

What is a Doula?

by Cate Ryba

Women supporting women during childbirth



Have you heard the emerging word doula before? The word “doula” comes from the ancient Greek meaning “a woman who serves” and is now used to refer to a trained and experienced professional who provides continuous physical, emotional and informational support to the mother before, during and just after birth.

The organized profession of doulas began in 1994 with approximately 750 trained doulas. Today the number of doulas has surpassed 7,000. Doula support complements medical care and is proven to reduce complications. Scientific studies have shown that when a doula was present, women were less likely to have pain relief medications administered, less likely to have a cesarean birth, and reported having a more positive childbirth experience.

The first time I became aware of a doula was when I became pregnant with my daughter. As I began to learn about pregnancy and birth, I realized that hiring a doula to assist me during the process was the best way to ensure the kind of birth experience I wanted.

Early in my pregnancy, my doula helped me create a birth plan, answered questions and was a sounding board for any of my concerns or fears. Throughout my pregnancy, until labor began, my doula was available to me by phone any time. She helped me understand the sometimes mysterious standards of medical procedures during labor and delivery.

During my birth, my doula was a constant presence, acting as an advocate for my wishes all through labor and delivery. She assisted me with breathing techniques and helped me into different labor positions. After the birth, she counseled me about breastfeeding and also came to my home a few times in the first 6 weeks postpartum. My doula helped me have an incredibly satisfying and empowering childbirth experience that I will never forget.

Luckily for Spartanburg, a new organization called BirthMatters has been formed with the purpose of bringing more doulas to women in our community. BirthMatters is an innovative community based doula program of ReGenesis Health Care. This is the first doula network developed in Spartanburg. They have nine trained doulas with diverse backgrounds willing to serve families in Spartanburg County. The program focuses on hospital births and provides birth doula services in all 4 local hospitals. Their fees range from \$200.00 to \$600.00, and they provide free service to women 20 and younger.

What people are saying about BirthMatters:

“I felt like the doula was not only there for my daughter but provided support for me”...“I wish I had a doula when I gave birth with my first child” -Wanda Cheeks, grandmother

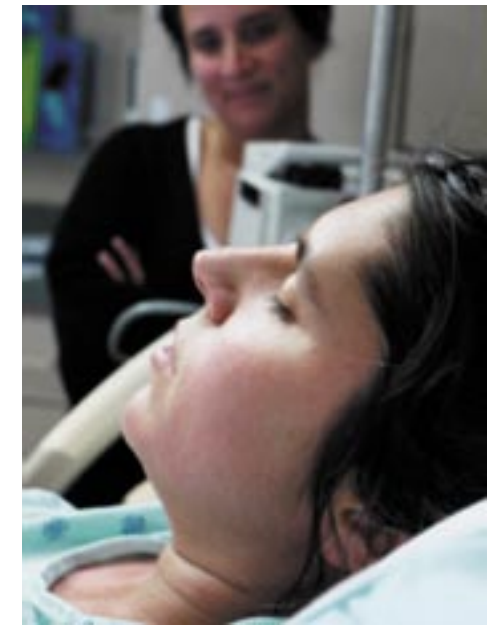
“When I started learning the information the doula provided about birth, I started building my confidence and understanding about things I had not thought about... this was the most important thing that helped me have a wonderful, calm, and natural birth” -Courtney Cheeks, mother

“A doula can be a great source of support for a new mother, especially during labor. She often helps the mother deal with the newness of the setting in the Labor and Delivery unit and the fear of the pain of labor, as well as the pain itself.” -Dr. Grant Warren, Spartanburg OB provider

The day your baby is born is a truly magical experience. With the help of a doula, mothers can prepare for childbirth so this day will be a wonderful and joyful occasion.

For more information about BirthMatters, contact Molly Chappell-McPhail, Program Director, 864-621-2878 or e-mail her molly@birth-matters.org

What can you do? Please consider us if you are pregnant... please inform pregnant friends about us... and please consider a tax-deductible donation to BirthMatters so we can continue to grow.



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