

**Submission
No 672**

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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My name is Trisha Cowley and I have given birth 3 times. I have no other involvement in the maternity system. They were 3 very different births. I trusted the system for the first two and trusted myself and a supportive doula for my last. I had very different birth for my last because I educated myself extensively about natural birth, and came to understand that much of what happens in the hospital setting does not support natural birth, but hinders it, leading to intervention and ultimately, birth trauma. For my first child, I was induced after my waters leaked. This led to him becoming distressed during labour and then a rushed birth including forceps, and a 3rd degree tear, which still impacts me 8 years later though damage to my pelvic floor. Knowing what I now know, I would have declined to be induced, and allowed more time for labour to progress naturally - there was no need to induce me at that stage. I gave birth despite the intervention with no pain relief - that was my choice and I don't regret that.

I put this in to demonstrate I am not complaining as a non coping individual! I was exhausted, and kept in hospital for 6 days post birth - which I now realise is quite a long time in the current system. For my second, I was checked after labouring for about 10 hours and was told I was 'only' 5cm. I had come in at 3cm 7hrs before. I felt so discouraged and demoralized. She was brow presentation and they said I would need a Caesarian, which is what we did. Knowing what I now know, I wouldn't have allowed them to tell me the dilation because that actually had no causal relationship to how far off giving birth you are! And I would have tried labour positions that work with brow presentations - instead of just going straight to a Caesar which is major surgery and linked to allergies (this child does have allergies). But again I trusted they knew best.

For my last, I was determined to have a VBAC. So I contacted some local home birth midwives who steered me down the natural birth path. I was advised that the best outcomes actually come from home births or with a doula/private midwife. I live rurally so wasn't game to attempt a home birth VBAC given I was over an hour from the closest hospital. Instead I found a doula and researched natural or physiological birth. It blew my mind, that the hospital system is so removed from providing natural birth outcomes. I hired a private obstetrician who was supportive of my VBAC. He basically was not needed, but that was my assurance that I would not be pressured down a Caesarian route. An expensive assurance!!

I went into hospital after labouring at home for half a day. And 4 hours later I gave birth, once again pain free, vaginally. My doula quietly dimmed lights, kept people away etc etc - all things that helped support a natural birth. It was a powerful, beautiful, amazing birth. The midwife monitored me hourly for foetal heart rate using a hand held device. I declined continual monitoring and cervical examination. I used the shower and movement and breathing to manage pain. I trusted my body.

I believe the current system has lost sight of what real birth is and how to support it. It is a system designed to intervene - but those interventions only serve to necessitate further intervention. I don't believe anyone was negligent - they did what they thought best - but they didn't really understand birth - or aren't allowed to in the current system. I believe many women experience birth trauma as a result of a system that interferes with/sabotages natural birth.