

# A Story of Compassion

## USDA Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

### Healthy Beginnings

#### Georgia

In Georgia, young teenage girls have the opportunity to get a new start in life through the Healthy Beginnings Doula Program. It is Georgia's first community-based Doula program that has been managed since March of 2005 through Families First, Inc. Prior to that, the Georgia Campaign for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (G-CAPP) administered the program since its beginning in December of 2002.

The program serves English and Spanish speaking adolescents from ages 10 to 19 years old. In addition to weekly home visits, these young, at-risk pregnant teens receive assistance with healthcare, education, parenting, and life-skills training.

Once the child is born and while the Doula is still caring for the mom, the transition process begins and eligible families are enrolled in the Healthy Families Program, also through Families First.

"The Healthy Beginnings Doula Program formally begins when the mother is six months pregnant," said Jacye Johnson, project manager and supervisor for both programs. "The program nurtures young mothers through pregnancy and childbirth and educates them about caring for their infants up to three months old. After that, the Healthy Families Program takes over and the focus is on helping the mom care for her child until they reach the age of three."

Johnson said they refer the majority of their clients to the WIC Program (Women, Infants, and Children) to ensure the health of the moms and their babies.

### How the Initiative is Helping

In support of the President's Faith-Based and Community Initiative the USDA Food and Nutrition Service had conducted outreach to health departments throughout the State. When they heard about opportunities through their area health department, they realized that these young women were eligible for the WIC Program and began referring them on a regular basis.

### About the Program

Participation in the Healthy Beginnings Doula Program has been successful in increasing regular pre-natal care and breastfeeding participation, which is a key component of the WIC Program.

"The WIC Program helps mothers stay healthy while they are pregnant, and their babies are nourished through breastfeeding or infant formula once they are born," said Johnson. "Enrolling in WIC ensures that the moms receive nutrition education, breastfeeding counseling, WIC food packages, and other services that the program has to offer."

A "Doula" is a trained Para-professional whose primary function is to offer non-clinical support for both mother and child. What this means is that the Doula nurtures young mothers through pregnancy and childbirth and educates them in caring for themselves and their babies.

"This is a home-visitation program," Johnson pointed out. "We have four doulas, two English-speaking and two Spanish-speaking, who go out into low-income Atlanta communities and visit the young women in their homes."

"Every week Healthy Beginnings provides the Doulas with educational guidelines to follow when they make their home visits," said Johnson. "With their training and expertise, they are able to



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accommodate the needs of these moms-to-be and make it much easier for them during pregnancy and the birth of their child.”

“At our facility, we offer in-service educational programs for pregnant and postpartum woman about once every quarter,” Johnson added. “They get to hear from a variety of speakers including a midwife talking about birth control to providers of various services including healthcare and domestic violence. Sometimes the Doulas refer the mothers to other needed services such as childbirth and parenting classes.”

“About two months ago a WIC coordinator from a local clinic visited Families First and facilitated an educational session for Hispanic moms,” Johnson continued. “Approximately 50 percent of those enrolled in the Healthy Beginnings Program are Hispanic.”

A grant from the Georgia Department of Human Resources (DHR), Promoting Safe and Stable Families, helped make the program possible. The amount of money allocated for this grant is based on the number of children in each State who received food stamps in the previous three years.

Families First Inc. and G-CAPP provide additional funding for the program.

Johnson said there are typically about 30 young women in the program at one time. Since its inception in December of 2002 through the end of the fiscal year on September 30, 2005, the program has helped approximately 140 young women in the Atlanta area.

“We are getting positive feedback from the community and have received letters of support from various sources including schools, churches, and the medical community,” said Johnson.

These young women and their babies have been given a second chance to make a positive impact

and create a new life for themselves and their babies!

