



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Darlington County First Steps Partners with Morehouse School of Medicine Center for Maternal Health Equity in addition to the Morehouse School of Medicine National African American Child & Family Research Center, University of Colorado, Chandler Consulting & Media, and First Team America.

January 25, 2024, Darlington County – Darlington County First Steps has entered a five-year partnership with Morehouse School of Medicine's Center for Maternal Health Equity (MSM CMHE) to conduct a study looking to better understand how to implement a preconception counseling program in the Southeast and create programs for healthy mothers, fathers, and babies.

According to the South Carolina Maternal Morbidity and Mortality Review Committee (SC MMR Committee), between 2014 and 2018, 73 South Carolina women died within six weeks of giving birth, a rate of 25.5 deaths per 100,000 live births. The maternal mortality rate was 2.6 times higher for Black and other minority women versus white women (43.3 vs. 16.4 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, respectively).

The MSM CMHE study, titled Project IMPACT (**IM**proving **P**reconception **A**ctions and **C**hoices for **T**omorrow), aims to learn the current preconception health behaviors of Black men and women of reproductive age in the Southeastern United States. Preconception counseling programs help both men and women become healthier before pregnancy so that they or their partners can have healthier pregnancies.

Darlington County First Steps and MSM CMHE are looking for Black or African American males and females living in Darlington County, between the ages of 18-44 who are currently not pregnant but want to have a child within the next year to participate in Project IMPACT. Participants will be asked to complete three interviews over six months and will be compensated with \$150 in gift cards as a thank you for being involved in this study. They will receive \$50 for the first interview, \$30 for the second interview, and \$70 for the third interview. Compensation will be given at the end of each interview session.

“We are honored to be part of this life-changing work that will save lives and impact families for generations to come,” said Darnell Byrd McPherson, Executive Director for DCFS.

“Given the maternal health crisis in the Southeastern United States, especially among the Black and African American community, I am proud to be a part of this project that aims to provide our community with needed resources from the community-based organizations they have access to and trust,” said Adenike McDonald, Program Coordinator for Project IMPACT at MSM CMHE.

“Improving preconception health amongst our communities is a crucial step forward in tackling the unequal maternal health outcomes we face. As research shows, community-driven solutions are better suited for shaping healthier futures. We are truly excited to be taking on this joint effort with Darlington County First Steps,” said Dr. Oluyemi Farinu, Project Director for Project IMPACT at MSM CMHE.

For more information about this voluntary study, email admin@darlingtoncountyfirststeps.org.

The mission of Darlington County First Steps is to provide programs, services, and information to strengthen families and communities in Darlington County.

###

Email: admin@darlingtoncountyfirststeps.org

Phone: 843-339-0819