

**Profiles of Service Excellence**  
*Volunteer Spotlight Maliyka Muhammad*

**For our Volunteer Spotlight Series, we will showcase the dedication and service of the extraordinary women who have been spearheading the foundation's core programs and contributing to our mission. We interviewed each of these Trailblazers, and discovered that rooted in their hearts is an unwavering commitment to service, collective wisdom and inspiration to give back and prepare our children for the future. This is part two of a three part series.**

An energetic and active member of the Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Maliyka Muhammad has been leading the Stork's Nest Committee as its Chair since 2010. The Storks' Nest program was launched in 2005 at North General Hospital to increase the rate of expectant mothers receiving early pre-natal care from lower income backgrounds. Since its inception, the program has since expanded into its third cohort at Harlem Hospital. Designed to promote healthier babies and support a more stable early care environment for infants, the program continues to grow, focusing on providing incentives and motivating expectant mothers to invest in pre-natal workshops and activities.

Over the course of the last three years, Maliyka has remained committed in continuing the program's mission to empower young women with the information and knowledge required to prevent and eliminate premature births in disadvantaged communities. Through a referral program and joint partnership with Harlem Hospital's prenatal care program, Stork's Nest is credited with providing pregnant woman with maternity and nursery items as a rewards-based initiative promoting healthy living and encouraging participants to maintain a proactive routine, leveraging prenatal care/support services throughout their pregnancies.

From a service standpoint, Maliyka reflects on her personal relationship with her mother and how that helped to cultivate her motivation to give back to the community and provide exceptional service. Recently honored by the Greater NY Inter-Alumni Council for UNCF, Maliyka enthuses that the notion of "to whom much is given, much is required" resonates with her and is an underlying factor driving her positive energy to do more for others. "Through God's blessings, I was born to a mother who had the means, the desire and the ability to obtain the highest level of prenatal care while pregnant with me. After birthing me, she cared for me with my long-term health in mind. I grew up to be, what I believe is an exceptional woman. I would be remiss if I did not do my part to help someone else accomplish the same thing."

When asked about what drives her inspiration to volunteer and serve as an advocate supporting health awareness programs, Maliyka states "I am driven by a passion to support health awareness initiatives and help women become aware of what they need to do to have a healthy baby. Armed with this knowledge, knowing that I am in a position where I can have an impact and can be a change agent, is truly fulfilling." Maliyka also maintains that the unique structure of the Stork's Nest Program also enables her to invoke her passion for teaching and support her health-building advocacy. "I enjoy teaching the sessions and feel as though I am in my own element. I also enjoy seeing the excitement on the women's faces when they are redeeming their points. The Stork's Nest is unique because we are really dealing with someone who is not even here yet. All of our other programs are dealing with people who we can see right then and there. We won't see these

babies until they are born. We won't be able to hear from them how they benefited until they come of age and have an understanding of the concept.”

Furthermore, based on her professional and educational background, Maliyka felt personally inclined to contribute to the mission of the Five Pearls Foundation and with the Stork's Nest program in particular. This further triggered her advocacy for women's health centered on mitigating premature births. “When I became a member of the Sorority, I was set-up to shadow the Stork's Nest committee. As a health major, I am well aware of the disparities that exist within the health field. Unfortunately, while African-Americans make up less of the population, they have a high prematurity birth rate. The United States is one of the leading industrialized nations; however, our health report card including the number of premature births models that of a 3rd world country.”

Maliyka's extensive research on health initiatives stems from overcoming and facing up to her very own challenges in regards to obtaining health services as a woman. “When it comes to advocating for women, my drive is so high because first and foremost- I am a woman. I have lived in the "ghettos" and been on Medicaid. I know what it is like when you are classified based on what you have. There are women who exist who want the best for themselves, however their resources are limited and they cannot afford them. Working with the Stork's Nest is in-line with my professional goals to address disparity issues that affect people of color, in particular women.”

In regards to defining a vision and roadmap for the future, Malikya remains highly attuned and hopeful towards building a solid foundation and supporting a healthy life for future children through programs such as Stork's Nest. “At 30+ years of age, I am concerned with the future. The future being our youth, both those here as well as those who have yet to be born. They deserve a fighting chance to be exceptional. They deserve a healthy start. Service is such a beautiful thing and it is very important to secure a better future for these children. You just never know where you could be in life and really have to pay it forward.”

In terms of expansion and outreach, Maliyka also asserts her vision to ensure growth in cohort size and potential partnerships that would have far greater impact in reaching communities in need. “I would like to see the cohort sizes maintain a consistent size for each session. That size being at least 10 women. I would like to see big corporations donate baby items to keep our nest well-stocked. I would like to see a Stork's Nest at Metropolitan Hospital another HHC hospital in Manhattan.”

Moreover, with a diverse set of leadership roles and volunteer activities already under her belt, Maliyka sheds her own insights and words of wisdom for those looking to carve out a similar path towards service and volunteer work. “Volunteer—not so you can build your resume, but so you can build yourself. Volunteering should be heartfelt. One should be volunteering for the good and not just for experience. When you are volunteering for purely good motives you will see that there are things that you never knew about yourself come out. You may even find a new career path.”

Malikya ends by describing how important service is to her and how it extends beyond the material aspects and financial contributions.

“As a Muslim, I was raised to believe that charity is important. If you have the means, you are obligated to help others. Charity doesn't just mean monetary. While I may not be able to make a huge monetary contribution, I can give my time. You never know when you may need ‘service’; I do service because as a spiritual person, I need good energy to surround me.”

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