

# MOTHERS' VOICES

*Merck for Mothers* is Merck's 10-year, \$500 million global initiative to create a world where no woman dies giving life. We focus our efforts in three areas:

## EMPOWER WOMEN

Empower women to make informed choices and get the quality care they need before, during and after pregnancy

## EQUIP HEALTH PROVIDERS

Equip health providers with the skills, tools and technologies they need to provide high-quality care

## STRENGTHEN HEALTH SYSTEMS

Strengthen health systems to sustain the delivery of high-quality services that benefit women and communities

We sincerely thank the many women and community health workers who shared their vision and stories – making them come alive. We also thank our clinical partners at the Maternity Care Coalition, Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers and Northern Manhattan Perinatal Partnership as well as our research partners at the Yale School of Public Health.

**Camden Delivers** is a program within the Camden Coalition for Healthcare Providers' Accountable Care Organization which serves patients with complex health needs. Camden Delivers works with all women of reproductive age in the city, using community health workers to support women's reproductive life planning and ensure they receive both prenatal and primary care.

**The Maternity Care Coalition's** MOMobile Safe Start program is a partnership with the Hospital of University of Pennsylvania and the physical and behavioral health Medicaid managed care organizations, Keystone First and Community Behavioral Health. The Safe Start community health workers support women with chronic conditions early in pregnancy through three months postpartum, serving as patient advocates and birth doulas. Working closely with medical providers and insurance care managers, Safe Start ensure seamless and comprehensive care for high risk patients.

**The Northern Manhattan Perinatal Partnership** has a long history of serving mothers in Harlem. The Maternal Intentions' community health workers use a specialized curriculum to educate pregnant and recently postpartum women about managing their chronic conditions and support them with reproductive life planning.

**Yale University** researchers are assessing the impact of these programs on health outcomes, utilization of appropriate care and cost.



# PREGNANCY AND CHILDBIRTH ARE OFTEN AMONG THE MOST JOYOUS TIMES IN LIFE!

Usually, pregnancies are uncomplicated and result in a healthy baby, an expanded family and a deepened sense of love and purpose.

Mothers are the cornerstone of a healthy and prosperous world. When a pregnant woman or new mother dies, the ripple effect on her family and community is enormous. The United States is one of very few developed countries where deaths related to pregnancy or childbirth are increasing. And the growing problem of chronic conditions like diabetes, hypertension and obesity is contributing to this rise in maternal mortality.

*Merck for Mothers* is supporting three community-based organizations — Maternity Care Coalition (Philadelphia), Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers (Camden, NJ) and Northern Manhattan Perinatal Partnership (New York City) — to pilot innovative community health worker models to improve maternal health. The goal is to link pregnant women with chronic conditions to the care and support services they need to have **safe pregnancies and healthy lives**.

## MOTHERS' VOICES HAS ELEVATED WOMEN'S STORIES AND DEMONSTRATED THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY-ENGAGED INTERVENTIONS.

**Photovoice** is a community-engaged, action-oriented research method that gives voice to those traditionally unheard. Using photographs and captions, Photovoice participants identify, capture, and share their experiences and stories with others.

**Mothers' Voices** uses Photovoice to listen to and learn from clients and their community health workers who are participating in the *Merck for Mothers* initiative. The following contributions illustrate the many ways community health workers support women and their families during pregnancy and beyond. **Mothers' Voices** has helped us to share these stories. It demonstrates the importance of community-engaged interventions that provide quality, woman-centered maternity care and result in positive outcomes for mothers, families and communities.



# I HAVE A LOVE HATE RELATIONSHIP WITH THIS DOOR RIGHT HERE.

This is the entrance to the women's shelter where I spent almost nine months before finally moving into my apartment.

This building is filled with my tears, my anxiety, my anger, my laughter and my joy. At times I swore I was never going to be able to leave. Time and time again, I would get my hopes up about a place to move just to be told no. My [community health] worker stayed positive even when I felt defeated. The work that I put in, that she and her colleagues put in, and that my boyfriend put in paid off, and we ended up exactly where we were supposed to be. I wouldn't change a moment of those nine months.

I walked through this door seven months pregnant, scared, broken and afraid of failing. I walked out of this door nine months later with my beautiful six month old baby boy, my head held high, with new friends, the support of the staff and the keys to my family's new home in my pocket. But most importantly, I left with hope and gratitude.

- CLIENT, CAMDEN

# THESE KEYS REPRESENT HARD WORK AND DETERMINATION.

These keys are so much more than just a way to open my front door. These keys represent hard work and determination. These keys are nine months at a shelter with my son, living separately from his father while we worked on housing.

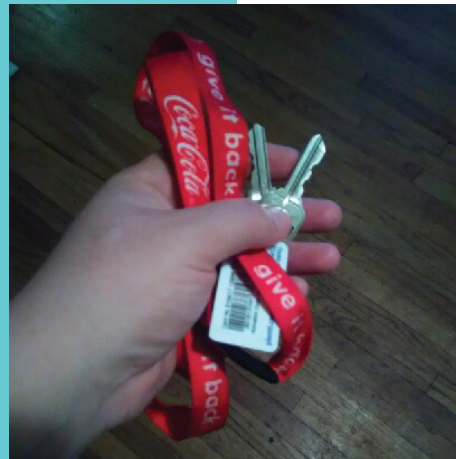
These keys represent a second chance. These keys are months of struggle, tears, doubt, and most importantly, hope.

These keys would never have been in my hand if it were not for a [community health] worker who believed in me and saw the work I put in and how far I have come. My community health worker who wouldn't take no for an answer and got a hesitant landlord to believe in second chances.

## THESE KEYS ARE SO MUCH MORE THAN JUST METAL. WHEN I CARRY THEM AND HEAR THEM JINGLE IN MY BAG, I SMILE.

Because where you see keys, I see hope and the promise of an amazing future to come.

- CLIENT, CAMDEN



## PATIENT ENCOUNTER

Enter Information Here if the Encounter Type was One Where the Client was  
Shown or Not.

### PATIENT ENCOUNTER - CLIENT PRESENT

Home Visit

- ☐ und Pre-Enrollment Attempt
- ☐ Pre-Enrollment Visit
- ☐ Enrollment Visit Attempt
- ☐ Enrollment Visit
- ☐ Initial PCP Visit
- ☐ Home Visit Attempt
- ☒ Home Visit
- ☐ Hospital Based Intake Attempt
- ☐ Hospital Based Intake
- ☐ PCP Visit
- ☐ Provider Mental Health Visit
- ☐ Specialist Visit
- ☐ Mental/Behavioral Health Visit
- ☐ AP Phone
- ☐ Hospital Attempt
- ☐ Hospital
- ☐ Community/Nursing Home/Other Facility
- ☐ Use Graduation

I took this photo while documenting a visit with a woman who had just moved into an apartment after nine months of homelessness. She was living in a shelter for three months while pregnant and then six months with her baby after he was born.

She has been through so much and has worked so hard to get back on her feet. She is a great example of how amazing things can happen when people get the resources and support they need. Right now her baby is happy, healthy and teething in the comfort of a real home.

Now when I document our visits, I get to select "home visit", and that makes me smile.

- COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKER, CAMDEN

AMAZING  
THINGS CAN  
HAPPEN  
WHEN PEOPLE  
GET THE  
RESOURCES  
AND SUPPORT  
THEY NEED.



# I'M HAVING MY THIRD BOY.

I want to say I was shocked, but deep down inside I wasn't. It's funny — both sides of my family are basically all males except for me. I guess I was meant to have another young man. I'm excited either way because children are always a blessing. Even though this pregnancy was a trying one — it seemed as though everyone wanted to stress me out.

But I also got a lot of support from people who really care. I had outside support from my community health worker. Having outside support from those that don't look down on you for mistakes or choices you've made is a big plus. She made me feel very supported and like this is more than just a job for her. She was there to help me have all the support I've needed throughout the pregnancy. If I ever wanted to talk about anything, she was there. I'm grateful I've made it through this pregnancy without any complications so far. That's truly a blessing, I must say.

So, three boys it shall be. I hope they form a close bond together. I can't wait to meet you. I love you boy!

— CLIENT, PHILADELPHIA





# I'M NOW FEELING GOOD AND FREE.

The reason why I picked this picture was because a couple of months ago, I was feeling down and out. It actually took me a month to get me right for me and my kids. And this is the reason why I'm now feeling good and free.

Thanks to Ms. Carla [my community health worker] for being in my corner and telling me that everything was going to be OK. I had doubts about what you were telling me. I thank you so much, I can't thank you enough.

– CLIENT, PHILADELPHIA



# I WILL LOVE THESE WOMEN FOREVER.

These two women [my community health workers] were two corners of my new foundation.

Xiomara, with her ever-ready list of resources and not allowing me to settle for mediocrity for my children or myself. She encouraged me to go for a job that matches my needs as well as my salary expectations.

Digna, the emotional support the universe sent my way to help me organize my heart and mind. She accompanied me to my prenatal and sonogram appointments. It was difficult finding myself again. She would stay with the baby at childcare so that I didn't worry about her while I did the yoga class at NMPP. This was amazing and definitely helpful for me to find my inner peace.

They helped me ease the worry and anxiety I felt regarding the financial burden that comes with another child. I am now working full time, saving money and preparing to have my own place.

I will love these women forever.

- CLIENT, NEW YORK CITY





# FINDING BALANCE IS AN EVER REVOLVING PROCESS.

Overall, this whole thing scared me. I was not ready to have a second child. Despite the surrounding struggles, I found an inner peace by just accepting my life role as a mother of two. I was scared and nervous, but finding balance was my main goal. [My community health workers] helped me retain the necessities for my children and find peace with my new status of being medically prohibited to work. Finding balance is an ever revolving process.

Now that my daughter is here, the smiles and stability of my children are what matter most to me. I am their pillar and example of balance, strength and finding the laughs during difficult times. No matter what happens, we always make sure to do something fun, spend time together and just remember that life is not all about being serious.

Each day, I push myself to be good. I am my children's example to stay focused and work hard. There is a solution to everything.

– CLIENT, NEW YORK CITY

# WOMANHOOD IN ALL ITS SPLENDOR AND ENERGY

This is the entrance to my office cubicle, where I sit and type my notes and my home visits become a part of my families' stories on paper. This space is where I "make things happen" for the families I work with, where hope is formed and a bond is made. It's the place where, with a call or an email or a text, with health information and understanding, I impact my families' lives. I like to call it MY WORLD within the world.

The cloth that covers the divider is called a rebozo which is used during and after labor to soothe the woman and carry the child. To me, the design on it represents womanhood in all its splendor and energy.

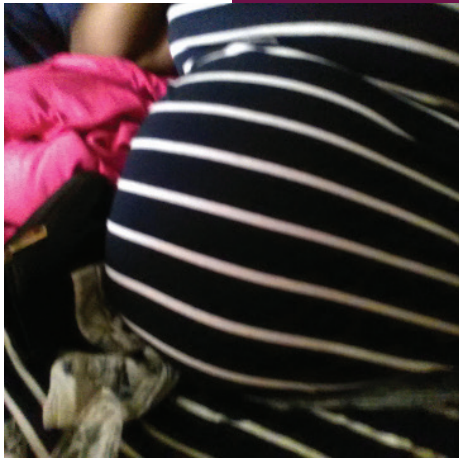
AS A COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKER, I  
HELP CHANGE THE LIVES OF FAMILIES  
WITH KNOWLEDGE, UNDERSTANDING, OR A  
SIMPLE HUG.

The work that I do impacts me as a person and them as a family. Community health workers are important in our communities!

– COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKER, NEW YORK CITY





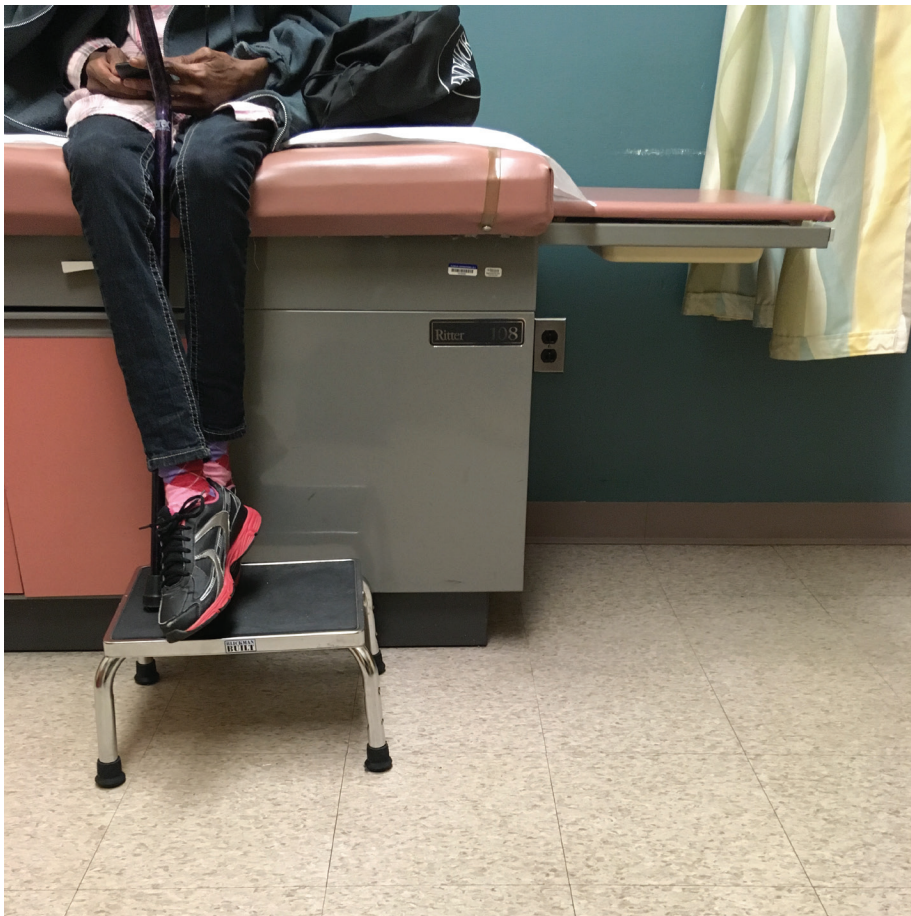


# MY BABY BUMP MEANS THE WORLD TO ME.

Although my son is not here yet, I've learned how to become a protector and how to cherish something that I will have for life.

My baby bump also shows me how everything can change in a matter of time.

– CLIENT, PHILADELPHIA



# THE DOCTOR'S VISIT.

I often accompany women to their medical appointments. The women we work with often face a lot of stigmatization within the health care system and have usually experienced judgment and negative attitudes from one of their health care providers.

**GOING TO THE DOCTOR CAN BE JUST ONE MORE PLACE WHERE THEY ARE MADE TO FEEL THAT THEY ARE A BAD MOM.**

For this reason women often come armed by donning the mask of toughness and defensiveness, with an air of impenetrability.

It's amazing how quickly that defensive armor can be shed when a provider shows compassion and respect and listens to the patient's story instead of creating their own.

**- COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKER, CAMDEN**



# IN GIVING BIRTH TO OUR BABIES, WE MAY FIND THAT WE GIVE BIRTH TO NEW POSSIBILITIES WITHIN OURSELVES.

I believe the choice to become a mother  
is the choice to become one of the  
greatest spiritual teachers there is.

Giving birth is a mystery, just like life. It  
takes a woman's deepest fears about  
herself and shows her that she is strong.

- CLIENT, PHILADELPHIA





**I FEEL STRONGER  
AND MORE  
VALUABLE SINCE  
I ENROLLED IN  
THIS PROGRAM.**

When we first met, my [community health worker] said, "I hope you are breastfeeding this baby exclusively. It will trim away the pregnancy weight, protect against infection and make you closer emotionally." She explained to me how my mood can affect the milk production and advised me to be positive and think of happy moments. Most importantly, she has been a material and moral support for me, giving me advice and hope when I need it.

I chose this picture because every time my community health worker visits me, she finds me breastfeeding and I can see the joy and happiness on her face. I remember her saying, "You don't know how happy I feel inside when I see this baby enjoying her food in a safe and lovely place like your lap."

I am very grateful because I feel stronger and more valuable since I enrolled in this program.

**- CLIENT, NEW YORK CITY**

# LOVE YOURSELF.

## THIS IS THE INSIDE OF A BATHROOM STALL AT A PUBLIC LIBRARY IN CAMDEN.

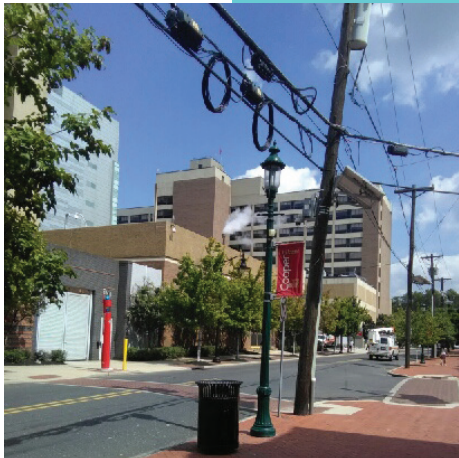
The mothers we work with are struggling with addiction and experiencing homelessness or housing instability, and this library serves as a safe place in the community where we can meet to work on their goals.

When I use the bathroom, I see “love yourself” has been scratched into the stall door. When I read it, I think, yeah, why is that so hard? Then I look around at the other messages, a dense mosaic of negative words, and I think, oh, that’s why.

One of my favorite parts about this job [as a community health worker] is that it has given me the opportunity to see what people can do when provided with the right resources and a little support and positivity. Amazing things can sometimes happen.

– COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKER, CAMDEN





# THIS IS WHERE I STARTED TO HEAL.

I walked down this road to Cooper Hospital not knowing what to expect. I was hurting, physically and emotionally. I was scared and broken.

This two block walk felt like 200 miles, but I made it there and made it inside. I asked for help and received it with welcoming arms. This is where I learned to open my mouth, this is where I started to get my voice back, this is where I became involved with the Camden Coalition, this is where I found out my beautiful baby boy would be here in a few short months.

This is where I found a support system that has changed my life for the better. I found people who say “we’re here for you” and mean it. This is where I remembered how amazing it is to be a mother, and where I realized I’m a strong woman who can go through the worst and keep my head high and continue to move forward.

This is where I started to heal.

– CLIENT, CAMDEN



# SEE ME LIKE I SEE YOU.

I pass by this mural on my way to many home visits each week and the words “see me like I see you” always stand out to me.

As a community health worker, I am in the position of being able to offer support to moms-to-be during what is often an incredibly challenging and transformative time in their lives. I recognize my special role of being a consistent and kind support to people during these moments, and the phrase “see me like I see you” guides me as I aim to bring to the surface all the positivity and strengths each and every one of the women I work with embody.

**TO ME, THESE WORDS ARE AN ENCOURAGEMENT FOR ALL OF US TO STRIVE TO SEE THE BEAUTY, STRENGTH AND HUMANITY IN ONE ANOTHER.**

I feel lucky to be in a role where I can be a non-judgmental support to people, and in doing so hopefully hold up a mirror to each woman’s unique beauty as a mother, woman, and whole individual.

– COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKER, PHILADELPHIA





**FOR THE LATEST UPDATES** on our programs and progress, visit [MerckforMothers.com](https://MerckforMothers.com). You can also join the #EndMaternalMortality conversation by following @MerckforMothers on Twitter.







Merck for mothers

*Merck for Mothers* is known as *MSD for Mothers* outside the United States and Canada.