

ECHO (Enhancing Collaborative Health Options & Opportunities) through **HOPE** (Hope and Healing Opportunities with Proactive & Preventive Education)



Happy Mother's Day

Mount Zion Community Development, Inc. salutes the following mothers for Mother's Day 2026.



May is...

- Better Sleep Month**
- Healthy Vision Month**
- National Stroke Awareness Month**
- National Teen Self-Esteem Month**
- National Nurses Week (May 6-12)**
- Maternal Sepsis Week (May 10-16)**
- World AIDS Vaccine Day (May 18)**



Mrs. Linda Glaze

Mrs. Linda Glaze

Her ongoing dedication to crafting handmade, crocheted blankets for babies born through the Project NAF program brings immense comfort and joy to our community families. Thank you, Mrs. Glaze, for stitching love into every gift.

Royanna Williams



Royanna Williams

An avid member of Project NAF's Community Advisory Board (CAB) for over 22 years. CAB is comprised of organizations of like-minded programs who advise Project NAF on continued development, implementation, evaluation, and maintenance. Project NAF remains honored by Royanna's dedication to the CAB over the years.

Royanna was recently asked to speak on I/DD at the legislative session held April 29, 2026. Due to a medical emergency, she was not able to attend. However, her letter was slated to be read during the session.

Royanna's Letter for the 2026 I/DD Legislative Agenda

Good morning,

My name is Royanna Williams, and I am a chronically ill mother of a 22-year-old son with autism. I am not speaking from theory. I am speaking from real life.

My son has been on the waiting list since he was five years old. But somewhere along the way—through agencies being bought, transferred, and passed down—his timeline changed. Now it looks like he's only been waiting since he was 14 or 15.

Being on that list is not neutral. It is not just a wait. That is years of his life. Back then, nobody told me to hold onto that run list number like it was everything. Nobody said, "Don't lose this—you'll need it to protect your place."

I manage multiple chronic conditions. I've handled years of medical paperwork—SSI, doctors, hospitals. If I didn't know something was critical, it got shredded. That's not just on me. That is a system that did not prepare families for what actually matters. Because while we're waiting, life is still happening.

My son graduated, and like so many families, we felt that drop-off,

that moment when the structure, the support, the resources just... disappear. And now it's on us to figure it out.

There are days I physically cannot function. I have crawled out of bed just to get him to a doctor's appointment. And there have been times he missed care—not because he didn't need it, but because I could not physically get him there.

This is not just about access. This is about capacity. When the system doesn't show up, the family has to. And not every family has unlimited capacity.

Where you live should not determine the level of care your child receives, but in North Carolina it does. And we have to stop treating autism like it's one experience.

My son is in the middle. He doesn't qualify for certain services, but he struggles every single day. People like him are falling through the cracks the most.

So I leave you with this—What is the plan for them? And what is your commitment to families like mine?

Thank you,
Royanna Williams

I/DD LEGISLATIVE CAUCUS

The 2026 I/DD Legislative Agenda

The 2026 Legislative Caucus for individuals and families with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) focuses on expanding access to services, protecting rights, and addressing systemic barriers.

Key Goals of the 2026 I/DD Legislative Agenda

End the Waiting List: Develop and fund a comprehensive plan to provide services for over 20,000 individuals on the Registry of Unmet Needs.

Strengthen the Workforce: Increase wages for Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) to address staff shortages.

Protect Medicaid Funding: Shield Medicaid and I/DD services from state and federal budgetary challenges.

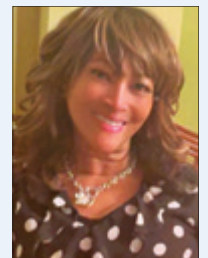
Advocacy and Empowerment: Empower individuals with I/DD and their families to share their experiences through the "My Story Matters" campaign to influence policy.

Community Living: Enhance opportunities for independence and community integration.

MOUNT ZION COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, INC.



Dr. John H. Grant, Founding Chairman, President, CEO of Mount Zion Community Development, Inc.



Belinda K. Grant, Chief Executive Director of Mount Zion Community Development, Inc.

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- Barbara Anderson: Office Support/Community Connector
- Dr. Ronald Caldwell: Supervising Physician
- Sapphire De'Bellott: Project NAF Outreach Worker
- Mr. Henry Glaze, Transportation Coordinator
- Kontia Grant: Nurse Family Practitioner
- Ms. Rosa B. Hearst, in appreciation of past services

Board of Directors

- Mrs. Linda Glaze: Board Chair
- Rev. Scott Rogers: Vice Chair
- Mrs. Michelle Harper: Fundraising Chair & Treasurer
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- Mrs. Alberta Drane: Events Coordinator
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Project NAF Community Advisory Board

- Denise Duckett: BCHHS Pregnancy Care
- Nancy Farmer: Spare Foundation
- Charlene Galloway-Pea: Mt. Zion Church of Asheville, Inc.
- Wanda Hensley: Madison County Representative
- Tabriska Little: Henderson County Representative
- Patricia Simpson: Children with Different Abilities
- Tim Splain: Asheville City Police Department (Male Advocate)
- Vacant: Advent Health
- Royanna Williams: Business Owner & Former NAF Participant

Project Empower

Education Means Power – in collaboration with community partners to impact the opioid crisis.



OUR PARTNERS

Our programming is made possible through the support of our generous funders.



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MESSAGE FROM MZCD STAFF



Dr. Ronald Caldwell, Kontia Grant, Sapphire De'Bellott, and Barbara Anderson.

Maternal Mental Health

Mental health conditions continue to be the overall leading cause of pregnancy-related deaths, with 216 deaths due to mental health conditions.

Data from 2022 shows that mental health conditions accounted for 27.7% of pregnancy-related deaths. This represents a significant increase from previous years' data which showed that mental health conditions accounted for 22.5% to 22.7% of pregnancy-related deaths.

More deaths are occurring late in the postpartum year. Data from 2022 shows that 37.8% of pregnancy-related deaths occur late in the postpartum year. This is a significant increase from previous years' data which showed that 27-30% of pregnancy-related deaths occurred late in the postpartum year.

More non-Hispanic Black women are dying due to mental health conditions. Data from 2022 shows that 16.9% of pregnancy-related deaths to non-Hispanic Black women were due to mental health conditions. This is a significant increase from previous years' data which showed that 7-9% of deaths to non-Hispanic Black women were due to mental health conditions.

Of note, the leading cause of pregnancy-related death for non-Hispanic Black women continues to be cardiovascular conditions, accounting for 20.0% of pregnancy-related deaths.

The vast majority of pregnancy-related deaths are preventable. Data from 2022 shows that 85.7% of pregnancy-related deaths are preventable.



Women's Health Month

Each May, Women's Health Month is observed as an occasion to call attention to women's health and to promote actions women can take to optimize their physical and mental health.

Women's Health Month is designed not only to encourage women to seek medical care when they need it, but also to educate them about factors that can adversely affect their health, and to emphasize the importance of preventative care such as adapting a healthy lifestyle

and undergoing all recommended health screenings and exams.

To celebrate Women's Health Month, we look at the latest women's health trends, such as the rising incidence of cancer among women, and their impact on care. We also explore a wide range of women's health topics, including chronic pain in women with rheumatic diseases, cosmetics use and ocular health, mental health symptoms in women with hemophilia, and decision regret among women who survive breast cancer.

Source: *Medical Profession Reference*

Preeclampsia Awareness Month

Preeclampsia is a serious and potentially life-threatening blood pressure disorder that occurs during pregnancy or after delivery. It is marked by high blood pressure, protein in the urine, or other signs of organ damage, typically after 20 weeks of pregnancy.

It is one of the leading causes of maternal and infant illness and death and requires immediate medical attention.

Key Aspects of Preeclampsia

Definition — A sudden and dangerous rise in blood pressure that can lead to severe complications such as stroke, organ failure, or preterm birth.

Symptoms — Severe or persistent headache; vision changes (blurriness, flashing lights, spots); pain in the upper abdomen; nausea or vomiting; swelling of the face or hands; sudden weight gain; and difficulty breathing.

When It Occurs — Most often after 20 weeks of pregnancy, but it can also develop in the postpartum period.

Prevalence — Affects approximately 5-7% of all pregnancies.

Action Needed — If any symptoms appear, contact a healthcare provider or seek emergency care right away.

Source: *CDC*

Pregnancy-Related Deaths

On April 24, 2026, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released new data on pregnancy-related deaths.

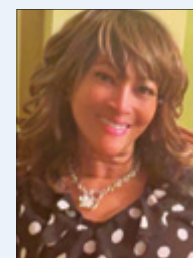
Analyzing data from 2022, the CDC sheds light on when and how women are dying during and following pregnancy. In particular, deaths due to mental health conditions have risen significantly from 22.7% in 2021 to 27.7% in 2022.

A pregnancy-related death is defined as the death of a woman during pregnancy or within one year of the end of pregnancy from a pregnancy complication, a chain of events initiated by pregnancy, or the aggravation of an unrelated condition by the physiological effects of pregnancy. It differs from strict maternal death by allowing for a longer timeframe and including broader causes.

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Hope. New Beginnings.
Transformation

MAY IS TEEN PREGNANCY PREVENTION MONTH

Teen Birth Rates

Provisional CDC data released in April 2026 shows US teen birth rates hit another historic low in 2025, with a 7% decline. Approximately 126,000 babies were born to females aged 15-19, a rate of 11.7 per 1,000, driven by increased contraceptive use, lower sexual activity, and access to care.

Mount Zion Community Development, Inc.'s Project EMPOWER (Education Means Power) program implemented a research-based curriculum in the Asheville City School System in after-school programs from 2003-2019. Project EMPOWER's current focus is on opioid and substance abuse prevention through community partnerships.