

ANCIENT SONG DOULA SERVICES

| Reclaiming the Ancient Principles of Birthing

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ANCIENT SONG DOULA SERVICES

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Chanel Porchia-Albert

Chanel Porchia-Albert Creator of Ancient Song Doula Services

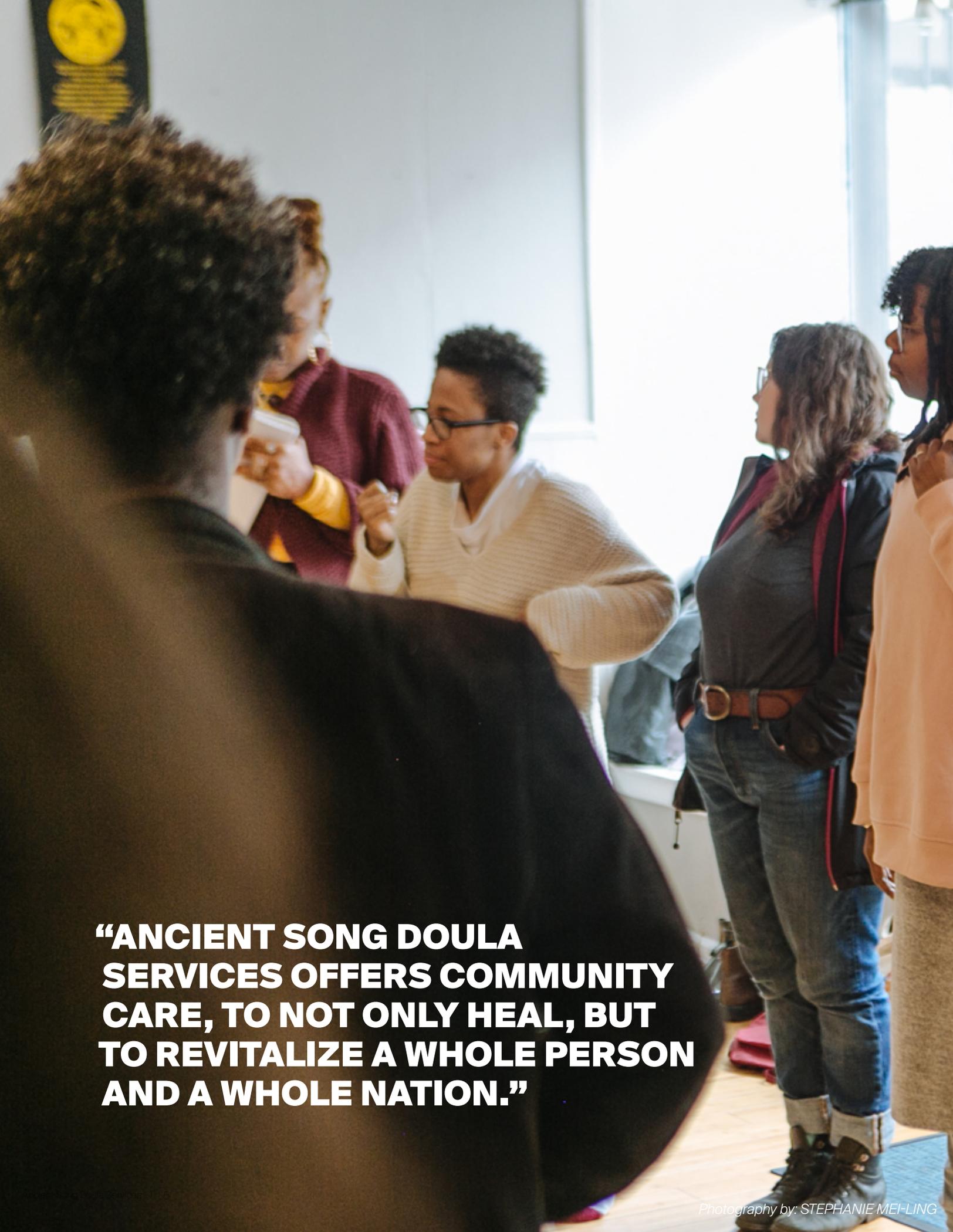
Ancient Song Doula Services (ASDS) is located in Brooklyn, New York and offers community care, focused not only on healing, but also on revitalizing a whole person using a reproductive justice approach. Chanel Porchia-Albert founded the organization in her living room in 2008 after realizing how Black, Latinx people, and teens were being treated with regard to their reproductive needs. Therefore, it is both a service provider and a training organization.

ASDS provides services to low-or middle-income families, especially people of color, those with fluid gender identities, teens, people pregnant while incarcerated, people in maternity shelters, survivors of sexual assault or trauma, and people with a history of substance use or mental health issues. For instance, prison doulas go to Riker's Island and deliver education around reproductive health access to help those incarcerated to better advocate for themselves. Although doulas cannot

be present in the birth room, we offer postpartum care around healthcare processes and advocate for what parents want for their child.

The organization trains a variety of people to become doulas: nurses, college students, medical students, social workers, school counselors, individuals who work in shelters, and even grandmothers! We provide full spectrum doula training, educational and professional development workshops, and direct services related to abortion, adoption, birth, postpartum, and grief support. The trainings are offered to community health centers, those who want to start a doula program, as well as international constituents who live where healthcare is limited. Since 2012 ASDS has trained over 500 people to become doulas.

ASDS is committed to reproductive justice and hosts an annual reproductive justice convening, the *Decolonizing Birth Conference*.

A photograph of a group of people in a room. In the foreground, the back of a person's head with dark, curly hair is visible. In the middle ground, a woman with short dark hair and glasses, wearing a white sweater, is looking towards the right. To her left, another woman in a maroon sweater is looking down at a white smartphone. To the right, a woman with long brown hair and glasses, wearing a dark jacket and blue jeans, is looking towards the right. Further right, another woman in a light orange sweater is partially visible. The background shows a white wall and a window with bright light coming through. A yellow circular logo is visible on the wall in the upper left corner.

“ANCIENT SONG DOULA SERVICES OFFERS COMMUNITY CARE, TO NOT ONLY HEAL, BUT TO REVITALIZE A WHOLE PERSON AND A WHOLE NATION.”



WHY THIS WORK IS IMPORTANT

“I thought this work was important because upon helping others I was opened up to the fact that people don’t have access to what they need. I also realized how Black people, Hispanic people, and teens were being treated, and so Ancient Song Doula Services started in my living room in 2008 and grew from there.”

SERVICES

“We offer full spectrum doula training, educational workshops, professional development workshops, and direct doula services in the form of offering abortion, adoption, birth, postpartum, and grief doulas. We also offer a conference every year called the Decolonize Birth Conference.”

WHO WE PROVIDE SERVICES TO

“We mainly provide services to people of color who are considered low-income or middle-income, those with fluid gender identities, teens, those who are pregnant while incarcerated, those living in maternity shelters, survivors of sexual assault or trauma, those with a history of substance use, and those with a history of mental health issues.”

RIKERS ISLAND & PRISON DOULA WORK

“We go into Rikers Island and offer education around reproductive health access to those pregnant while incarcerated to help them to navigate what healthcare looks like and advocate for better access to services. For example, if people don't have access to clean food or water we try to address those issues. We're not allowed to be in the birth room, but we meet them at the hospital and provide postpartum care. We then discuss if they will be able to keep the child, if the child will be within the care of a family member, or if they will give up the child for adoption. We offer support around these processes and advocate for what the parent wants for their child. We also go over what lactation looks like if they are allowed to breast or chest feed, and how to advocate for yourself so you and your child have the most resources.”

WHO WE TRAIN

“We train everybody and everyone: nurses, students, medical students, social workers, school counselors, individuals who work in shelters, folks interested in doing doula or reproductive justice work full time, and even grandmothers!”

“We do trainings for community health centers, those who want to start a doula program, and we even have travelled to different places where healthcare is limited. We travel all over the world to provide trainings to communities who need it. We adapt our trainings to fit the needs of a particular community. For example, we have done a training specifically for those living with HIV. We try to adhere to the needs of the populations those places serve.”

WHAT NON-DOULAS USE THE TRAININGS FOR

“For people who may not become doulas, they use the information with clients. For instance if it's a school counselor who has a student that is pregnant, they use the information to better understand how to support them through their pregnancy. If it's a social worker, they can use the trainings to connect their clients to reproductive justice and healthcare services. Overall they utilize the information to better support those they serve as best they can.”

HOW TO GET CERTIFIED

- Attend 5 births, abortions, or postpartum services
- Audit a breastfeeding/infant feeding class
- Obtain a food handlers license
- Read books, write papers
- Collect evaluations from those to whom services have been provided

IMPACT

“Our greatest impact is in the lives of the individuals we serve. When you see families come to events with the children you helped bring into this world, and they’re walking and talking, it’s deep. You know the backstory and you know what the individual personally went through—including personal struggles—and it is nice to see everything is working out. When you see that child and the individual, you realize how hard they worked for that child to be here. It’s really impactful.”

REDUCTION OF ADVERSE BIRTH OUTCOMES

“You can’t think about having a better birth outcomes if you don’t have basic necessities. So, our biggest achievement is being able to address the needs of folks so they can be more at ease, which in turn improves their birth outcomes. We help to reduce the criminalization of individuals at bedside, as well as teach people how to advocate for themselves and help them realize they have a voice. We improve access to necessary resources, such as diapers or formula, some of which we create ourselves through our community. We also partner with Center for Reproductive Rights, the Black Mamas Matter Alliance, and the National Advocates for Pregnant Women. We partner with a Community Supported Agriculture organization (CSA) to provide groceries. We also have a low number of cesarean sections and medical inductions because we help people know what’s going on with their healthcare so they are able to use their voice in a way people otherwise wouldn’t.”

HOW OUR WORK IS DIFFERENT

“We center the voices of the community and the people that we serve and offer full-spectrum services, which most organizations do not. We do this in a way that is culturally and linguistically appropriate. We see people as individuals and work to meet them where they are. We understand that needs are fluid and based on the time, space, and place the individual is in. There’s no one way to assist someone, so our services are individualized to accommodate everyone’s needs.”

THE FUTURE OF ANCIENT SONG DOULA SERVICES

“I want to see centers all over the world where people can get comprehensive care. We would not just be an institution in the community, but an extension of the community. We would hire community people that work and live in the communities they care for. People could go to one place and feel that they were cared for. It would never be stagnant, but rather something that’s ever-evolving as the community changes, because as generations change we have to change with them. We want people to feel invested and have it be a place where they can feel a part of the process and where they will be treated with dignity, respect, and love. Even if it just starts out with one or two places, that’s my big vision. That would be really impactful.”



Photo taken at MomCongress

Photography by: STEPHANIE MEI-LING

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The Clients of Ancient Song Doula Services

Below are stories of some of the clients served by Ancient Song Doula Services. The stories reveal the complexities of client's lives and how ASDS works with them.

ALBA SAAVEDRA'S STORY*

Alba Saavedra, a Latina woman who lives in Harlem, New York, was born in 1989. After receiving her GED and some additional training, Alba became employed part-time. Because the salary she received was low, Alba was eligible for Medicaid. At age twenty-nine, Alba already had one child and had experienced two miscarriages. The birth of her first child occurred in the 42nd week of the pregnancy. No doula or midwife was present at her delivery at the hospital. In fact, no one—not her mother, the mother of the baby's father, nor the father—were present. The one person who was with her was a friend who supported Alba during the labor and birth. A few days before giving birth, Alba was told she had herpes and consequently had a Cesarean section after receiving an epidural. Her former partner, the father of her child, had physically and emotionally abused Alba.

When Alba found out she was pregnant the fourth time, she sought out the services of Ancient Song Doula. She traveled by public transportation to the offices where the doula assessed Alba's situation. The doula noted that Alba required counseling and food resources. It was also determined that she would need postpartum and lactation support. Additionally, she required employment, educational and social services, as well as housing, all of which were crucial for her well-being.

During her last pregnancy, Alba received regular prenatal care which included doula visits. She had eight doula visits before the baby's birth and six postpartum doula visits. Though some of her family and friends functioned as a crucial support system, Alba needed support, which she received from ASDS.



Ancient Song Doula Hunter
Goodridge & ASDS Doulas

Photography by: STEPHANIE MEI-LING

NIA MILLER'S STORY*

At the age of 22, Nia Miller, a Queens resident, gave birth to her second child at a local community health facility. Nia, who is African American, completed high school and worked full time earning between \$10,000 and \$19,999. She also received Medicaid. When Nia came to Ancient Song Doula Services, she was in a domestic partnership with the biological father of her child. The father was employed full-time, too.

Together, with her doula, Nia and her partner created a birth plan. During her pregnancy, she saw the doula two times before the birth of her child. Although Nia had a birth plan, ultimately, she received an epidural, Pitocin and had the baby via a Cesarean section, when she was 40 weeks and six days along. Afterward, the baby was admitted to the NICU, and had to stay there for some time. After the birth of the baby, the doula made two postpartum visits to Nia and found that on account of the functioning support system of her partner, friends and her own strength, the young mother did not need additional services or support.

LINDA OLSEN'S STORY*

Linda Olsen was a 30-year old stay at home mother living in Brooklyn with her husband and two children. Linda, who is white, is college educated. Linda suffered from seizures and when she came to Ancient Song Doula Services, she reported that she was taking medication to control the seizures.

Linda sought out Ancient Song Doula Services during her third pregnancy because of anxiety and depression; the result of her traumatic childhood. Consequently, she was seeing a psychiatrist. For her third pregnancy, she wanted the support of a doula. Linda, her husband, and her doula designed a birth plan and arranged to have the baby at a birthing center. The birthing center was very cooperative and Linda received labor support from a team of people that included her husband, a close family member, and her doula. She met with her doula three times prior to the birth and then once postpartum. Linda had a successful vaginal delivery and the baby was fine.



Founder Chanel L. Porchia-Albert of Ancient Song

Photography by: STEPHANIE MEI-LING

TERRY WALKER'S STORY*

Terry is a Brooklyn resident who gave birth to her third child at age 49. Terry holds a master's degree and is employed full time. Terry identifies as Black/Hispanic/Latinx.

Although she is employed and married and her husband also works full time, Terry does not have insurance. Terry, her husband, and their three children live in a crowded apartment.

When she came to ASDS, Terry told her doula that in the past, she had experienced one miscarriage and suffered from a hypertensive disorder. She also noted that she gave birth to all of her children, vaginally. For her third birth, Terry had a birth plan and a doula. She saw the doula three times during her pregnancy and then twice after the birth of her child. The birth took place at a hospital where Terry received a Cesarean-section because the physician was concerned about her elevated blood pressure. Terry had planned on breastfeeding her child and the doula noted that she would need support. Terry received prenatal, labor and postpartum care which was provided by ASDS.

KAYLEE MILLER'S STORY*

Kaylee Miller, a Brooklyn resident, who identifies as Black, gave birth to her third child at the age of 34. She received a high school diploma and was enrolled in an insurance plan when she first sought out Ancient Song Doula Services. While Kaylee gave birth vaginally to all of her children in a hospital, she and her partner decided to have a home. In addition to a midwife, they sought out doula support as part of the home birth plan.

Before the delivery of third child she met with the doula once. During the delivery, the entire birth team was present: the doula, midwife, and the baby's father. All of them supported Kaylee before and during labor. Kaylee intended on breastfeeding her child, which she was able to do. The homebirth went well and the baby had immediate skin to skin contact right after the birth. Kaylee's family functioned as her support system, but the doula was also crucial for the successful and intimate home birth experience.

** All names have been changed to ensure privacy.*

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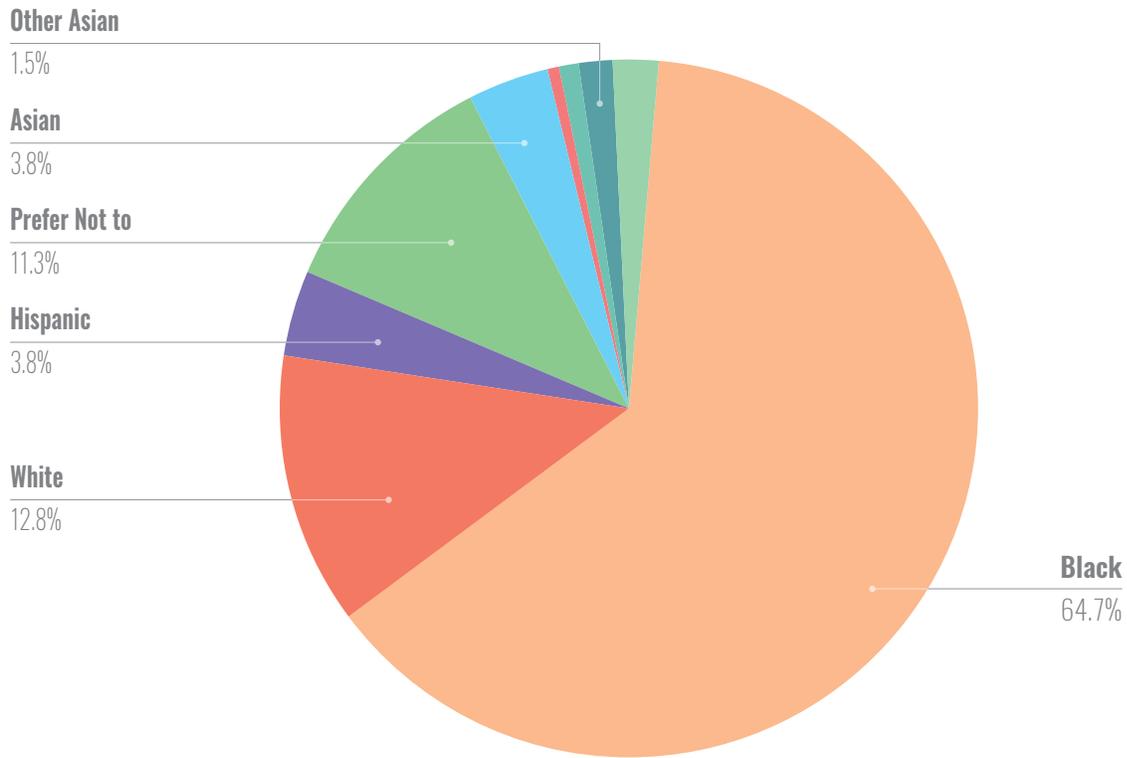


Client Demographic Data

Ancient Song Doula Services (ASDS) is an international doula certifying organization that provides quality doula services to birthing people of color and low-income families who otherwise would be unable to afford doula care. The organization, which was founded in 2008 in New York City, also offers workforce training on full spectrum doulas to address health inequalities within the communities it serves. Over its ten years of existence, the organization has provided doula services to approximately 3,500 clients, mostly women of color and people from low income families. In 2018, the organization provided doula services to 402 clients.

*Left: Dr. Joia Crear-Perry of National Birth Equity Collaborative at Ancient Song Teach-In.
Photography by: STEPHANIE MEI-LING*

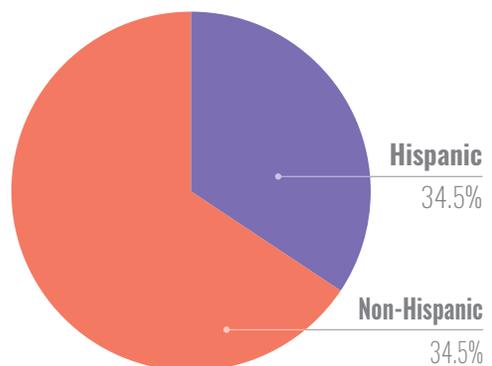
RACE & ETHNICITY



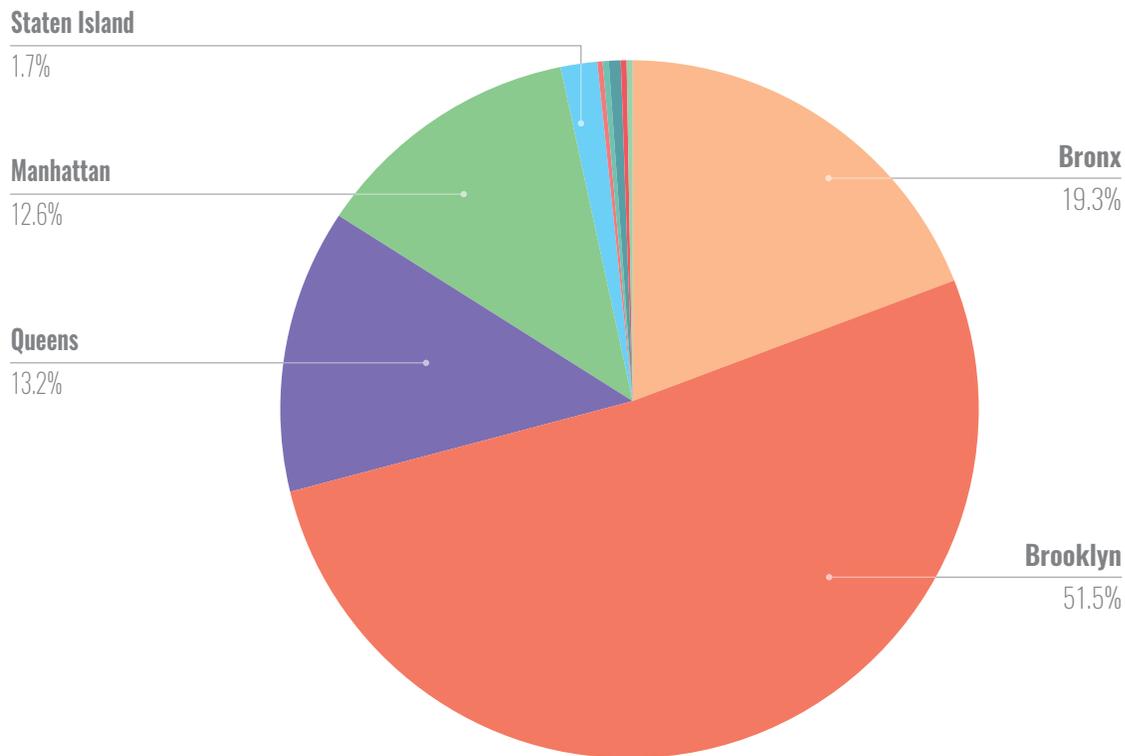
The majority of the clients are from minority race/ethnicity groups. Out of the 402 mothers who requested the services of ASDS in 2018, 129 of them provided information about their race.

Among these 129 mothers, 64.7% are black; 12.8% are white; 3.8% Hispanic; 3.8% are Asian; 1.5% other Asians; 0.8% Spanish; 0.8% American Indian; 0.8% are Moor. Further, 11.3% preferred not to respond about their race.

Additionally, 119 mothers informed the organization of their ethnicity, out of which 34.5% are Hispanic and 65.5% are non-Hispanic.

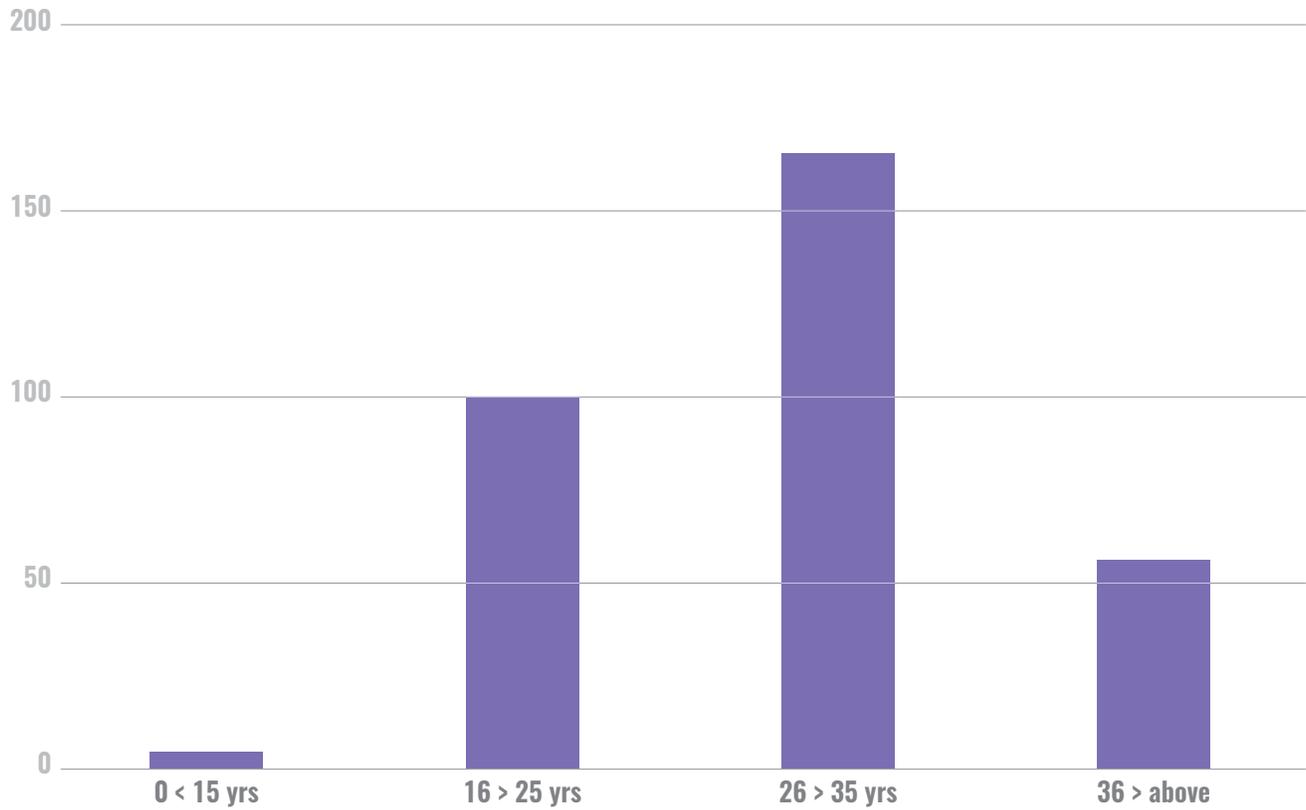


PLACE OF RESIDENCE



Among the 402 mothers that received services from ASDS in 2018, 358 provided information about their place of residence. Most clients, 51.5%, are from Brooklyn, because ASDS is located in that borough. However, just under 50% of the ASDS's clients are from other boroughs and counties in New York and New Jersey. 19.3% of clients are from the Bronx; 13.2% reside in Queens; 12.6% are from Manhattan; 1.7% live in Staten Island; 0.3% in Yonkers, 0.3% are from Nassau, NY; 0.9% reside in New Jersey (0.6% East Orange and 0.3% Newark) and 0.3% are from elsewhere.

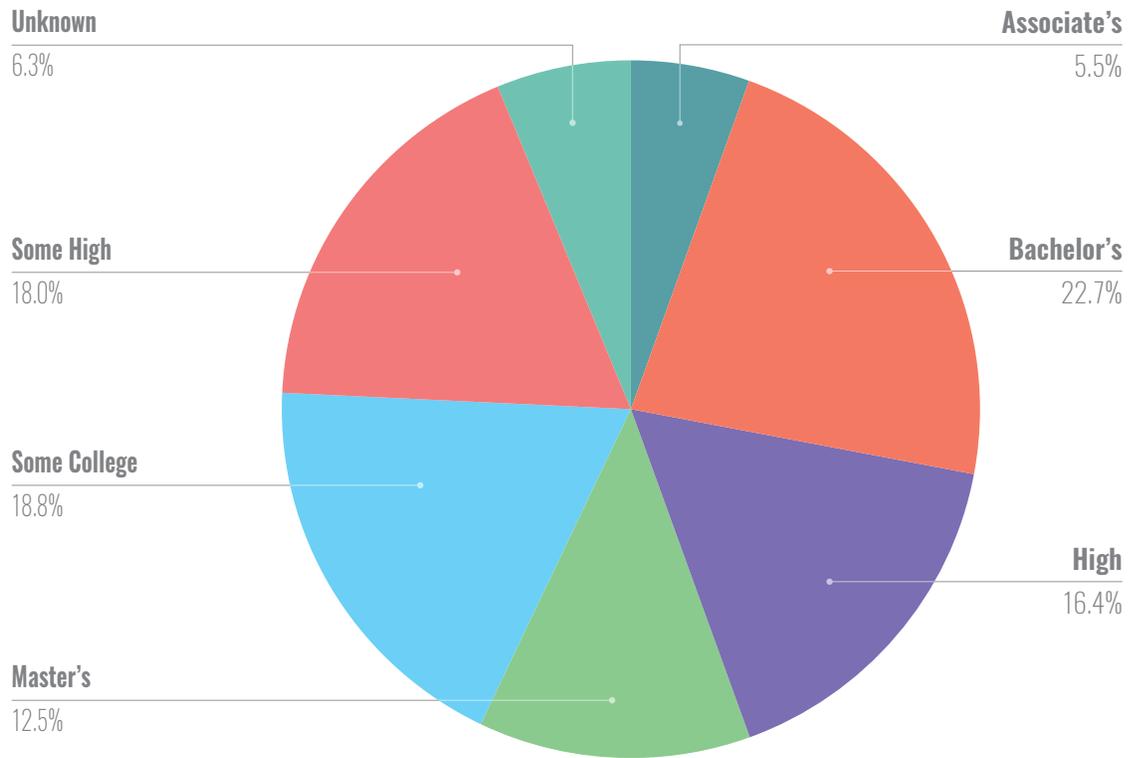
AGE



ASDS clients provided information about their age. Of the 402 mothers who received doula services in 2018, 329 provided their age.

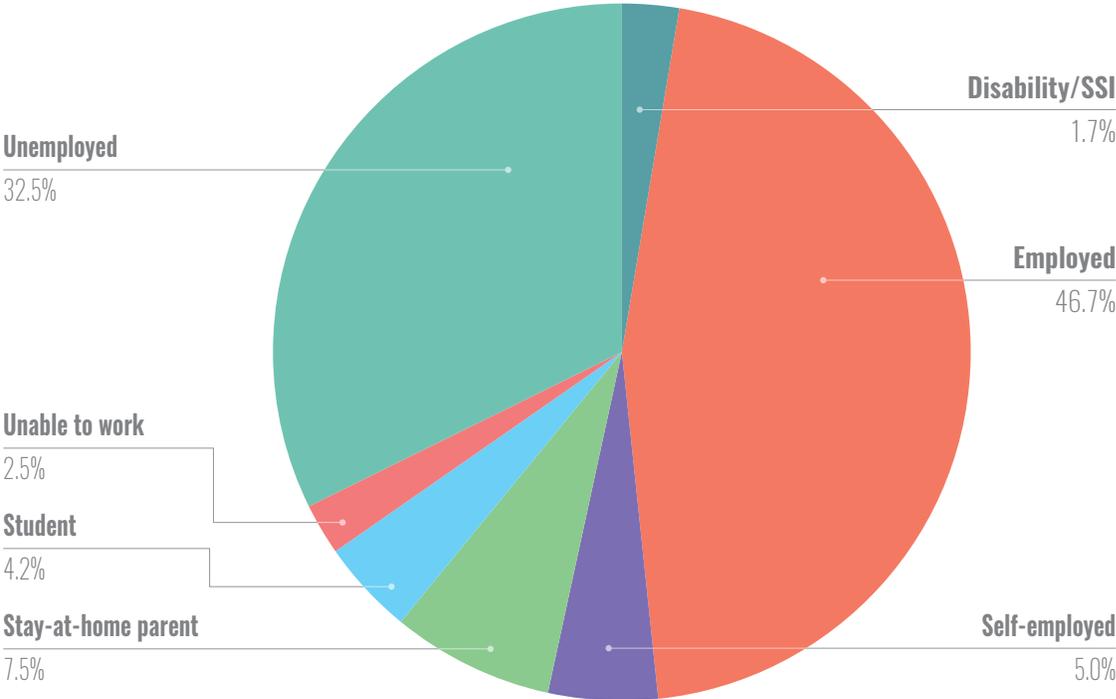
- 5 are under 15 years
- 100 are 16 to 25 years
- 168 are between 26 and 35 years old
- 56 are 36 years and older

EDUCATION



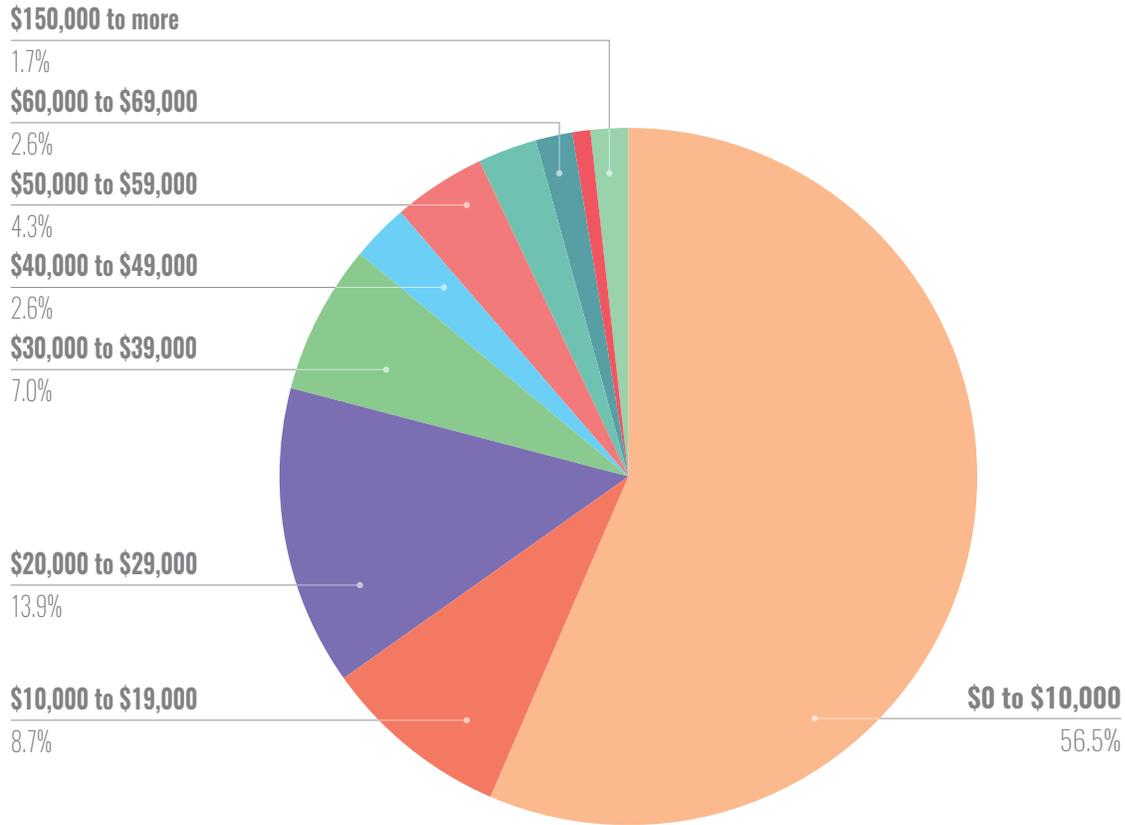
Out of the 402 mothers ASDS provided doula services to in 2018, 128 clients provided information about their education. The majority of the clients have a bachelor's degree (22.7%); 12.5% have master's degree; 5.5% hold an associate's degree; 18.8% have some college education; 18.0% completed some high school education; while 16.4% achieved a high school diploma or thier GED.

EMPLOYMENT STATUS



Among the 402 mothers who requested doula services in 2018, 120 mothers informed ASDS about their employment status. A large percentage, 46.7%, are employed; 5.0% are self-employed; 7.5% are stay-at-home parents; 4.2% are students; 2.5% are unable to work, while 1.7% receive disability/SSI. Although a high percentage are employed, 32.5% are unemployed the majority of whom are not looking for work because they are pregnant.

INCOME



Ancient Doula Services targets those with low-incomes. Out of the 402 mothers who received doula services in 2018, 115 provided data about their income. The majority have annual incomes of less than \$10,000 (56.5%); 8.7% have incomes between \$10,000 to \$19,000; 13.9% have incomes ranging between \$20,000 to \$29,000, while 7.0% have an annual income of \$30,000 to \$39,000. Additionally, 2.6% of the mothers who responded have an annual income of \$40,000 to \$49,000; 4.3% have an income range of \$50,000 to \$59,000; 2.6% have annual incomes between \$60,000 to \$69,000; 1.7% have an income level of \$70,000 to \$79,000; 0.9% have incomes between \$100,000 to \$149,000, and 1.7% have incomes of \$150,000 or more.

CLIENT ANALYSIS CLIENT ANALYSIS **CLIENT ANALYSIS** CLIENT ANALYSIS CLIENT ANALYSIS



*Far Left: Chanel L. Porchia-Albert of Ancient Song & Right: Kay Matthews of Shades of Blue Project
Photography by: STEPHANIE MEI-LING*

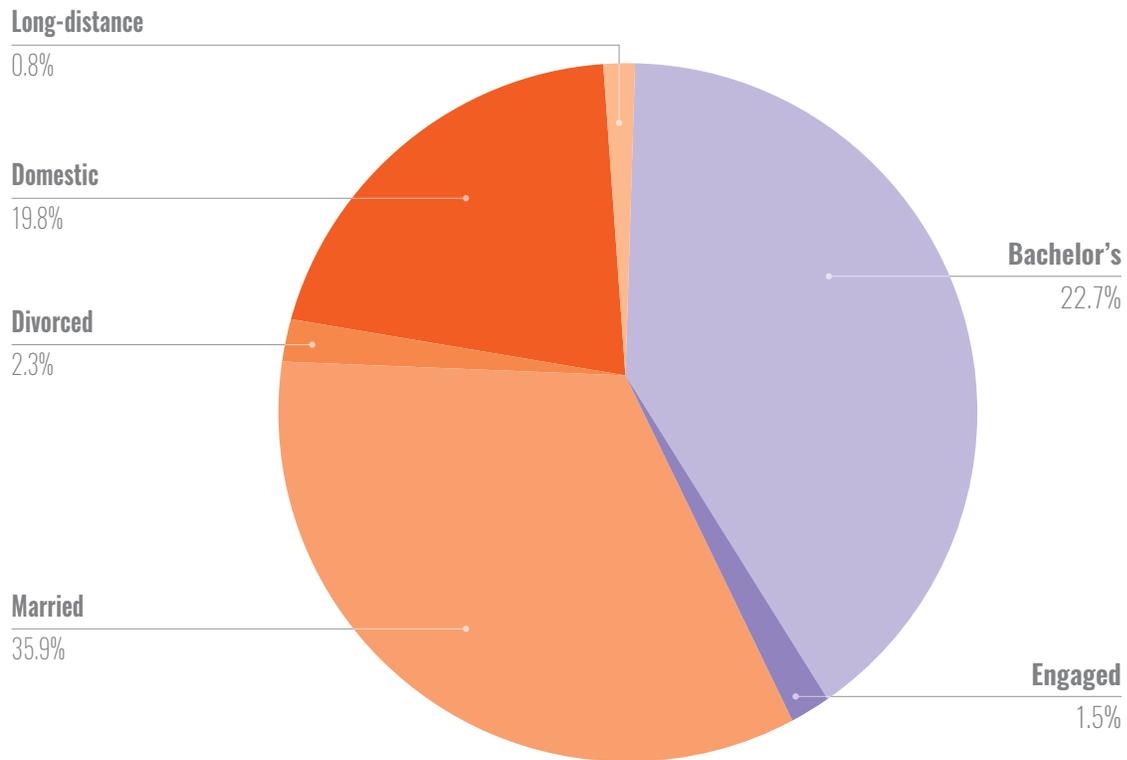
Client Analysis

Ancient Song Doula Services

Types of Support Available and Need for Doula Support

In 2018 Ancient Song Doula Services provided services to 402 people. For each of those individuals, information was collected including demographic data, relationship status, service, and support systems. Of the total, 117 clients provided information about both their relationship status and the kind of support they could count on during their pregnancy and birth.

RELATIONSHIP STATUS OF CLIENTS

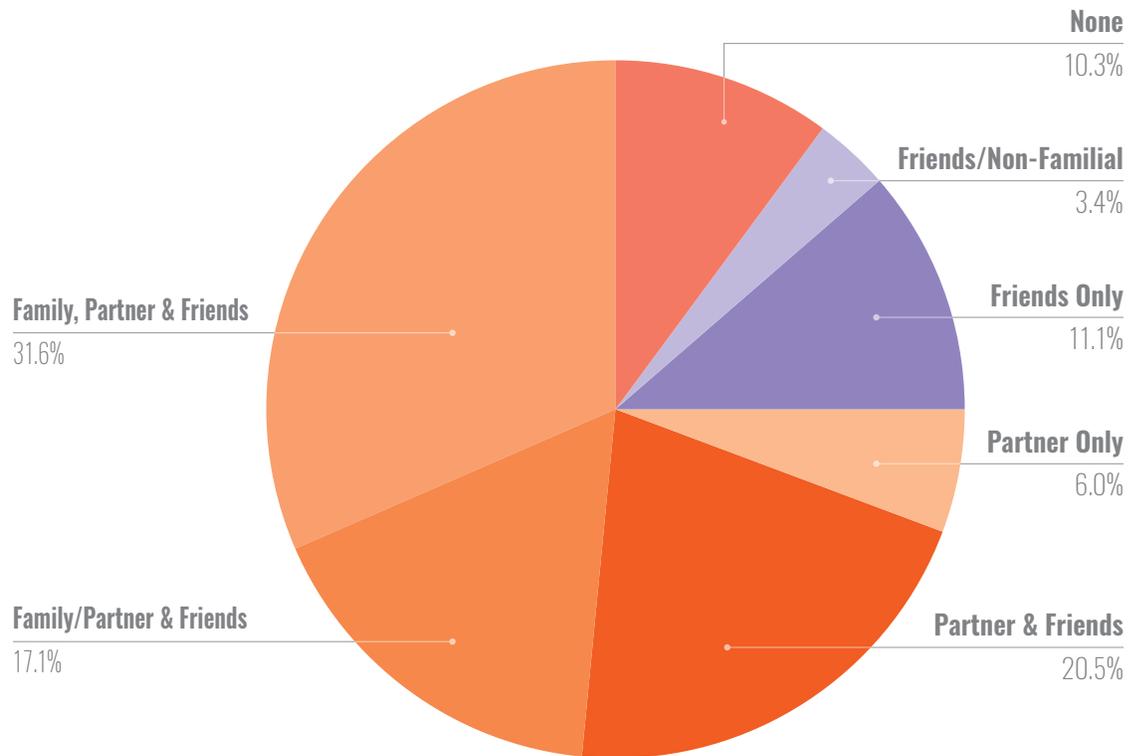


Among the 117 clients:

- 39.7% were single
- 35.9% were married
- 19.8% were in a domestic relationship
- 2.3% were divorced
- 1.5% were engaged
- 0.8% were in a long-distance relationship

Overall, 58% of the clients indicated that they had a partner at the time that they requested a doula. On the other hand, 42% of them declared they did not have any partner. This suggests that regardless of the kind of relationship one is in during pregnancy, primary and secondary support is important.

TYPE OF SUPPORT CLIENTS COULD ACCESS

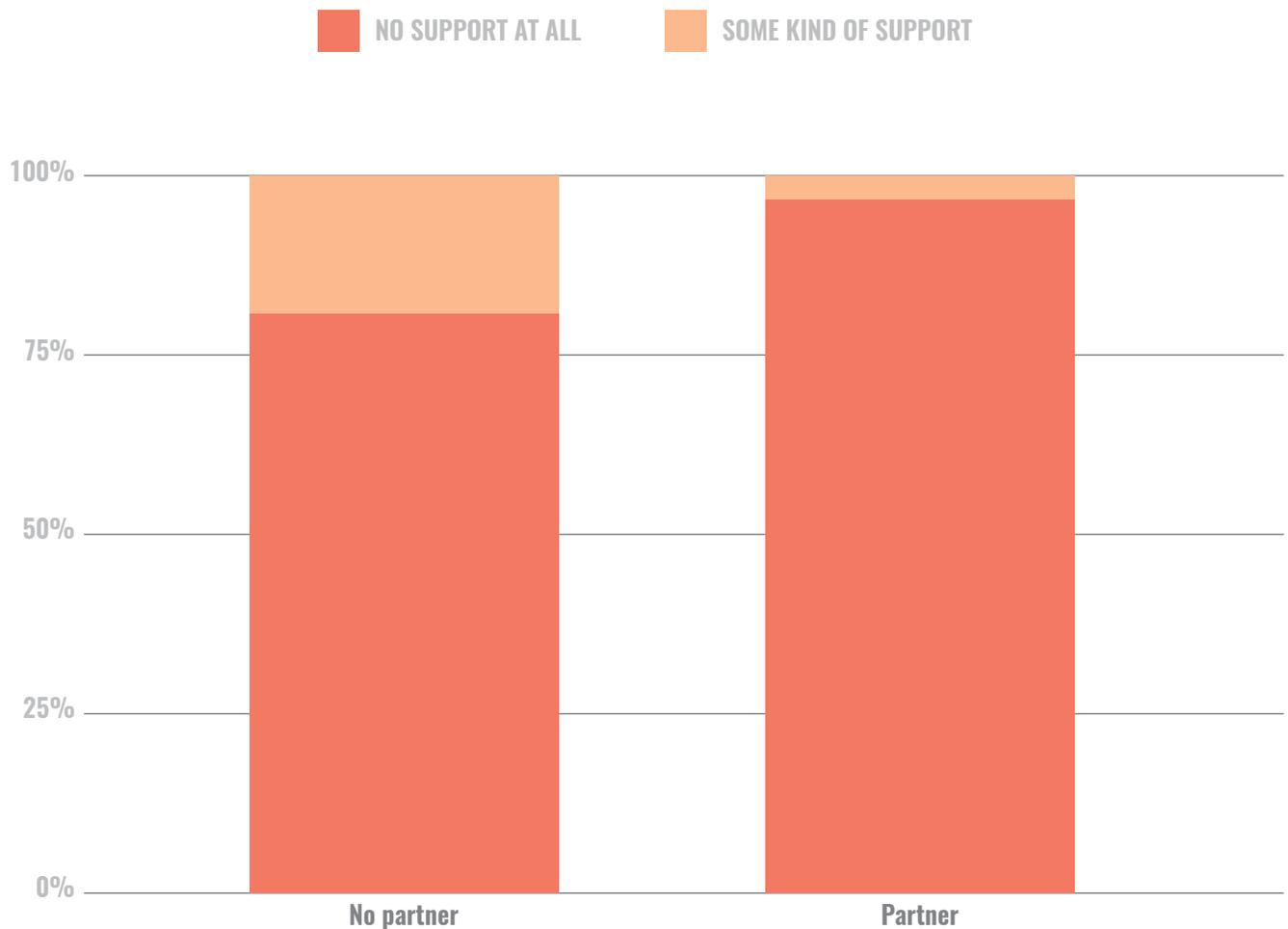


Among the 117 clients:

- 10.3% received no support at all
- 3.4% received support from their friends only
- 6% received support from their partner only
- 11.1% received support from their family only
- 17.1% received support from both their friends and partner or family
- 20.5% received support from both their partner, and family
- 31.6% received support from their family, partner, and friend.

Overall, of the 117 clients we considered, 10.3% were unable to count on any kind of support when they requested a doula. On the other hand, 80.7% of the clients could count on some kind of support coming from familial, emotional and/or friendship relations.

PERCEIVED SUPPORT



Of the 117 clients who provided information regarding both their relationship status and the kind of support they had access to:

- 65 clients had a partner, and 95.3% of them could count on some kind of support
- 52 clients did not have any partner, and 82.7% of them could count on some kind of support

Overall, of the 117 clients who provided information about both their relationship status and the kind of support they had access to, it is clear that between 80 and 95% of clients were able to count on some type of support in their friend, familial, or social networks. Again, this points to the fact that the presence of support does not negate the desire for doula support during pregnancy.



Dr. Michelle Drew, DNP, MPH, CNM

ENDNOTES

1 Of the 117 clients who replied about both their relationship status and the kind of support they had access to, 101 of them also provided their income range. Of them:

- 63% had an income of between \$0 and \$19,999;
- 23.5% had an income of between \$20,000 and \$49,999;
- 12.5% had an income that was equal to or higher than \$50,000.

Of all the 115 clients who provided information about their income range regardless of their relationship status and type of support:

- 65.2% had an income of between \$0 and \$19,999;
- 23.5% had an income of between \$20,000 and \$49,999\$;
- 11.3% had an income that was equal to or higher than \$50,000.

With regard to race/ethnicity, among the sample of 117 clients, 116 provided information about their race and ethnicity:

- 93% were not white.

Among the entire population of 134 clients who provided information about their ethnicity and race regardless of their relationship status and type of support:

- 91.8% were not white.

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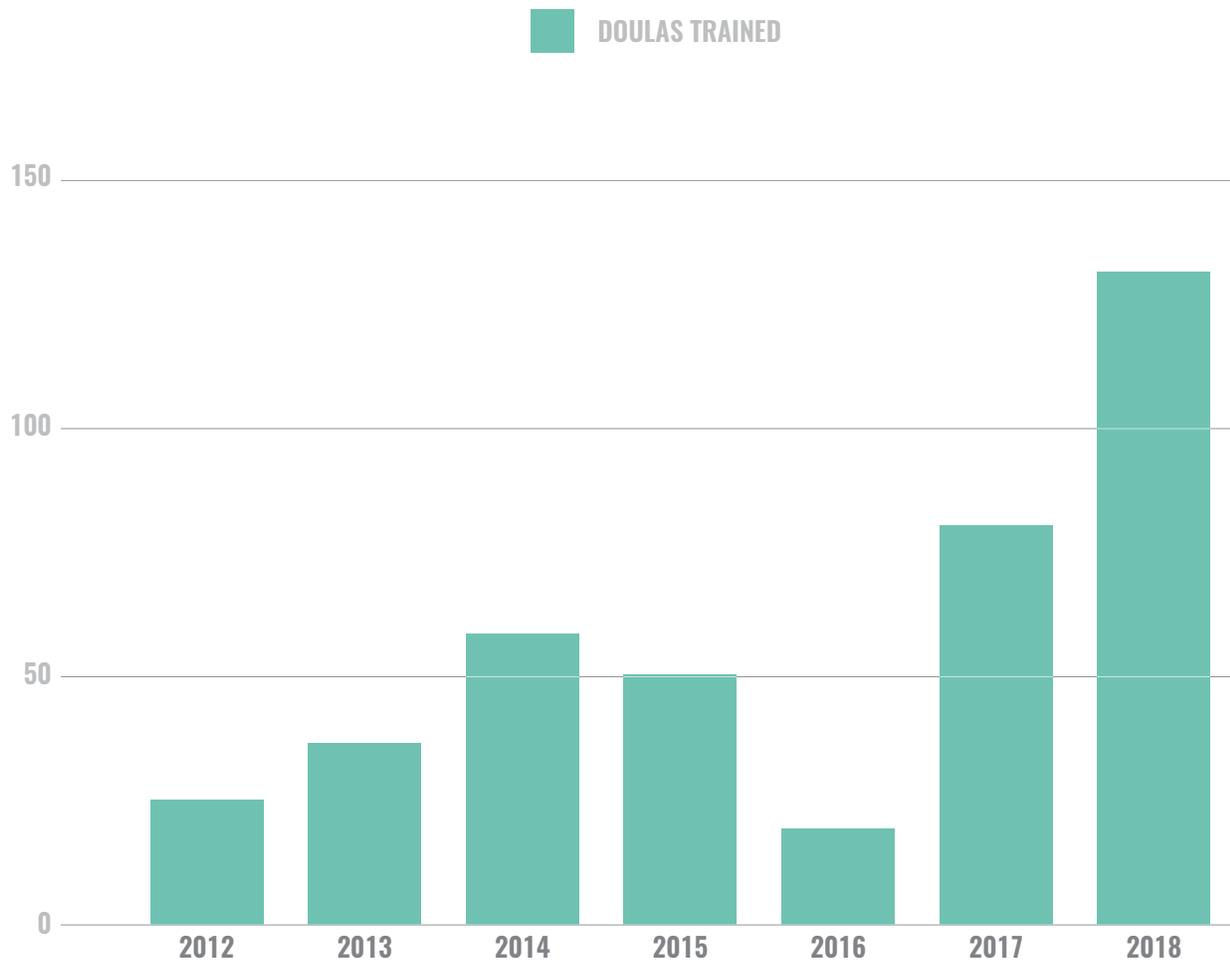


Doula Trainings

Ancient Song Doula Services (ASDS) is an organization that provides doula services and doula training. Some of services include supporting pregnant people going through high-risk or difficult pregnancies with antepartum doulas. Birth doulas support people throughout any stage of pregnancy and assisting them with their chosen birthing plans. Postpartum doulas assist people with people who have just given birth. ASDS also provides doulas to support people through a range of reproductive health choices or situations such as abortion, miscarriage, or stillbirths.

In 2012, ASDS began training people to become doulas. Between 2012 and 2019, there has been a steady increase in the number of doulas trained annually and ASDS offers approximately 39 trainings each year. The data indicates a steady increase in the number of people trained between 2012 to 2018. During that time, ASDS trained 389 individuals or an average of 55 people each year. Between 2012 and September 2019, ASDS has trained a total of 513 people; or an average of 64 people per year.

TOTAL DOULA TRAINING REGISTRANTS PER YEAR



- 2012 - 27 people
- 2013 - 39 people
- 2014 - 57 people
- 2015 - 50 people
- 2016 - 19 people
- 2017 - 70 people
- 2018 - 127 people
- 2019 - 124 people *(Total number is through September 2019. This data is not included in the graphic)*

* Some data is missing due to records being damaged during a fire.

MENTS ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ACKNOWLEDGMENTS **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS** ACKNO

This report was prepared by the students in the Women and Gender Studies Master's Degree program at the Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York. The report represents the commitment of nine students who undertook a semester-long project to collect and transform data into material that would be useful for a reproductive justice organization.

The students registered for the Feminist Research Methods course during the spring semester of 2019. The required course was taught by Prof. Dána-Ain Davis, the director of the Center for the Study of Women and Society and the Master's Degree program.

A discretionary grant from the New York Women's Foundation provided funding for students to focus on the issue of reproductive justice. Students learned about reproductive justice during a workshop led by Toni Bond, one of the founding mothers of reproductive justice framework, Professor Lynn Roberts, associate dean for Student Affairs and Alumni Relations, and Chanel Porchia-Albert, the founder of Ancient Song Doula Services.

To become more familiar with reproductive justice issues, students attended the Civil Liberties Public Policy conference at Hampshire College in 2019, where one student did a presentation.

In preparation to undertake research using a range of methodologies, students read about various research methods, and met with Chanel Porchia-Albert for two planning sessions. Students planned both individual and group research projects, which resulted in this report.

In order to transform students' findings into a package that would be useful for Ancient Song Doula Services, we consulted with Elizabeth Chin of ArtCenter College of Design, located in Pasadena, California. Professor Chin put us in touch with Sophia de Lara, a graduate of ArtCenter College of Design, who designed this report.

We would like to thank Chanel Porchia-Albert for her commitment to reproductive justice and for trusting us with her data and her vision. We also thank Ana Oliveira, President of the New York Women's Foundation and program officer, Beatrice Lors-Rousseau. We are grateful to the reproductive justice warriors, Toni Bond, Lynn Roberts, and Marlene Gerber Fried. Finally, we thank Eileen Liang, Assistant Program Officer of the Center for the Study of Women and Society and Brenna McCaffrey for their support and because of whom, everything gets done.

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