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BLACK MATERNAL HEALTH PROJECT

Final Report July 2024

Working in collaboration with LJMU and the International Slavery Museum, Collective Encounters hosted a series of creative workshops with the **aim to understand the links between Black maternal health in the past and present**.

The project addresses inequality in maternal care and birth outcomes. Together with participants from the local community, aimed to establish what insights could inform guidance for future practice.

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1. Overview

The Black Maternal Health Project is a collaborative initiative with LJMU and the International Slavery Museum, Collective Encounters to host a series of creative workshops with the aim to understand the links between Black maternal health in the past and present.

The sessions are were led by Natalie Denny, project manager and lead artist, and Michelle Richards, lead artist and art therapist.

The sessions took.place in National Museums Liverpool Make Space, Central Library and Cafe Asia. Written consent was taken in the first session. There were five two-hour workshops and two 4 hour workshops. The exact format of the workshops was agreed with the participants in the first session, but as a guide we discussed historical source material and artefacts related to this topic and participated in creative activities to express our thoughts.

We had informal discussions in the small group to establish themes and what is important to local communities/individuals. The topic was considered sensitive because we discussed motherhood under slavery, but we took every precaution to make sure that the material was not graphic, nor distressing.

Whilst the sessions were guided by the participants, they included discussions around the historical sources (e.g. photographs of enslaved people and written memories of slavery) and artefacts from the International Slavery Museum (e.g. photographs and medicine bottles). Participants were supported to use poetry/creative prose/telling stories to connect with their thoughts and feelings throughout the sessions.

At the end of each sessions there was an evaluative element which enabled the participants to agree the scope of any longer term research, public engagement activity, and its intended impact.



All seven sessions were delivered Feb – June 2024

Dates

Tuesday 6th February 10-12 COMPLETE
Monday 12th February 10-12 COMPLETE
Tuesday 20th February 10-12 COMPLETE
Monday 26th February 10 - 12 COMPLETE
Tuesday 5th March 10-12 COMPLETE

ADDITIONAL SESSIONS
Tuesday 23rd April 10-2 COMPLETE
Tuesday 4th June 10-2 COMPLETE

Participants received £65.00 for each session and £35 towards childcare, if required.

It is hoped that this project will lead to the shaping of the representation of this topic in the International Slavery Museum and to how this history is taught within the midwifery curriculum at Liverpool John Moores University.

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2. Research Questions and Outputs

We will be asking questions such as:

How can historical research into Black women's health be used to advocate for change in addressing present-day Black maternal health outcomes?





***Together* we want to:**

- Shape how this history is presented in the International Slavery Museum.
- Work with LJMU's Midwifery team to decolonise midwifery curricula.



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- Provide an opportunity to steer future historical research
- Contribute to closing the black maternal health inequality of outcome gap.

3. Measuring Progress







Key Indicator	Activity / Project	Data / Outcome
7 workshops with 5 Black Mothers, Project/Art leads and NML	5 Black Mothers recruited and attending weekly sessions	All 7 workshops delivered. Monitoring forms and creative work produced
Work with LJMU's Midwifery team to decolonise midwifery curricula	Meetings and consultation with lead professionals responsible for midwifery training. Midwives attended final session and networking event.	Academic cluster 2nd October 2024 at LJMU. Midwifery team will be invited to learn about the project, receive the finalised leaflet and talk about next steps.
Black Maternal Health Leaflet co-created and creative responses to NML material produced with workshop participants	Research and collating information for leaflet. Supported to use creativity to explore the Archive materials.	Published leaflet Granny Marie Shrine exhibited Community Engagement networks around Black Maternal Health

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4. Quotes from participants

Quotes from workshop participants:

"Space to be really honest about things that are difficult to talk about when others don't know your culture."

"It has raised the bar on my expectations of maternity services. Why shouldn't we deserve the best?!"

"This is a cathartic experience as Black women dont get the space to talk about their own experiences"

"I connected with Grannie Marie (Archive material of midwife in slavery). It reconnected me to my goal of wanting to train as a doula in later life."

Quotes from workshop participants:

"...this project and space has been so important for me personally without me even knowing I needed it- and will be so important for and to other women. Proud of everything we collectively felt, shared and achieved in those short hours! Powerful.. "

"...i've learnt and healed/healing parts of my labour/maternal experience and have learnt so much and a really good insight. This is amazing, look what we have created ladies..."

5. Creative output - response to archive material: Granny Marie poem and Shrine



The Black Maternal Health Project group chose poetry and installation as their response to the archive material/creative outputs to honour Granny Marie, a midwife who lived on the Louisiana plantation. She was 34 when slavery was abolished and died in 1935, aged 104.

The participants wrote individual letters to Granny Marie; lines from the letter were then combined and edited via a group activity to create a collaborative poem. The poem was then screen printed onto mirrors alongside Granny Marie's picture to form a shrine. This creative choice was made to propel viewers to be engage with the piece by positioning their reflection in the work. Flowers were woven around a mesh frame to give Granny Marie "her flowers".

Dr Andrea Liversy met with the Park Rangers at Cain River Creole National Park regarding Granny Marie shrine. The park consists of two former plantations; where Grannie Marie spent her life. They've identified a space for a replica or photographs of our shrine exhibited and plan to transform their out building as a museum space; including a feedback book for people to write notes and reaction to the shrine. The shrine will also have a home at NML.

Grannie Marie – Mother and Midwife

I want to reach out and give you flowers.
I am in awe of you and your story.
They asked for your help despite selling our children.
Even though your humanity was questioned by some of
those whose hand you held so gallantly in
their most transformative hours.
I wonder how many babies you delivered and how many
you brought safely to their first breath.
I wonder how many babies you carried
and how many you kept.
Our Black babies entered a world where their bodies
would be broken by slavery.
The white children would grow to be perpetrators.
Did they ever punish you?
They called you ignorant yet used your knowledge.
How sad that it should be that way.
Your auction price proves you were a valued commodity.





Guiding women, without grudge or prejudice, despite
your extreme adversity.
Natural, caring and nurturing;
a profound connection to the preciousness of life.
Oh to be humble for the sake of life and to have such
capacity for love.
You knew about earth medicine and how to work with
nature;
feet planted in the soil.
Sharing wisdom and knowledge.
I am proud to be your ancestor.
How did you find the strength to be "present" for the
mothers who owned you?
A lost voice.
We will bring you back to life with respect.
Grannie Marie, thank you for being an amazing
vulnerable part of this world.
I want to reach out and give you flowers.
And for you we will bloom.

6. Educational output - Hey Mama leaflet



Participants wanted to create an information source for Black Mothers by Black Mothers to distribute to Maternity services, health care professionals and the community. Participants in the group shared how they never saw themselves reflected in the information and imagery in NHS services waiting rooms, and when they did, it was usually in cartoon form.

Through discussions and creative exercises about their maternity experiences it was highlighted that when some of the women were asked about their ethinic background it was either clumsily managed, uncomfortable or delivered incoherently with little information on why Black mums were more at risk, just that they were, which led to confusion, upset and fear.

The group agreed an informative leaflet in a supportive and comforting tone (their own voices) would support new Black mums on their maternity journey. We employed a photographer to attend a session to take pictures for the leaflet and worked through the main areas we felt should be addressed. The leaflet will be shared with the midwives to ensure all information is correct from a medical perspective.

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Hey Mama!



We are a group of Black and ethnically diverse mothers and we would like to increase the safety and positive experiences for Black women in the maternal health care system.

We hope that you will encounter people who will support your health, your emotions and your choices. Remember, you have the right to demand a high level of care.

Listen to your inner voice. Feel confident to express yourself. Your knowledge of your own body is valuable.

This leaflet is designed to aid you in your maternal journey.

We wish you a safe pregnancy.

7. Next Steps



01. Complete leaflet

Liaise with LJMU midwifery team and participants to finalise leaflet. Once signed off by all parties it will be sent to print and made digitally available.



02. Official launch event

The need to centre Black mothers voices in Maternity discussions was evident throughout the project. The participants are invited to an LJMU Academic Cluster Event for Health professionals on 02.10.24 to launch the final report, publicise the leaflet and showcase the Granny Marie Shrine.



03. Secure additional funding

It's clear from feedback from the participants that a space for Black women to discuss their maternity experiences and offer/receive support is missing. This project highlights the need for a more holistic wraparound approach Black Mothers in health care settings and in the community. Funding bids are in the process of being submitted with input from the project team to upscale and extend this project.

8. Conclusion

There are many highlights to the Black Maternal Health Project. Below are a few we picked out.

Highlight 1 Safe space for Black Mothers

- Supportive
- Holistic
- Cathartic

Highlight 2 Creative and Educational Outputs

- Public viewing of Granny Marie Shrine
- Community Engagement
- For Black Mum's by Black Mum's

Highlight 3 The potential to impact real change for Black Maternal Health

- Trailblaizing
- Change making
- Transformative

9. Acknowledgements

We wouldclike to acknowledge the contributions of the people who worked tirelessly on the project:

- Our amazing workshop participants
- Alexander Scott and Makiya Davis Bramble - National Museums Liverpool
- Dr Andrea Livesey- Liverpool John Moores University and LJMU Midwives
- Collective Encounters- Tessa Buddle, Wendy O'connor and Amy Woods
- Our colleagues from Local and Partner Organisations
- Natalie Denny - Project and Art Lead
- Michelle Richards- Art Lead
- The British Academy - Funding this transformational project

We thank you for your continued support for the Black Maternal Health Project

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