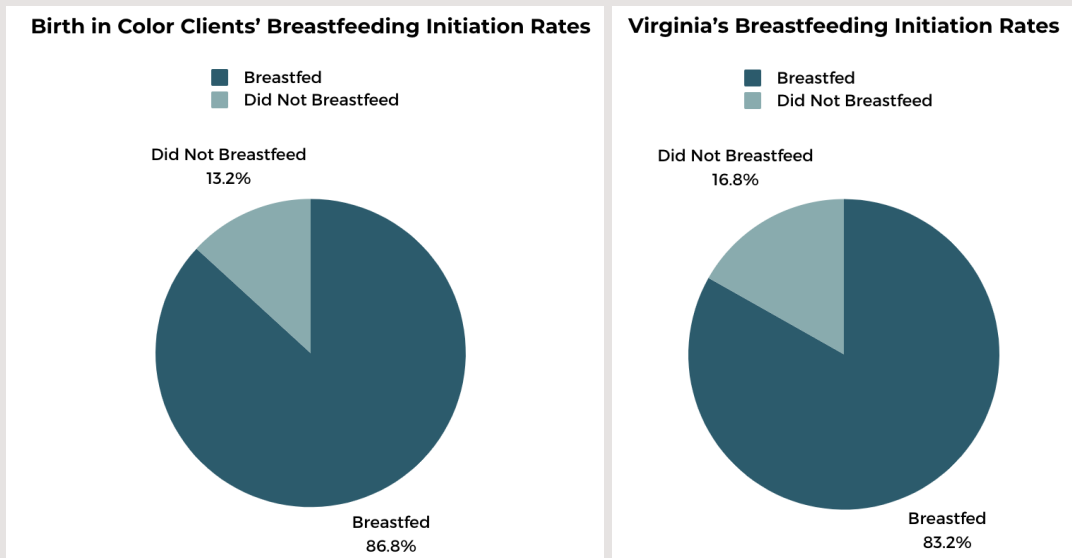
Epidural Use

Data show that the presence of Doulas can also lower the use of additional medical interventions, such as the use of IV pain medications and Epidurals. **In Virginia, 78.1% of birthing people use an epidural. In 2023, 50.3% of Birth in Color clients used an epidural, and 49.7% birthed without an epidural.**



Breastfeeding Initiation Rates

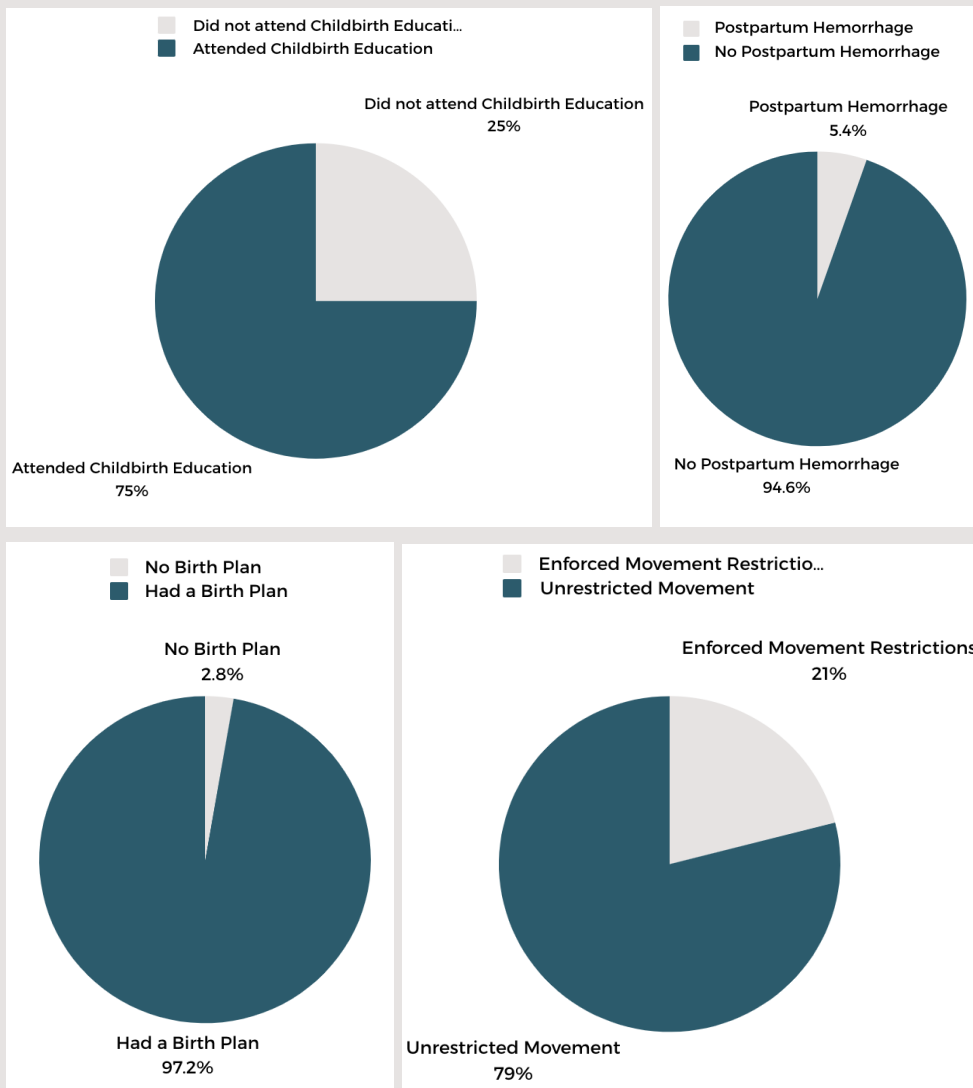
Birth in Color Doulas are also trained to support clients who choose to breastfeed during breastfeeding initiation and offer basic education and support during their lactation journeys. **We also have a cohort of Certified Breastfeeding Specialists of color who are available for free consults for all of our clients, and our monthly lactation support classes are open both to our clients and the public.** This year, **Birth in Color clients initiated breastfeeding at a rate 3.6% higher than the state average.**



Additional Outcomes

Our doulas also encourage additional practices to support clients and their families during labor. Some of those practices are creating a birth plan, attending Childbirth Education classes, inviting their partners/the baby's other parent to catch their own baby, and using movement and different positions during labor and pushing.

Though these statistics are difficult to capture at a state or national level, our doulas do record this information in their outcomes reporting. **We are glad to share an additional glimpse into the experiences of our clients and their families, as we proudly encourage these practices with our clients to enhance the information and resources they have access to during their pregnancy, birth, and postpartum journeys.**



Fundraising and Grants Received

Birth in Color is thrilled to have been granted funding from Aetna Better Health of Virginia to expand our Dads' programming. This grant will enable us to offer more of our Dad's Workshops that we have made to address the specific needs and questions of expecting fathers around the state. We also plan to offer mental health support contacts and resources to fathers in our community. We recognize that fathers often face unique challenges when it comes to mental health and parenting, and we want to provide a safe and supportive environment for fathers to seek help and support. Finally, we have created postpartum boxes for fathers! These boxes include items just for dads like self-care items, treats, and products. We believe that providing these resources will help fathers feel more prepared and supported during this exciting but challenging time.

We are so honored that Sisterfund selected us to be the 2023 Grant Recipients to receive \$30,000 to continue our lactation efforts. Sisterfund is an amazing giving circle dedicated to ensuring black women and girls are taken care of in the community. As we continue to support the maternal and reproductive health for people of color, we are proud that this grant will ensure that we can continue efforts to eradicate injustice policies and practices that create barriers and biases for healthy pre-and postnatal outcomes for Black women.

Grant	Amount	Project
Aetna Better Health of Virginia	\$100,000	Growth of Fathers' Workshop Program, Dads Postpartum Boxes , and Hampton Roads Doula Training
Sisterfund	\$30,000	Certified Breastfeeding Specialist Training for Doulas of Color
Greater Lynchburg Community Foundation	\$8,625	Birth in Color LYH Project – Funds provide doula care to 17 clients
MS Foundation	\$25,000	Doula Program
Virginia Department of Health	\$24,000	Infant Loss Awareness Program
In Our Own Voice	\$60,000	Reproductive Justice Advocacy
Health Equity Funding	\$33,000	Richmond Doula Project
RCHD	\$150,000	Henrico Doula Project

Community Foundation Impact Grant \$20,000

Fundraiser	Amount	Project
Black Maternal Health Week 2023	\$48,116	The Black Maternal Health Summit, Community Baby Showers, and funding for doula training and organizational growth
5 Year Anniversary Gala and Silent Auction	\$47,607	The 5 Year Anniversary Gala and funding for 2024 programs

Our Gala and Silent Auction event served three purposes. First, we celebrated 5 Years of Birth in Color with our community. Second, we had the opportunity to highlight other small and local businesses in Virginia through our silent auction. And third, we hope to raised the funds needed to propel us into a year of growth through 2024. [You can see more of the photos from the event here.](#)

What's Coming in 2024?

Classes and Programming

Birth in Color classes and programming will be growing and changing as we launch into 2024! You'll see new names for our classes as we develop them even further to serve our clients and our community members well. We also plan to offer these courses with more frequency and in more locations by the end of 2024.

Birth in Color CARES support group	→	Hands of Hope: Navigating Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Together
Birth in Color Infant Loss and Fertility Challenges Support Group	→	Heartfelt Healing: Walk, Heal, and Hope together in Infant Loss Support
Dads' Workshop and Survival Guide	→	Papa Perspectives: A Workshop for New Dads
Birth in Color Lactation Support Group	→	The Milk Bar: Nurturing Support for Your Lactation Journey

Black Maternal Health Week #BMHW2024

Mark your calendars for another week of events, webinars, baby showers, and our annual Black Maternal Health Summit on April 12, 2024!