

The Tampa Bay Doula Program

Location: Tampa, Florida
 Date Submitted: 11/2008
 Category: **Emerging Practice**

BACKGROUND

Hillsborough County has one of the highest black infant mortality rates-12.4 deaths per 1,000 births. In comparison, white infant deaths are occurring at 7.3 per 1,000 births and Hispanic infant mortality rates are 6.2 per 1,000 births. This area also suffers from a lack of perinatal education programs for low income, at-risk pregnant women. Before beginning the doula program, a needs assessment was conducted for the target population. The goal of this program is to give women the necessary tools (education, support, and counseling) to improve birth outcomes.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

- Decrease the number of infant deaths in the target population
- Provide services that focus on eliminating health barriers and disparities for the young women served
- Develop strategies that promote healthy bonding and attachment for new moms and their babies
- Provide evidence based data to funders that substantiates the need for doula services
- Demonstrate the cost savings of doula services to various state and national agencies

TARGET POPULATION SERVED

The Doula Program provides free perinatal services to low income pregnant women living in Hillsborough County that are at risk for poor birth outcomes including maternal/infant death. The majority of the clients fall into the 15-20 age group. 99% of clients served fall well below poverty line. 56% of the clients are Hispanic, 31% are Black. The remaining 13% are white, bi-racial or of Asian descent. From September 2007 to October 2008 doula services were provided to 1,020 pregnant young women and adolescents.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

The Doula Program services include community based childbirth education classes, labor and delivery support, postpartum mom/baby care and instruction focusing on mom/baby attachment, extension of breastfeeding duration

TITLE V/MCH BLOCK GRANT MEASURES ADDRESSED
#4: A) Percent of infants who are ever breastfed and B) Percent of infants breastfed exclusively through 6 months.
#14: A) Percent of women who smoke during pregnancy and B) Percent of children who live in households where someone smokes.
#15: Percent of children 0 through 17 years who are adequately insured.

and inter-conceptional care. A pregnant client can sign up for doula services at any time prior to delivery, however, the average young woman begins attending classes in her first trimester and stays with the program through 3-6 months postpartum. Clients are able to participate and receive doula services if they are low income, and socially/medically at risk.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES/EVALUATION DATA

Doula staff performs "real time" data entry of all client data. The data are collected and queried by an outside IT department and the outcomes are monitored weekly. Staff meets quarterly to discuss issues that have been identified and work together to problem solve. This current funding year has seen a steady increase in new clients. In the first quarter alone, annual outcomes have been met in regards to clients served.

Young women participating in the Doula Program experience decreased need of intensive medical interventions, such as C-sections or epidurals, and they breastfeed for an extended duration, providing an estimated cost savings of \$1.5 million annually for the WIC agency (data based on a report from the United States Breastfeeding Committee on the Economic Benefits of Breastfeeding).

Additionally, in comparison to the Hillsborough County average of 12.4 black infant deaths per 1,000 births from 2005-2007, black participants in the Doula Program experienced a lower infant mortality rate (1 per 1,000 black infant deaths reported). These data were calculated based

on the total number of doula assisted, live births over the last three year period; 2005-2008.

The program's Client Satisfaction Survey, which is given to new mothers during the postpartum period, found that:

- 91% of the new mothers in the Doula Program breastfeed solely or in combination with bottle feeding.
- 99% of doula clients receiving postpartum support report and demonstrate positive transition relating to mother and infant bonding.
- 98% of clients receiving clinic based doula instructions demonstrate competence of pregnancy related topics.
- 97% of delivering mothers that were provided supportive labor/delivery services report positive birth experiences.

Over the past five years (2003-2008), the survey completion rate average was 97%.

PROGRAM COSTS

The total grant funding –covering all operational costs- is \$483,697. The primary funder is The Children's Board of Hillsborough County. The program receives funding from Hillsborough County tax dollars through the lead agency, Children's Future Hillsborough. Additional funding is received from Gulfcoast North AHEC to provide smoking cessation content in the childbirth classes, and Suncoast Community Health Clinics to provide doula services to the migrant community in South Hillsborough County.

ASSETS & CHALLENGES

Assets

- Community awareness of the disparity in infant mortality between black and white infants, and the will and funding to address the problem
- Community awareness of the lack of prenatal services for the Hispanic population, and the will and funding to address the problem

Challenges

- Communicating and forming bonds with clients that come from a culturally diverse community where different languages are spoken
- Addressing the additional needs of this population in terms of social services that are desperately needed; this program has been overwhelmed by this increased need which extends beyond prenatal services
- Lack of staff training in the areas of homelessness and hunger faced by some clients
- Collaborative partners have become overburdened with the amount of help that is needed from the Doula Program (e.g., clients lack basic services and

supplies such as food, safe shelter, clothing for the infants)

- Impact of growing economic problems and increased unemployment (this often leads to feelings of hopelessness, and in some cases, increased incidence of domestic violence)

Overcoming Challenges

- Young women from the community were trained to work with clients so that this program is now able to offer doula services to pregnant young women in the following languages: English, Spanish, Creole, Haitian, French as well as several African and Spanish speaking dialects.
- To address the problem of hunger among clients, additional funding was received from The Children's Board of Hillsborough County through Children's Future Hillsborough, to start a pilot program; "The Breakfast Club". This program enhancement piece provides vital education to pregnant young women on proper nutritional needs during pregnancy and postpartum. Emphasis is on learning to make wise food choices, efficient grocery shopping, learning to choose balanced meals and snacks. Education also covers the nutritional needs of nursing mothers. Monies go toward the purchase of nutritional food snacks for class time and classroom educational materials.
- Additional funds were obtained from The Children's Board and Children's Future Hillsborough to hire a social worker who works closely with the doula staff and clients. The role of the social worker is to address and eliminate health barriers and disparities to assure fair access to basic everyday supplies. This person works closely with the doula staff and clients who are dealing with such issues as domestic violence and homelessness.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Program results are not immediate, so patience is necessary; effort and hard work are rewarded.
- A collaborative effort is extremely valuable because it provides access to other avenues of assistance that will be needed to combat this complex issue.
- Staff may grasp instruction better if it is repeated over time and presented in creative ways.
- Respect staff's contributions, and offer some degree of schedule flexibility since doulas work full time during the week and on call at night for their primary clients.
- It is vital that doulas project an optimistic, cheerful approach when they are dealing with their clients.
- Never stop communicating with partners to address problems as they arise.



FUTURE STEPS

The Children's Board, a current funder, is a strong advocate for this program. Potential grants are continually being identified. There is also a private pay Doula Program for pregnant women with the ability to pay for doula services. These monies go directly into the grant funded program.

COLLABORATIONS

It was particularly important to collaborate with community groups/leaders, natural networks, spiritual leaders, ethnic media, and family advocacy groups to develop the best program planning, service delivery and evaluation/monitoring services.

Additional partners include-The Children's Board of Hillsborough County, (the primary funder, through Children's Future Hillsborough), Gulfcoast North AHEC, Suncoast Medical Clinics, Healthy Start Coalition, Zero Exposure Project, Mom Care, Child Abuse Council, Parents as Teachers, Falkenberg Jail, Hillsborough County School System, Tampa General Hospital, St. Joseph Women's Hospital, University of South Florida, The Ounce of Prevention Fund (previous funder), and the Allegany Foundation (previous funder).

PEER REVIEW & PROGRAM REPLICATION

The Doula Program presented evidence based data and outcomes at the National Perinatal Conference in Loma Linda, CA in 2008.

During the years that the funding was provided by the Ounce of Prevention Fund, the program was replicated in three other sites statewide. Unfortunately, these data were not available at the time of submission.

RESOURCES PROVIDED

The website is: www.achievetampabay.org

Private Doula Program website is:

www.doulabirthbabies.com

The agency report is available on line along with the program information and brochure.

Key words: Infant Mortality, Health Disparities, Prenatal Care, Inter-conception Care, Adolescent Health

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