

***Community Leadership Pathways and Advocacy:
Moving towards Equitable Breastfeeding Care and
Support***

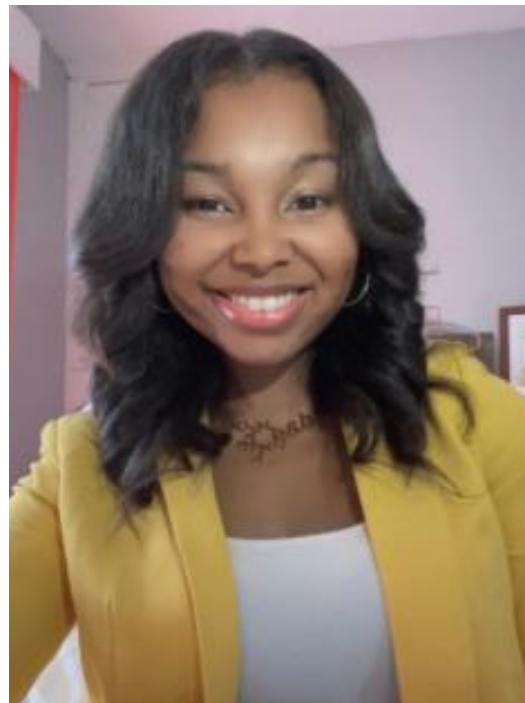
**September 12, 2024
10-11am Pacific / 1-2pm Eastern**

Featured Speaker Biography

Shenell Ford

Founder, Heart2Heartbeat Lactation & Wellness

Shenell Ford, International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC) and Childbirth Educator Apprentice is founder of community-based lactation practice, Heart2Heartbeat Lactation & Wellness in Springfield, MA, with a vision to create an environment that equitably serves prenatal and lactating families, encouraging autonomy in infant feeding and providing comprehensive and community-centered perinatal advocacy, education and support. Her greatest joy are her sons, Jeyceir and Jezari. Shenell humbly serves as Mayoral Aide to Springfield, MA Mayor Domenic J. Sarno, Parent Educator at Baystate Health and as Co-Chair of the Springfield DHHS Maternal Child Health Commission. She is a former WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselor, obtained her Certified Lactation Counselor credential in August 2015, became an IBCLC in January 2019, a Certified Perinatal Educator in 2022, and is in the midst of certification to become a Childbirth Educator. She is a former member of the Massachusetts Breastfeeding Coalition Board of Directors, a current US Breastfeeding Committee CRASH and Awards Committee member, and a member of National Association of Professional and Peer Lactation Supporters of Color (NAPPLSC), Mass Lactation Consultant Association (MLCA), and the Boston Black Breastfeeding Week Committee. Shenell continues to lead birth & breastfeeding advocacy efforts in



Springfield including annual Black Maternal Health Week, National Breastfeeding Month, and Black Breastfeeding Week celebrations, in collaboration with many commUNITY partners. She was recognized by Masslive in June 2023 as one of Massachusetts Emerging Black Leaders & recipient of the 2024 SDHHS Commissioners Award. Shenell is an inspired and fiercely passionate advocate for prenatal and lactating families. She is committed to increasing the diversity of and equitable access to childbirth & lactation education and support in her community and beyond.



Melody Cunningham

Doula and Certified Lactation Counselor, The Melo Mama

Melody is a fully trained and certified midwife assistant, full spectrum doula, birth and postpartum doula and lactation counselor. She is also mother of 5 who fell into the wonderful world of birthwork and support over 20 years ago and has never looked back.

She was inspired to become a midwife assistant, lactation counselor and doula determined to serve disenfranchised women after partnering with two wonderful organizations in Boston: the Vital Village Network and the Boston Breastfeeding Coalition.

Having nursed her own 5 children with little to no support, facing several challenges and very traumatic birth experiences of her own, Melody is very familiar with the complexities of breastfeeding and birthing and wanted to use herself and her experiences to help and inspire, inform and encourage other mothers.

While she has over 20 years of cumulative, practical breastfeeding support and doula experience, she has been providing professional breastfeeding support and counseling since 2016. She began her path to becoming a professional, certified doula in 2018. Melody is committed to providing moms with the tools and confidence they need to have the birthing experience they want to have and to overcome breastfeeding obstacles and meet their breastfeeding goals by any means necessary.

Also a certified yogi in Vinyasa, Melody brings a calm but firm reassurance to the birthing experience.

In addition to being a doula and providing breastfeeding support and counseling, Melody has been a public speaker in the world of lactation.

Melody has been a featured speaker at the CDC's USBC Annual National Breastfeeding conference, Massachusetts Breastfeeding Coalition's yearly Breastfeeding in the Baystate conference, Vital Village Network's annual leadership conference and more.

Ronda Alexander (Moderator)

*Director of National Partnerships
Vital Village Networks at Boston Medical
Center*



Ronda Alexander is a native Detroiter dedicated to working with communities to reach their desired goals by aligning and leveraging their resources. Ronda joins us from the United Way for Southeastern Michigan where she served as the Director of Corporate and Community Alignment on the organization's College and Career Pathways team. In her role at United Way Ronda worked to help external corporate partners find meaningful ways to engage with both students and educators; as well as worked across teams within the organization to align and leverage resources. Prior to joining United Way Ronda worked on the premier education initiative of Ford Motor Company Fund – Ford Next Generation (Ford NGL) for nine years. While at Ford Fund Ronda served a variety of roles including Professional Development/Technical Assistance Specialist and Program Manager for STEM initiatives. In all of her roles with Ford Fund Ronda worked with and supported multiple communities across the country as they worked to transform their communities through education.