

NEWS RELEASE

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For immediate release

The Magic of Doulas: New Birth Program offers Support for Pregnant Women in South Vancouver

Whether it is a hand to hold, someone to lean on, or words of comfort during the pains of labour, women have been helping women through childbirth for centuries.

A new pregnancy and childbirth program in South Vancouver is incorporating this age-old tradition into its services by offering pregnant women the assistance of a doula. Doulas are trained childbirth professionals who provide women with continuous physical and emotional comfort and support throughout childbirth. Doula (pronounced "doola") is a Greek word meaning woman-servant or caregiver.

The program offers interested women living in South Vancouver the opportunity to receive training to become a professional doula. Once the training is complete, the doulas will work with the team of nurses, midwives and doctors to provide comprehensive maternity care before, during and after the birth. The doulas role is to provide labouring women with continuous one-on-one support at their home and at BC Women's Hospital where the women will deliver their babies.

In the past, these labour helpers were often a pregnant woman's mother, sister, or her aunt. Today, women do not live as close to their extended family as they once did and are birthing in isolation without a community of family. The South Community Birth Program wants to bring supportive birth back to the community by training local women to provide one-on-one support to pregnant women and new mothers in South Vancouver.

"It's an opportunity to build a sense of community for childbearing women," says Jalana Grant, Doula Coordinator for the South Community Birth Program. "Our goal is to provide women with one-on-one labour support in their own language. We are hoping to train local women as doulas who speak a variety of languages which are present in this diverse community."

Continuous support from a doula has been demonstrated to have impressive benefits for expectant mothers, including shorter labours, less need for pain medication, a reduced likelihood of having a cesarean delivery and healthier babies. A comprehensive review published recently by the Cochrane Library, the biggest source of evidence-based healthcare in the world, concluded that having a doula (or other non-medically trained woman present at the birth) is the best guarantee you can have these days of a normal, satisfying childbirth experience.

Offering professional labour support and emotional reassurance, doulas are not at the labour to replace a woman's partner or her extended family, but work with them to ensure a safe and satisfying childbirth experience for the mother.

South Vancouver women interested in learning more about the doula training program for the South Community Birth Program can contact Jalana Grant by telephone or email: 604-321-6151 or doulaprogram@hotmail.com.

The South Community Health Program is a partner program of Vancouver Coastal Health's South Community Health Office and BC Women's Hospital & Health Centre, an agency of the Provincial health Services Authority.

The birth program is accepting referrals as of January 2004. Women can self-refer to the program or have their family doctor refer them. The program is open to all women living in South Vancouver with low-risk pregnancies. For more information about the South Community Birth Program, call 604-321-6151.

Funding for the doula training program comes from the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority and the Provincial Health Services Authority, part of a primary health care renewal initiative underway in British Columbia.

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