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Los Angeles Midwives Promote Home Births

by Deyane Moses

Home births in the United States are increasing, although they still account for only one percent of overall deliveries. Los Angeles is one place where there is a rising interest in giving birth at home with the help of midwives. Some of those midwives are making an effort to reach out to minority women.

In 2012, Jasmine Lavender delivered her second child in a bathtub in south Los Angeles.

"It was an amazing experience. Very empowering. You know I encourage other moms to have a vaginal birth. It was life changing to be honest," she said.

She chose to give birth in an informal setting because she feels the hospital performed an unnecessary and rushed surgical procedure -- a Caesarean-section -- when she delivered her first child.

"I was on a time clock and my time was out," she said.

The tub where Jasmine gave birth is located at [The Community Birth Center](#). The women who work here specialize in maternity care.

But founder Racha Lawler said they also offer some general health services.

"It's seeing ourselves really truly as a clinician. Where, you know, as a midwife you can draw people's blood and test people's blood and test people for STDs. You can, you know, teach women about how their bodies work in regards to their ovulation and fertility," she said. "So why not make sure everyone in the community knows that?"

Lawler, a licensed midwife, also goes to the patient's home to help her give birth. And after the birth, she provide services to the mother and her newborn.

Midwife apprentice Tanya Smith-Johnson said the center believes in keeping the process as natural as possible.

"We do things to keep women from tearing. You know, Rub oil as opposed to, 'Ok You tore? We're just going to suture you up. We're going to cut you,' that kind of thing. We do all the things to make it as few interventions as possible," she said.

When the center first opened, there were about 300 licensed midwives in the state of California. Most of them were white. But Lawler hopes to double the number of midwives of color through advocacy and free mentorship for apprentices like Tanya Smith-Johnson.

"The stats show women of color, we're the ones who need maternity care. Our babies die at rates three or four times that of white women. And one of the solutions to that is having more women of color tend to women like themselves," Smith-Johnson said.

With generous donations and flexible client rates, the grassroots birth center provides services to people who could otherwise not afford them.

<http://www.voanews.com/content/los-angeles-midwives-promote-home-births/1865909.html>