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Carnegie Mellon and Allegheny Health Network join forces to bring Lullaby Project to Pittsburgh parents

By Cindy Alexander

The birth of a child is always a memorable experience. Many parents talk about the joy of seeing their child for the first time, and how their hearts filled with love at that first glance.

But childbirth is not always such a rosy experience, especially for those who deal with birth trauma or postpartum depression. That's where the Lullaby Project aims to make a difference.

The international organization is a project of Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute, in New York City, offering free resources for new and expectant families, partnering them with musicians and working together to write personalized lullabies for their new babies. The goal of the project is to promote and enhance maternal health and childhood development while strengthening the bond between parents and their child.

"Since its inception, the Lullaby Project has worked with new parents in challenging circumstances to foster an increased maternal bond," said Monique Mead, an associate teaching professor and director of music entrepreneurship at Carnegie Mellon University. "Songwriting is a vehicle for connection, and my hope this semester is to guide our teaching artists to support these new or expectant parents in expressing their



Carnegie Mellon University

CMU student Aaleah Oliver, center, was among the students helping parents write personalized lullabies to their children at the launch of the Lullaby Project in Pittsburgh.

love, hope and blessings for their children in an original, personalized way."

The AHN Perinatal Trauma-Informed Care clinic, which has been in operation since last year, is a program dedicated to obstetric patients who may be facing circumstances that may make the experience of having a child traumatic, whether it be a history of domestic violence, sexual abuse or birth trauma.

Birth trauma or postnatal post-traumatic stress disorder can occur when there is distress during or after childbirth, including a difficult delivery, an emergency medical situation, an unscheduled cesarean, or extreme loss of blood during delivery.

"As these women prepare for another birth, it's critical

that their traumatic history is considered when their care plans are designed," said Dr. Tracey Vogel, an anesthesiologist and director of the clinic at AHN. "It's also important that we implement care strategies and provide resources that better support women in their fourth trimester, as research has shown a close correlation between preexisting trauma and bonding impairment between mother and child."

The Lullaby Project has been operating for a decade but is new to Pittsburgh, thanks to the partnership with CMU.

"We were able to supplement what the Lullaby Project required with additional training, teaching and facilitation on culturally responsive pedagogy, cultural

competencies, critical race theory, and thinking and understanding forms of oppression," said Valeria J. Martinez, assistant dean for diversity, equity and inclusion at CMU's College of Fine Arts.

"We also prepared how to interact with trauma," said participating student Beleyou Kebede. "We had lessons from Dr. Vogel explaining what kind of trauma can happen to a mother during a pregnancy journey."

Martinez taught the course that was developed around the Lullaby Project with Mead.

Dr. Vogel chose the six patients who would participate in the project along with the 12 students who registered for the music entrepreneurship course through CMU. Among those patients selected was Amy Walsh, who suffered birth trauma.

Walsh, who said she felt alone in her experience, was shocked to find so many women she knew having a similar experience.

"I hope that the Lullaby Project is something that is a resource for more and more women" who have had the same type of experience, said Walsh.

Since its inception in December 2011, more than 3,000 original lullabies have been written through the Lullaby Project and are available to hear at carnegiehall.org/lullaby.