

Nothing short of a miracle



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Dhani Adler, pictured with her daughter Liliana, who just celebrated her first birthday, is grateful for the support of doula Raelene Baker, provided through Everyday Miracles.

[by Mandy Moran Froemming](#)

Union Editor

Bringing a new life into this world is never easy.

And the everyday miracle of childbirth is especially overwhelming for expecting moms who are young, single or low-income.

But many of these women now have an unexpected ally by their side while they bring their baby into the world.

Just more than four years ago Debby Prudhomme and Mary Williams were looking for a way to take their passion – supporting women during childbirth – to a larger circle.

“I just love being a part of that sacred moment when a woman gives birth – there’s nothing like it,” said Prudhomme.

At the time both were working for the doula program offered by Unity Hospital and each had more than 10 years experience.

Doulas have long been a part of the birthing process for many women.

A doula acts as a support for the expecting mom, as both labor coach and an advocate of

the mother's wants during delivery. Many doulas also offer pre-natal services to help pregnant women prepare for childbirth and post-natal visits to see how mom and baby are adjusting.

Prudhomme and Williams were coming across so many women who were slipping through the cracks, not quite meeting the requirements of hospital or county-based doula programs.

They wanted to create something that would reach women who would benefit most from the service but couldn't necessarily afford it.

"What Debby and I were finding was there were so many women who would almost make the cut," said Williams.

And many of these women who could benefit from the support of a doula could not afford the \$500 to \$1,200 typically charged for private services.

So Everyday Miracles was born.

The non-profit was established in 2004 by Williams and Prudhomme and the only qualifier to be accepted as a client is the woman must be on state-funded health insurance.

Referrals to the program come from supporting agencies U-Care and Metropolitan Health Care who help fund Everyday Miracles, as well as public health nurses, social workers and teachers. Through the Web site pregnant women are also able to refer themselves.

Everyday Miracles has experienced phenomenal growth, being a part of 341 births so far in 2008. This number already exceeds 2007's total of 314 for the year, which had doubled from the year before.

Since its inception the non-profit has provided service to nearly 850 women, and the numbers just keep rising.

The service has 27 doulas on contract who among them speak more than 11 languages. This is important – many of the expectant mothers are immigrants having their first baby in the United States.

"Sometimes we are the only person they know in the room," said Williams.

All doulas are certified through DONA International, the lead certification agency in the profession that requires doulas to add continuing education credits to their resume in order to maintain their license.

In addition to major growth year over year, there are other numbers that Everyday Miracles is especially proud of.

It boasts a breast feeding rate of 89 percent of new mothers compared with the state average of 69.3 percent. After six months, 45 percent of these women are still breast feeding their babies, compared 26.6 percent Minnesota-wide.

According to information provided by the non-profit, only 7 percent of babies born to Everyday Miracles clients are low birth weight, compared to a 12.7 percent national average.

“The point is to eliminate the health disparity of poor birth outcomes,” said Williams. These include low birth-weight, not breast-feeding and not bonding with the baby – all high risks for low income women.

Other stats include a low incidence of cesarean births, use of narcotics and epidurals.

But Everyday Miracles does not advocate any one particular birthing style – but rather advocates for the desires of the mother.

“You can still have an epidural and have a better outcome using a doula,” said Prudhomme.

Expecting mothers served by the program range in age from 12 to 46 years old.



Doulas Raelene Baker, Mary Williams and Debby Prudhomme offer doula services during delivery as well as pre- and post-natal support as part of Everyday Miracles, a non-profit specifically serving expectant mothers. Photo by Mandy Moran Froemming

Call for support

Raelene Baker describes herself as a professional labor coach who is able to offer physical and emotional support to a woman through childbirth.

She works as a full-time doula and is contracted by Everyday Miracles for up to five clients at any one time.

Baker is on call and ready to attend the birth of all of these babies, from start to finish, providing support through the entire labor.

Her services also include three to four pre-natal visits where she and then expecting mom discuss a birth plan and options. There are also follow-up visits after the baby is born.

“We are advocates for the mothers and make sure their voices are heard,” said Baker. “Many of them don’t speak up for themselves.”

Baker, who lives in Blaine, was a young mom herself, having her first baby at the age of 17.

“I loved being pregnant and I wanted to be able to give other young moms the support they needed,” said Baker.

One of these women who will be eternally grateful for having Baker by her side during childbirth is Dhani Adler of Elk River.

Pregnant at 19, Rae Baker came into her life just three weeks before Adler was due to deliver.

It changed everything.

“I had no idea what to expect,” Adler, who had a natural childbirth and stuck to the plan she put together with Baker before she went into labor.

She said she felt better prepared for the birth and confident she would be heard.

“Josh (her now-husband) and I talk about it all the time, how glad we are that Rae was there,” said Adler.

Liliana Rae Adler was born a year ago last week, her middle name giving testament to just how important Baker’s involvement was in her birth.

“My next baby I’m hiring Rae,” said Adler.

Last year Baker sent Mother’s Day cards to all of her clients – a thoughtful touch for many women who might be celebrating the day for the first time and doing it alone.

Prudhomme said her commitment to providing doula services to women who truly need the support but couldn’t afford to pay for it was cemented when she starting working with a young girl who got pregnant at age 14 and delivered her baby when she was just 15 years old.

“We just had a connection,” she said. “Your heart just breaks when you know that you are the only person they can open up to.”

Lifetime commitment

Both Williams and Prudhomme profess to being “birth junkies” and Williams jokes that she uses her “preg-dar” to scope out expecting mothers in need of a doula. They, along with Baker, all work as privately hired doulas as well.

All three doulas said they can see the physical and emotional tension release when they arrive.

“I have seen their (the mother’s) blood pressure go down on the monitor,” said Williams.

Williams used to work as a post-natal nurse at Unity Hospital.

“I found there wasn’t enough time in the day for the comfort measures I wanted to give,” she said.

She was the nurse showing up with a boom box loaded with soothing music and massage oil for the new moms.

Then she saw what she could do as a doula and made the switch.

It’s not just single moms served by doulas, but all three doulas said the benefits are certainly important for expecting mothers who don’t have a strong support system of women in their lives.

And they agree their role can make the delivery process a lot easier on the expectant father.

“It’s a difficult thing to watch somebody you love struggle and be a labor coach at the same time,” said Williams. “That’s a big load to throw at a man. My job is to help him help her.”

When possible, the doulas like to meet with the fathers before childbirth.

Most often the men are very positive about the entire experience.

“You saved my life,” is something Williams has heard from many fathers. One even ran across a Wal-Mart parking lot to give her a hug.

The non-profit is currently based in Prudhomme’s Anoka home and all of the doulas work out of their homes as well.

But Everyday Miracles has its hopes set on a house of its own.

Prudhomme likely said Northeast Minneapolis would make for a central location for the services. This would offer a home-base where prenatal education could be taught and support groups could meet.

In 2007 Everyday Miracles celebrated the success of its first financially sustainable year, credited to the support of the two major insurance programs – U-Care and MHP. The non-profit reported revenues of \$207,705, with 51 percent of the financial support from insurance providers, 43 percent from grants, 2 percent from fund-raising events and 4 percent from individual contributions.

Expenses for 2007 totaled \$205,884 with 91 percent being spent on programming.

In addition to doula services, Everyday Miracles clients are also given a breast pump and education on how to use it, a car seat and have access to a swap closet of maternity clothes.

Recently Everyday Miracles was given a Stars of the State Award as an organization making a difference from Kids Count Minnesota, a national state-by-state effort tracking the status of children in the U.S.

For more information contact www.everyday-miracles.org or call 763-323-0012.

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