

Submission
No 957

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

Submission to birth trauma inquiry

My Son was born in 2006, at a little birth centre in a country town in NSW. When I discovered I was pregnant, it took me some time to wrap my head around my new reality. In this time of new joy and uncertainty, I missed the window to apply to have my baby in a birth centre in Sydney. Short weeks was all I had to make a huge decision for my birth. I ended up at the _____ having prenatal care, where I felt like a nameless person on a conveyor belt of pregnant women.

My decisions to avoid certain tests were questioned repeatedly, as if I had no autonomy over my choices.

My partner and I moved states at 7 months pregnant and we found a birth centre _____ that would take us, but only for the birth. No pre or postnatal care would be available because of my late admission to the program. I did shared care with a local GP but was otherwise left navigating the rest of my pregnancy on my own.

By birth was long and challenging. It was supported by 2 midwives I met that night and went on for 20 hours. I laboured and birthed in the bath. After my son was born, he experienced secondary apnoea, and his APGAR score went from an 8 down to a 4. He was swiftly taken from me for resuscitation with the full alarm calling all available midwives and doctors to assist him.

I was left in the bath by myself (my partner when with our son) with 2 new and unfamiliar midwives coming in to assist me. I was feeling scared and very unsure of what was happening, and no one was telling me anything.

Later, after a long separation, when I had my baby, who was well and did not require further assistance, I felt the fear and the pain arise in me. My baby was coughing and spluttering, and I was worried he wasn't breathing well. I spoke my concerns to another midwife (again, unknown to me) and she totally dismissed my fear and my worries. She told me I had nothing to be upset about as he was perfectly fine.

That dismissal was enough to gut me emotionally. It invalidated what we had been through and my feelings. I felt totally unheard and unsupported as a brand new mother who had experienced a great birth, but a terrifying post-birth experience.

I was discharged after a couple days (as they wanted to keep an eye on my baby's breathing) and had no follow up care unless I drove myself 3 hours south to the GP. I think I did that once.

My early days of motherhood were difficult and challenging and it took a long time to get over the feelings of being utterly dismissed. This lack of support ended up becoming post natal depression which I struggled with for several month before getting support and being heard in my trauma.

I became a doula, to offer support to women. In that time, I supported births at home, in public hospitals and in private hospitals. The births at home were beautiful and supportive. The births in public and private hospitals were appalling.

I witnessed women being coerced, infantilized and spoken to like they were stupid. I witnessed interventions being forced on women without informed consent. I witnessed dismissive behaviours. I saw parents denied access to their babies in the special care nursery.

I witnessed women suffering at the hands of a maternity system that does not put them at the centre of their own care.

I ultimately stopped being a doula because it became clear that my role became too difficult in a system that does not support women.

None of this is okay and needs urgent change.