

# Healthy Start Coalition's doula program seeing positive outcomes

BEVERLY S. PARIS  
YOURNEWS CONTRIBUTOR

VERO BEACH — Whether it's a mother's first birth, or not, the Indian River County Healthy Start Coalition's Doula Program is discovering many positive results since launching the program in the fall of 2016.

First, what are doulas? They are trained non-medical professionals who provide continuous physical, emotional and informational support to a mother before, during and shortly after childbirth to help her achieve the healthiest, most satisfying experience possible.

Doulas have been shown to have a great impact on birth outcomes and health literacy.

The coalition's program has been charged through State of Florida statute with assessing and implementing ways to improve maternal child health within our county. Although their services have been successful in assisting mothers and babies to be healthier in many ways, the program fills a gap between the coalition's current programs.

"One of the number one causes of infant mortality in our county is related to early term labor," said Andrea Berry, Healthy Start's CEO. "Doula programs running all over the United States are seeing a decline in early term labor through these community doula programs. They are targeted to educate and empower mothers and give them the best start to motherhood that they can get."

Keda Henderson, a mother of three girls, ages 1, 3 and 7, experienced the birth of her youngest child at home. When she learned about Healthy Start's new doula program, she was quick to apply.

Henderson assisted in her ninth birth through the program and is well on the way to receiving her DONA Doula certification.

After learning about the program from Partners in Women's Health at Indian River Medical Center, Linda Wynn of Vero Beach recently experienced her first birth with Henderson's support.

"I was three months pregnant when



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New mother Linda Wynn, left with her newborn daughter, Elizabeth Denise Gordon, in her baby box and 'Doula' Keda Henderson.

I learned about the doula program, and once I began talking with Keda and then meeting her, I knew this is what would offer me the best results," Wynn said.

"Keda not only educated me, but my family as well, so I was fully prepared to know what to expect throughout my pregnancy as well as during the birth process. Keda was in the birthing room with me the whole time. She has been an amazing support for me, and now, for my baby Elizabeth Denise too."

The doula program is funded through the generosity of John Island Service League, the Indian River County Children's Services advisory committee and Indian River County Impact 100.

The Indian River County Healthy Start Coalition offers a broad spectrum of programs to insure pregnant women and their young children receive all necessary healthcare and support services. They are located in the Bridgewater Office Building B, 2nd floor, 1555 Indian River Boulevard, Vero Beach.

For more information on the doula program, call 772-563-9118 or visit [www.irhealthystartcoalition.org](http://www.irhealthystartcoalition.org).