

Submission
No 107

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Ms Mary van Reyk

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Partially
Confidential

My name is Mary, and I have a 5 year old and a 1 year old. I live in _____ with my partner.

During the 10 years it took to complete our family, my partner and I lived through 10 miscarriages. The trauma of them, and how they linked to my births, is what I would like to talk about today.

When I had my first miscarriage, I went initially to my local GP to ask about bleeding. He told me there was no way he could tell me what was happening and sent me home. When I later started bleeding more heavily, my partner and I drove to the hospital. I have no memory of how it was diagnosed, only that it was done in a consult room in the same space I had recently visited to submit my hospital forms for the baby. I had to sit in the waiting room with pregnant women, until my partner demanded I be taken to a private space.

The second time I had a miscarriage, I was diagnosed in an emergency room while an intoxicated woman in the bed next to me loudly asked for a pregnancy test. The nurse told me she wished I was the one with the baby out of the two of us. I had to have a stranger tell me they couldn't find a heart beat while an ultrasound tool was still in my vagina. I will never recover from that moment. When I called to book my specialist appointment in regards to the miscarriages, I was asked by the reception staff what was wrong with me? Otherwise they wouldn't know who to refer the matter to. The first specialist I saw told me I only had a 'tiny septum' causing the miscarriages and it wasn't worth surgery, I should just wait till one stuck. She did not acknowledge the trauma of this statement, that I should go through multiple miscarriages rather than be given another option.

I submitted a complaint to the hospital, which was taken seriously. I got a new specialist, who immediately apologised for the fact I had already endured (by that stage) 4 miscarriages, and immediately offered/explained to me the surgery that led to my first daughter. The septum was much larger than could be seen in ultrasounds, I really never had a chance without it. I felt heard and began to trust that one person in the medical system could actually work with me in a respectful way.

I fell pregnant, made it to 12 weeks, and was consumed by anxiety for the remaining time. The problems I now encountered were that I could not join the Midwives program because I was 'high risk'. But that meant I spoke to a new person at the hospital every time, and every time I had to tell them about my miscarriages, and my surgery, and my trauma. I wish so much that there was a program for me which was led by modern concepts of 'tell your story once' and that I had been able to work with a single person, a midwife, all the way through. I could not afford private options.

The person who helped me the most at this time was a perinatal specialist councillor through a local free mental health program which has now been discontinued. I feel that the closure of this service was a massive loss for our community. I also had a friend who offered pregnancy circles at this time, and the community and support I received through this was also invaluable. I was only able to participate in both of these because they were free.

I understand there has been a recent submission to parliament by another mother who had stillborn twins about hospital spaces for people who are experiencing a miscarriage or stillbirth. I believe she should be supported in her fight, and I know there are so many people who will be eternally grateful for her advocacy.

I would also ask that some form of continuity of care which is financially accessible to people who have experienced the trauma of multiple miscarriages. I know it would have made a big difference for the pregnancies and births of both of my daughters. I really wished I could afford a doula, mainly because I come from a culturally diverse background and a rainbow family. Being able to choose a

support person who I could connect with culturally and who would also understand my family relationships, which do not fit the 'norm', would have changed my experience of pregnancy from one of endless anxiety and PTSD, to one where I may have even enjoyed.

As it is, I found what I could, sewed it together and made something that allowed me to be strong enough to finally birth my two daughters. I end with acknowledging my own strength in this, and knowing that I am now the mother I always new I could be.