

Submission
No 570

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I make this submission on behalf of myself and all women who have found themselves pregnant with a baby in a breech (bottom first) position at term or in labour and not been given any safe option to birth their baby vaginally despite their preferences.

My first baby was found to be breech while I was in advanced labour at a public hospital in NSW. If this happens to any woman at any hospital with the exception of [REDACTED] and the [REDACTED] in Sydney, the account would be much the same, so the exact hospital name is irrelevant. Despite my intention to labour naturally and the fact that myself and my baby were well and progressing well in labour, I was told that I 'had to have a caesarean'. I was told that this was hospital policy and I could read between the lines that my care providers were frightened that I would not consent and that they did not know how to manage a breech birth. Knowing it was our only safe option, and not wanting my child to be born into a stressful environment, I agreed to the caesarean, but I have never fully recovered from my baby being cut out of me for no reason. It made me feel weak and powerless and shattered all of my confidence and belief in myself to be a mother to my child. I was terrified that I wouldn't bond with him and became obsessive over breastfeeding, which I also had limited support with and was not able to achieve beyond expressing milk. The recovery period was excruciatingly painful and I suffered the worst mental health I've ever experienced before or since. I blamed myself for signing the consent for the caesarean and not standing up for myself and my son. I grieved the breech birth that I could have had and would have felt so proud of.

From my second birth it was confirmed for me that my body is absolutely capable of birthing a breech baby, as he was also breech and over 1KG larger than my first. I felt terrified of hospitals, so had planned a home birth. When he was also found to be breech on ultrasound, we transferred to [REDACTED] breech clinic. My baby was born there, and despite also experiencing obstetric violence through non-consensual procedures, I do not feel traumatised from this birth. I believe this is because I had continuity of care with my private midwife and because despite not getting the home birth I had planned, I was still being supported to have a VBAC with a breech baby and I knew how lucky I was. I had my power still and could look past some of what was done and imagine that they had the best intentions. I think it's easy for some people to think that traumatising women during birth is unavoidable sometimes when it's an emergency situation, but I reject this. When women feel that they have power, a voice and are part of the decision making process, they will be less likely to see their birth as traumatic, even if it doesn't go to plan for them or it becomes an emergency. My son was well and healthy and I was able to feel so proud of what I had achieved. This birth completely changed the course of my life. I decided to become a midwife so that I could be there for women and be a positive voice for change.

It is absolutely not acceptable that women with breech babies are not given the option to try for a vaginal birth in this country. It is not acceptable to be a licenced or registered maternity care provider who is not competent in breech vaginal birth. These providers actively cause harm to women through their incompetence. It is a systemic problem but individuals hold responsibility too for causing harm to women through unnecessary and invasive surgery that makes their subsequent births more dangerous also. The research is clear that a vaginal breech birth is just as safe as a caesarean and women have a right to choose how to birth their baby. If we want to reduce the growing caesarean rates in Australia, we cannot ignore breech. Clinicians remaining ignorant on breech birth makes women and babies less safe and trauma inevitable for women who will then be coerced into a surgical birth they may not want or need.

Please listen to the voices of women who had their power taken from them in a moment that should be the happiest of their lives and the start of a new journey. Mothers hold our world together and they deserve the very best care we can possibly give. They absolutely deserve to have their stories heard.