

Effort afoot here to recruit, train local pregnancy counselors

BY CLARA VAUGHN
Eastern Shore Post

A Richmond-based group is expanding to the Eastern Shore to help improve pregnancy outcomes for local residents.

The group, called Birth in Color, will host its first training for a new group of community-based doulas — non-medical professionals who support pregnant people before, during, and after birth — on the Eastern Shore June 14-16.

Those interested in the training should register by June 1 by visiting www.birthincolordhamptonroads.org to be considered for the program.

Birth in Color focuses on narrowing racial disparities in pregnancy outcomes for Black women, but applicants of all backgrounds are welcome to apply for the training program and support from Birth in Color's community-based doulas, said the group's founder and Executive Director Kenda Sutton-El.

"There's no real manual that comes with childbirth, but you can be ready for what's to come," Sutton-El said.

"The goal is always to decrease the maternal mortality rates but also to educate people in childbirth and be ready for it," she said.



COURTESY MARCUS INGRAM PHOTOGRAPHY

Birth in Color doula Megan Gomez demonstrates a lunge-type movement used during labor to help progress the baby's position with Alexis Jackson. Birth in Color is offering its first community doula training on the Eastern Shore in June.

doulas are Black, according to a 2023 article by the New York Times, but they can play an important role in narrowing the gap in health disparities in their communities.

Doulas are not only trained in techniques such as birthing positions that can speed labor and ease pain, but can also advocate for patients from their own communities, said Charmaine Henry, who recently completed Birth in Color's doula training program in Hampton Roads.

She has worked as a certified medical assistant in maternal-fetal medicine for over 20 years and said her

Black patients have "a lot of unanswered questions" about pregnancy and childbirth.

"We're there to support, to educate, to advocate, to help them with resources and things that they may need during their pregnancy," Henry said of community-based doulas.

"I want to be a part of helping them advocate for themselves," she said.

Improving outcomes

Data from the American Journal of Obstetricians and Gynecologists shows the constant presence of sup-

port personnel such as a doula is one of the most effective tools to improve labor and delivery outcomes.

Studies have found women receiving doula support were less likely to need pain medication during birth, less likely to have a cesarean birth, and had shorter labor times — factors that make a smooth transition to motherhood more likely.

A doula is "the only person that doesn't change with birth. If your doctor isn't on call, then you don't get the doctor that you've been seeing the entire time" during pregnancy, Sutton-El said.

She founded Birth in Color to help families and communities navigate pregnancy-related experiences and provide support and education for those who need it the most.

That is why she is expanding Birth in Color to Virginia's Eastern Shore.

"It is really a rural community in that they don't have a lot when it comes to education surrounding pregnancy — both before and after. When we look for a community, that's what we look for," Sutton-El said.

No experience necessary

No experience is necessary to apply for Birth in Color's Eastern Shore training program, said Sequoi Phipps-Hawkins, Birth in Color's director of communications and marketing.

"You truly learn everything that you need to know through the training," she said.

Applicants will undergo an interview to ensure they understand what a doula is before they are accepted into the program, she said.

The training begins with three full days of in-person instruction by Sutton-El June 14 to 16 at a location to be determined on the Eastern Shore.

Virtual trainings will follow and trainees will connect with a mentor for four to six weeks of additional train-

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Combatting mortality rates

Doulas are professionals trained to provide emotional, physical, and informational support to women throughout their pregnancy, birth, and postpartum periods. They assist with births both at home and in the hospital.

Sutton-El founded Birth in Color in 2018 to help combat maternal mortality rates, which are significantly higher for Black women than the overall population.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Black women are three times more likely to die from a pregnancy-related cause than white women.

Only about 10% of the country's

Doulas

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ing before attending their first training birth, Phipps-Hawkins said.

After a series of training births, trainees become Birth in Color and Virginia State-Certified Doulas, Sutton-El said. Birth in Color helps connect them with clients for part- or full-time doula work once they are certified.

Applicants do not need a medical background and trainees of all ethnicities and backgrounds are welcomed, she said.

"We actually want everyone to utilize these services. We just want to make sure that people of color actually are paying attention ... and feel comfortable with coming," Sutton-El said.

Birth in Color has several bilingual doulas and translation services, she said.

Pregnant people seeking a community-based doula can contact Birth

in Color through its website. Doula funding on the Eastern Shore exists through Medicaid, though Sutton-El said she has reached out to the local Department of Health to discuss other types of funding assistance, similar to the services Richmond's Health District provides Birth in Color clients.

"We're there to help them to be able to ask their medical providers questions about their pregnancy so they know that they can get the information that they need ... to ensure that they have a safe and healthy birth and delivery," Henry said of community-based doulas.

"I think every woman deserves a doula," she said.

To apply for a doula or learn more about Birth in Color, visit the website www.birthiscolorhamptonroads.org

To sign up for the Eastern Shore community-based doula training, visit www.birthiscolorhamptonroads.org/apply-eastern-shore

Those without Internet access can text Sutton-El at 804-840-6535.

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Eastern Shore Auctions will be selling the estate of Garry "Dean" Ward of Pocomoke City, MD. Items include a '01 Ram 3500 dump truck 77,389 miles, '01 Toyota Sequoia SR5, '07 Yamaha Star Classic motorcycle 19,417 miles, '68 Chevrolet C10 pick up truck, '69 Ford 600 farm truck 77,155 miles, '05 Homemade trailer, Bobcat 753 diesel skid steer loader 2095.8 hours, Bobcat 709 backhoe attachment, stump grinder & bucket attachments, 2 axle trailers, travel trailer (no title), old hubcaps, ladders, old truck hoods, riding mowers and much more. Visit easternshoreauctions.hibid.com to register and bid.

Bidding is currently open and ends on Wednesday, June 7, 2023 starting at 5 PM.

Preview Date & Time: Tuesday, May 30, 2023 from 3 PM to 5 PM.

Preview Location: Stockton Road Stockton, MD From Pocomoke - Chicken house on left (past 4925 Stockton Road) Sign will be posted.

Checkout Date & Time: Saturday, June 10, 2023 from 9 AM to 1 PM. No exceptions.



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