

DIAPER DASH RAISES AWARENESS
Doulas provide added support for child birth
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The Daily Gleaner

As one of only two doulas in New Brunswick, Theresa Marshall is trying to inform the public about the services she provides to expectant parents in the hopes of raising interest and increasing the number of certified doulas in the province.

Marshall said a doula, not to be confused with a midwife, recognizes birth as a key life experience, and understands the physiology of birth and the emotional needs of a woman in labour.

A doula assists a pregnant woman in preparing and carrying out a birth plan and stays by her side throughout labour providing emotional support to her and her partner, practical comfort measures, an objective view point and information to help with decision making.

Marshall held a Diaper Dash crawling contest in the Fredericton Mall on Saturday to attract attention to her display about being a doula. She said there is a great need in New Brunswick for this kind of care, especially for the wives of servicemen stationed at CFB Gagetown.

"More than half of these men are away on training or field courses or overseas so their wives end up having babies by themselves," she said. "They are isolated because they have moved away from their families and often times end up alone, which is not healthy."

The benefits of having the support of a doula are clear, Marshall said. Women typically have a shorter labour, fewer interventions, fewer cesareans and healthier babies.

A doula simply closes the circle of support, they should not take away from the role of the woman's partner in the birth, she said. They offer gentle suggestions and techniques so both parents can enjoy the experience.

"Often times dads are not sure what to do other than stroke her hair. A doula has a lot of good ideas to help both of them relax and can also do a lot of the running around so that they can be together," she said. "It is all about supporting both partners and helping them to create and have the birth they want, to help them both feel more in control."

Each time Marshall meets with expectant parents she talks about three possible birth plans. The first is the perfect plan in which nothing changes from the original intention to have a natural birth. The second is to prepare in case she requires a cesarean section or chooses to have an epidural.

She also talks to them about what they will do if their baby is stillborn. A hard subject to approach, she said it is important for parents to know what their options are should they be faced with this situation.

"I talk to them about this only because often times they don't know they can hold their baby, spend time with them and take pictures," she said. "I like to prepare them for the worst because they do have rights."

Someone interested in becoming a doula can apply for certification through DONA, Doulas of North America on the Web site, www.dona.org. After becoming a member of DONA, applicants complete a list

of required reading material and take part in a childbirth education series. They also attend a DONA-approved doula training course and then provide continuous labour support to three clients after completion of the course.

With documentation from the births including a DONA Birth Record Sheet and 300-500 word account of the birth, trainees also complete a typewritten essay on the value and purpose of labour support.

Marshall said depending on how fast a trainee reads and how quickly they find three clients to support, they can become certified in as little as three months.

The ultimate goal of DONA is to provide a doula for every woman who needs or wants one, Marshall said. The cost of having a doula is a sliding scale between \$300 and \$500. Clients are asked to pay what they can in that range.

"It is important for me to provide all women with the support they need. I tell them to pay me what they can. If they can't afford it at all that's OK. I would rather see them have a doula for nothing than to do without one."

She said being a doula brings an adrenaline rush every time she helps new parents welcome a child into the world.

"It is such a magical moment. It is almost like everything freezes, just for a moment the instant that baby comes out and the couple first sees it," she said.

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