

Hello

My name is Phyllis Sharp and I'm a certified birth, postpartum doula and certified lactation counselor in the Rochester, NY area. I have been a doula for four years and have served over 175 families of all nationalities. My goal is to educate, support & empower every birthing person throughout their pregnancy, labor, birth and postpartum period.

Doulas have been around for a very long time but until recent years because of COVID-19 and the rise in maternal and fetal mortality rates doulas have become a necessary part of the care for birthing persons. The mortality rate should not be overlooked or ignored especially when women and babies are dying at an alarming rate.

The United States has the highest maternal mortality rate of the developed world and NYS is no exception. Birthing persons of color are at a higher risk—Black women are 3 to 4 times more likely than non-Hispanic White women to die in NYS due to childbirth-related causes.

One way to alleviate these disparities is increased accessibility to doula support through Medicaid reimbursement. This is important for all birthing person's but especially Black birthing persons should be a part of this health equity solution. Doulas provide physical and emotional support, partner support as well as education about pregnancy, labor, birth and the postpartum period. Why should this service only be available to people who can afford it and the people who need it most are left with little to no support or education.

People of color report lower satisfaction than White people regarding communication with medical providers. Doulas act as a liaison, using their experience with childbirth to increase the quality of communication between providers and birthing persons. Additionally, doulas can assist in care navigation, promote health literacy, and provide culturally competent social support, all contributing to better health outcomes.

I had a client who delivered her baby and a few days later after she was at home I went to check on her. I asked how she was doing and she said she was doing fine but noticed that her site wasn't as sharp and mentioned she thought she needed new glasses. I was a little concerned and asked if she had a blood pressure cuff at her home and she did, after checking her BP it was well over the range and I knew she needed to call her doctor right away. She was re admitted to the hospital for HBP. Mothers aren't due back to see their healthcare provider for 6wks after birth.

Doula's saves lives.

I was in the OR with a client who had a planned c-section, and dad wanted me to check on the baby before he came over to see her. I walked over to check on the baby and she was blue and not breathing. The nurse was right there and didn't notice, I calmly told her the baby is not breathing, she's blue and starting rubbing her back to get her to breathe.

Doulas Save Lives!

I had a client in the hospital for an induction and after a few days as her labor process was slow her doctor was pressuring her to have a c-section. Stating failure to progress. I was there to educate her and to help ask questions regarding why she would need one. There was no medical indication and she

realized that this was her choice. She decided to continue with the induction and had the vaginal birth that she wanted.

Doulas educate, advocate & empower!

My client was having trouble navigating her postpartum journey. She felt tired, alone and unable to cope with all the newness that comes with having a new baby. She told me she was frustrated that breastfeeding wasn't going as she had planned, her birth didn't go as she had planned. Nothing seemed to be going her way. We would talk almost everyday and even though her husband and her mother was there to help she felt all the burden was on her shoulders. I asked her how she was feeling she just said she was sad and wished she had not had a baby. I asked her to call her doctor to make an appointment because I felt she had postpartum depression. I also followed up with her husband to make sure that he was doing ok and to get them the help that they needed. This client got on meds and found a great counselor to help her navigate through the depression. Four months later she's talking about having a second child and how she didn't want to return to work but to stay home with her baby. A total turn around.

Doulas support & help find resources for families.

Doulas should be able to do this for everyone but especially those who are on Medicaid and cannot afford it. The New York Coalition for Doula access has proposed an Equitable Medicaid Reimbursement Program and it should be considered in this years budget, so that doula care can be increased in underserved communities. Show them that their lives are valued and their children's lives are valued.

Doulas are here to empower families, to educate families to make informed decisions regarding their care. This is a crisis and there are proven ways that we can help prevent these disparities.

We need everyone to have access to Doula care!

With a Doula by your side:

Shorter Labor

15% increase in having a vaginal birth

Increased breastfeeding rates

31% less likely to need Pitocin

10% less likely to need pain medication

39% less likely to have a cesarean birth

34% more likely to rate their birth experience as a positive experience

Thank you for allowing me to speak today.

