

# HOW COINCIDENCE TURNED INTO CONNECTION

## THROUGH HEART OF THE HARBOR

By Caroline Orija

One of the most meaningful successes in my work with Heart of the Harbor unfolded during the October Harvest Festival at the Providence Wellness and Activity Center in Wilmington. The team demonstrated what community-centered service delivery truly looks like in action. We welcomed 290 attendees, including 170 residents from the Heart of the Harbor census tracts, as well as participants that traveled from Torrance and Carson. The event was designed to be welcoming and supportive, but what stood out most was how seamlessly the team responded to an unexpected moment of need with compassion, and care.



As I entered the Harvest Festival, I noticed a pregnant African American woman walking past the center. Drawing from my work with the African American Infant and Maternal Mortality Prevention Initiative in Public Health, I took a moment to connect with her, share information about available LA County services, and offer my contact information. This simple interaction quickly became something more impactful when Marielena, a Community Health Worker, observed the exchange and immediately stepped in to provide additional support.

Marielena signaled for me to call the woman back and then invited her to the Harvest Festival, ensuring she felt welcomed and seen. Marielena asked the woman to wait as she gathered baby items and treats for her young son who was walking with her, transforming what could have been a brief conversation into a moment of genuine care and relief. Beyond meeting the immediate need, Marielena also collected the woman's contact information and connected her to a Household Assessment, opening the door to ongoing support and resources. "Thank you very much I did not know that these services are here," I heard the woman say before she left.

This moment reflects the heart of the CPHT model and the strength of the Heart of the Harbor team. Their ability to meet community members where they are—both literally and figuratively—while responding with empathy, initiative, and tangible assistance illustrates the power of trusted relationships and proactive engagement. It is these everyday acts of care that build trust, strengthen systems of support, and ultimately improve health outcomes for the communities we serve.

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