



RCD Women's News

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Do-what? – supporting women through pregnancy

By Amilee Collins - Refugee Council project worker in Hull.

In the last year I have seen two pregnant clients progress from anxious and scared, to relaxed and eager. How? Not drugs, wondrous doctors or even my own hours of home-based support, but because they were given **doulas**.

The term "doula"* has been around for nearly 40 years but the idea is as old as giving birth. The name derives from the Greek for "woman servant or caregiver" and a doula is someone who supports a mother. A doula will usually be involved from pregnancy until the baby is about 6 weeks old. She may have a lot or little involvement, may be paid or part of a voluntary project. She can help directly with the baby, hang out the washing, or help mum to breastfeed. Crucially what most doulas have in common, is that they are available during the birth, and at the request of the mother can be there throughout the entire birthing experience.

At the Refugee Council, we are more than aware that refugee women who have been through trauma in their home countries and often arrive here alone and unsure, are made to feel even more lonely and scared by their experience of being pregnant in a foreign country. Midwives and health visitors, however good they may be, have little time available to chat about birthing options, to shop for baby equipment or to help with the washing up when the baby is born.

My clients were referred to the Goodwin Volunteer Doula Project**. As part of the local Sure Start programme it trains and supports local women to become volunteer doulas. Started in 2005 by a small group of local women who wished to do something positive for pregnant women, so far they have trained 65 volunteers and supported nearly 200 women. It has seen such amazing results that in May this year, Alan Johnson MP (then the Health Secretary) promised £270,000 for the service to be rolled out across eight more locations in England. This will start with Derby, progressing to Bradford, Eastbourne, Scarborough and possibly Sheffield.

It should be noted that there is no medically recognised, standardised training for doulas; it is an unregulated service and some people worry that fathers may feel left out of the birthing process. But there is a lot of research that suggests doulas can improve the bond between mother and infant, decrease the incidence of complications and that mothers with doulas are more successful at breastfeeding.

If you have a client who is scared about giving birth, taking care of a baby or just needs a bit more support, referring her for a doula is one of the best things you can do for her and the baby. When it comes to partners, I leave you with the words of one of my client's husbands: "I don't have enough words to describe what she did for us. In the home, outside, at the hospital. She didn't leave [my wife] until she was happy. Even her own sisters couldn't have helped her in the same way."

*See www.doula.org.uk, and call **Sallie Shelley** on **020 8979 6432** or email sallie@thameside-doula.co.uk for information about their hardship fund (covers expenses incurred by doulas who work for clients in their local community, who do not have the means to employ a doula)

See www.goodwindoulas.org or call the Doula Project team on **01482 497 811 for information about this award-winning project

See newspaper article women.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/women/families/article6737591.ece

Training

The New Vetting & Barring Scheme – 'The Independent Safeguarding Authority requirements and your organisation'

This half day course will comprehensively review the latest developments from (ISA) Independent Safeguarding Authority, their requirements and timescales for implementation and will assess the impact to your organisation.

24 November 2009, 10am -1 pm or 1.30pm – 4.30pm

Stratford E15 Cost: £49 per person. To book a place email training@londoneastconnexions.co.uk, see www.isa.gov.org.uk/default.aspx?page=2 for more information.

Funding news

Community Cashback is a scheme in England and Wales which gives local people a say in how £4 million of recovered criminal assets (for example confiscated cash) should be spent in their communities.

You could help women's projects get a share of the cash by voting for them at <http://cashback.cjsonline.gov.uk>.

Event - new publication

Rights of Women are launching their latest publication for asylum seeking women and their supporters: *Seeking Refugee? A handbook for asylum-seeking women*.

When: **Thursday 26 November** at 6pm

Where: The Resource Centre, 356 Holloway Road, London, N7 6PA www.theresourcecentre.org.uk.
The launch will be followed by refreshments and an opportunity to network.

Speakers will include: Alison Harvey, General Secretary of ILPA, Debora Singer, Policy and Research Manager at Asylum Aid and a woman from Women Asylum Seekers Together, Manchester. These fascinating and inspirational speakers will offer an insight into the challenges facing women seeking asylum and how these can be overcome.

Seeking Refugee? will be available free of charge to asylum-seeking women and the individuals and organisations that support them. For more information about the book or to attend the launch, email **Catherine Briddick**, Senior Legal Officer at Rights of Women at cate@row.org.uk.

Join the women's sector on the women's Café

The Women's Resource Centre (WRC) has recently launched an online network for women working in the women's voluntary and community sector. If you are working in a women's project (staff, volunteer or trustee) this could be for you! There are already over 150 women signed up and they are using the network to:

- Find other women interested in similar issues
- Provide each other with information, advice and support on campaigning, research and other topics
- Co-ordinate campaigns and working groups with other women across the country
- Share their experiences, expertise and best practice examples

If you would like to know more before signing up, the WRC has put together a Step by Step guide to the Women's Cafe which you can find at www.wrc.org.uk/news/default.aspx?Ref=enews

If you would like to submit an article to *RCO Women's News* about your RCO's work, or would like to write about a topical issue, please email: development@refugeecouncil.org.uk.