

## Improving Birth Outcomes

A new journey for a Portland entrepreneur

Dana Lynn Barbar | 11/28/2017, 4:59 p.m.



Culturally competent doula training in Portland is geared toward reducing health disparities and improving birth outcomes in the African American community and increasing the number of doulas of color. Long time Portland doula and midwife Shafia Monroe (right) leads the training session providing education, resources and emotional support.

A Portland midwife, public health expert and business woman with decades of culturally-competent birth experience has taken on a new role in her journey to improve health disparities and reduce infant mortality in the African American community.

Shafia Monroe moved to Portland in 1991 and founded the International Center for Traditional Childbearing (ICTC), a non-profit to honor the legacy of the 20th Century African American midwife, reduce infant mortality and increase the number of midwives and doulas of color.



Shafia Monroe

Now as the non-profit organization grows into a new direction, Monroe is taking over the group's Full Circle Doula Birth Companion training program as a private business. Under the nameplate Shafia Monroe Consulting/Birthing Change, she becomes the only woman and minority-owned emerging small business owner in Portland providing doula training.

Monroe told the Portland Observer she is "ecstatic and proud" to take on this new role.

The word "doula" is Greek and literally means slave women. In the late 1970s, research confirmed that when a laboring woman has a female support as a doula, her labor shortens, with reduced intervention, less Caesarean sections, better breastfeeding rates in the first hour of birth, and the mother and father felt more satisfied with their birth experience.

Monroe said doulas are not medical staff, they are not midwives or doctors, but work with them to help the mother during labor and birth. Doulas offer education, resources and emotional support, and help with writing birth plans and what to bring to the hospital. Doulas can come to your home after the birth to help with postpartum support with baby soothing tips, light house-keeping, making meals, helping with baby bathes and running herbal baths for the mom. Doulas work in all birth settings, hospitals, homes and birth centers. It is up to the parent where she chooses to birth.

Monroe says she is committed to keeping the ICTC Full Circle Doula Birth Companion curriculum intact. Only the name will change to SMC Full Circle Doula Birth Companion training to reflect the new ownership.

The instruction will continue teaching about all the aspects and stages of pregnancy, from fertility and reproduction to postpartum and breastfeeding. The instruction is geared to be inclusive to everyone, as pregnancy is just one aspect of women's health, and the instruction covers nutrition, healthy movement, breast health and information on healthy menstrual cycles.

All women can benefit from the training, Monroe says, as it is "a passage to womanhood" and "normalizes birth" and other areas of women's health. Even three men and one transgender man have trained with her to become full circle doulas.

The cultural competency element is a large part of the program. Monroe makes it a point to address the consequences of systemic racism in society. She points to issues that can contribute to unhealthy outcomes for expectant mothers, such as food deserts, racial profiling in the justice system and the medical profession, and the stress that comes from not being able to access culturally competent doulas.

As her consulting business moves forward, Monroe hopes that the services become more mainstream, that the community grows to include more national trainers, and that health institutions will seek her doula graduates as stellar persons to have in their company with unique skill sets.

"This business adds value, not just to people and families of color, but to the entire city of Portland," she said.

For more information about Shafia Monroe Consulting/Birthing Change, and the training sessions offered, visit [shafiamonroe.com](http://shafiamonroe.com).

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