



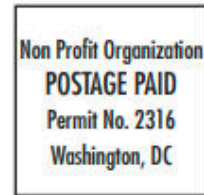
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Newsletter Spring 2021

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Hope Due Any Day

Myla Watley is 36 weeks pregnant and glowing. Though she has had a relatively easy pregnancy, she - like most first-time mothers - is nervous about the unknown and has many questions about what is ahead. She met her husband while finishing her degree and moved back to the DC area to be closer to her parents for when they started their family. "We weren't necessarily planning to get pregnant, but we weren't not either. It didn't take very long - 4 months." **"When we found out, I immediately Googled Black OBs because of the Black maternal mortality rate and other things you hear."**



Myla has reason to be concerned. Overall, pregnancy mortality in the United States occurs at an average rate of 17.2 deaths per 100,000 live births, but that number jumps to 43.5/100,000 for non-Hispanic Black women and over 70/100,000 in DC. **"I decided I wanted a little more of an intimate relationship with my medical provider. I needed someone local but someone who would hear me out."** Myla found Community of Hope's Family Health and Birth Center (FHBC) - the only free-standing birth center in Washington, DC which is also well-known for its care of Black families.

Myla was nervous to consider an out-of-hospital birth, but that didn't stop her. She immediately called Community of Hope and found her questions were welcomed. "I called and was able to talk to Sharice [the midwife] for 45 minutes to ask my questions. I was able to get a one-on-one [visit] with the midwife the next week, and when I came in for my first appointment it was an incredibly different experience than with my OB. Transferring my care was super easy."

(Myla's story continues on page 3)



domore24.org

Get Ready To Do More!

On May 19th, Community of Hope is once again partnering with the United Way of the National Capital Area for Do More 24 - the area's largest annual 24-hour online fundraiser supporting local nonprofits. We are raising funds for our new Family Health and Birth Center in this year's fundraiser.

Visit www.domore24.org and search for Community of Hope to support us on Do More 24.

Your gift will support *Healthy Beginnings and Hopeful Futures* for babies and families across Washington, DC.

Learn more at www.communityofhopedc.org/newfhbc



Choose Community of Hope as your selected AmazonSmile charity and a portion of your sale will benefit our work!

Also, go to www.communityofhopedc.org/wishlist to find items to help our families settle into their new homes.

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From The Desk of Kelly Sweeney McShane



Dear Friends,

It's hard to believe I have been leading Community of Hope for 20 years. I'm so grateful for the many friends who've been with us through our 40 years and also for many new friends. You've supported us through incredible growth and the unforeseen challenges of this global pandemic. Because of you, we have over 350 staff and nine locations. Last year, even in this pandemic, we served over 11,200 patients in health services and 1,140 families in our housing programs.

As we acknowledge the one-year anniversary of the COVID-19 pandemic, we mourn the loss of over 500,000 Americans that have died due to this virus. Yet, as we remain on the frontlines, I am proud to share that we have provided over 4,000 COVID-19 tests through our walk-up testing program and over 2,100 vaccines to the most vulnerable of our community. We've done all that on top of providing ongoing primary medical, dental, emotional wellness, prenatal care, and patient support services via telehealth and now back to in-person care.

We are excited to be expanding our work in maternal and child health and are sharing stories of impact and expansion at our Family Health and Birth Center, and building partnerships that will improve health and outcomes for parents and babies in our communities. Keep reading to learn more.

Our successes are built on a firm foundation laid by our founder Tom Nees, who passed away in January and whose incredible life we highlight in this newsletter. I am excited about the future - with more vaccines on the horizon - and remain hopeful that we can return to some normalcy. We look forward to providing more in-person services, volunteer opportunities, and celebrations in the years ahead!

Thank you for your ongoing support,

Kelly
President and CEO

Celebrating Tom Nees' Life and Legacy



Rev. Nees, Bob Sloan (former President of Sibley Hospital and founding board chair of Community of Hope), with Kelly Sweeney McShane at the 2017 Tom Nees Award for Exceptional Service awards ceremony

Community of Hope remembers Rev. Tom Nees, the visionary behind Community of Hope, who passed away on January 24, 2021. Tom was a gentle, wise, and bold leader whose legacy lives on in the services and successes of Community of Hope.

A pastor in Northwest, DC in the 1970's, Tom imagined a new world where his church members and his neighbors worshipped together and directly impacted the loss and poverty around them. He held visionary conversations with close friends and family and in 1980, he founded the organization and became its first Executive Director. He oversaw the renovation of an abandoned building on Belmont St., NW, that became an emergency shelter and a place to access legal aid, education, job training/assistance, clothing, and healthcare. The concept of providing all of the services that a family might need in one centralized location was unique and became the foundation of success for Community of Hope. Tom was a deep thinker and grappled with statistics of infant mortality, homelessness, and poverty. He wrote and spoke honestly about racism and its deep effects on the futures for the people he and his team were serving.

Tom built leaders through his example of exceptional service who continue to share stories of how Tom took them by the hand and, through his passion and determination, led them to leadership within Community of Hope. For this reason, in 2015 Community of Hope created the Tom Nees Award for Exceptional Service.

Tom often marveled at the growth and changes of the organization he founded, which moved from one building in one neighborhood to nine buildings across the city. We are forever grateful for the foundation he carefully laid, which has served over 100,000 people in the organization's history. Tom was truly a good and faithful servant and will be much missed at Community of Hope and by his wife, children, grandchildren, siblings, and friends.

Hope Happenings

Community of Hope is Distributing COVID-19 Vaccines

There is no more important time to continue to be a Community of Hope for patients and families. Currently, hope looks like vaccine distribution. In December 2020, COH was selected as one of the few community health centers to be a hub for the COVID-19 vaccine. While open to the public within DC Health guidelines, we have made special efforts to get vaccines to our most vulnerable patients by calling and scheduling people who otherwise may not have received the vaccine. To date, we have given over 2,500 vaccines with a 0% wastage rate and are slated to give out thousands more over the coming months.



Helping Families Avoid Shelter

During the pandemic, our homelessness prevention team has continued to work hard to keep families stably housed in their homes and with their families. At the onset of the pandemic, team operations went completely remote. Despite the challenges and rapid changes, our Homelessness Prevention team has had incredible success keeping people out of shelters and helping people transition to more permanent housing. We were very successful with 92% of families (compared to 2019's 87%) not entering a shelter.



Corporate Highlight - A Partnership for Healthy Beginnings

We are pleased to announce a new grant and partnership with Optum, a part of UnitedHealth Group, to support our comprehensive maternal and infant health programs. This partnership is designed to help Community of Hope take our innovative model of care for moms and babies to the next level – while ensuring the programs financial sustainability in the long term. Thank you to Optum for investing \$500,000 in moms, babies, and systemic change to ensure their health!



Continued from front: Hope Due Any Day

"I had labs the first day which was in the building and super convenient. **They told me about the patient care coordinator, what to expect in the birth center, and honestly, I felt seen and I was heard.**"

In addition to birth support, Myla discovered that FHBC offered other useful resources, such as the CenteringPregnancy® program, a group model of prenatal care. "As the Type A personality that I am, having the resources from CenteringPregnancy is really valuable. I appreciate the ability to connect with other moms. In prepping for an unmedicated birth, hearing others' stories helps give me perspective on what could happen. Anyone can receive these resources."

"Everyone wants a healthy, safe, attentive birth experience and medical care provider."

Myla is excited about her pregnancy, though she struggled with feeling joyful during a year when so many people were struggling. "I said in the beginning I didn't have a gender preference [for the baby]...but I did. I wanted a girl and that is what we are having! I am conflicted because we have had wonderful things going on, but I acknowledge loss and am being mindful and recognizing that not everyone is having an experience to celebrate."

Myla shares that she feels safe and supported in her pregnancy because the FHBC is community-based, implements holistic-based care, and is open to anyone who would like to birth with midwives no matter economic status. **"Everyone wants a healthy, safe, attentive birth experience and medical care provider. It is so important to know Community of Hope is here to provide access to care.** It is so important for me that everyone gets quality healthcare because everyone deserves it. That's my favorite part about Family Health and Birth Center. I am planning to use FHBC for my own primary medical care and for pediatric care as well after the baby arrives." With a grin, she added, **"but don't worry – God willing, we are coming back for two or three more babies."**

In January 2021, construction to transform this two-story building on Bladensburg Rd., NE into our expanded and relocated Family Health and Birth Center began. We look forward to opening this health center – that is over twice as large as our current location – in early 2022 and to continuing to be a haven for family medical, emotional wellness, and maternal and infant health on the eastern side of the city. Learn more at www.communityofhopedc.org/newfhbc.



Our New Health Center



Volunteers from our architects at Densler decorate the old building before construction.



Golf 'Fore' A Cause

Save the Date for Golf "Fore" A Cause, hosted by Palmer Properties Group and Balam Owens of RLAH Real Estate. This golf tournament, benefitting our mission for a 2nd year, is a great way for golf enthusiasts and supporters to network, raise funds, and build awareness for our mission while remaining socially distant.

This event will take place on **Monday, May 24 at the Montgomery Country Club**. For sponsorship information, please contact Development@cohdc.org or visit www.communityofhopedc.org/golf-fore-cause-tickets for tickets.

