

Why dads love midwives

Maria Scott

Midwives aren't just for mums. They also work closely with fathers throughout pregnancy, birth and into the first few weeks of a child's life.

Dads are honoured by their families this month on Father's Day. To mark the occasion, Midwifery News has spoken to fathers about their relationships with the midwives who helped their babies into the world. These dads have no doubts about the vital role these health professionals have played in their lives.

"I just think the job the midwives do is amazing," says Dom Forde who became a father for the first time 18 months ago with the birth of daughter Malia. Dom and Malia are featured on the cover of this issue of Midwifery News, appropriately clad in All Black jerseys as the Rugby World Cup gets underway.

At the time of writing Dom, who works for the Department of Immigration and wife Mairi, a former administrator at the New Zealand College of Midwives were awaiting the birth of their second child under the care of midwife Janaya Anisy, a partner in a Christchurch practice with Rose Barker, who cared for Mairi during her first pregnancy.

Dom and Mairi will be familiar to many College members as the couple featured in our Pain in Labour booklet and other publicity material. Behind the photographs there is a real family and birth story. And it was not a straightforward one.

Mairi's labour was induced because she was overdue and Malia arrived via a caesarean section.

Despite the drama involved, the birth was still a positive experience says Dom and he thanks Rose for this.

"Even though the birth plan pretty much flew out the window it was fine."

All the staff involved in the caesarean were "amazing" but the relationship with Rose, which had been built up during the months of pregnancy, was extremely reassuring, says Dom.

She "kept the whole process calm".

"We knew exactly where we stood with everything. We were holding out for a vaginal birth but Rose was fantastic in that she was realistic in the information she was giving us."

And Rose was tireless during the hours leading up to Malia's birth. Dom recalls that he and Mairi "nodded off" with fatigue after Mairi was given an epidural but Rose "just kept going".

Baby Malia went grey after she emerged and Mairi went into shock. Dom recalls the fear he felt. "Your world is in turmoil and you can't do anything about it".

Rose, working with her colleagues, instilled complete confidence that all would be well, as it was.

Dom recalls wondering during Mairi's pregnancy how he would cope during labour but says that the relationship with Rose had made him "hugely more confident about being the support person".

Mairi was the focus of pre-natal discussions but Dom said he did not feel in any way excluded. "Rose involved me heavily."

Musician Mike Chunn, a former member of Split Enz and now chief executive of the Play it Strange Trust which runs programmes to encourage young New Zealanders to become involved in music, has five children aged nine to 35. The last four were born with the assistance of midwives and Mike remembers them all as reassuring and supportive during the births and the early weeks of the children's lives.

"I am very glad that modern society has kept them in as part of the birthing world."

During the births, he says, he saw the midwives as "experts with full-on real time jobs at hand".

"I was there to witness the glorious process and to be a comfort to my wife."

Christchurch secondary school teacher Chris Henderson is admittedly, a special case when it comes to midwives. His wife Kate is one. She and Chris have two children, Maia aged four years and Piper aged four months. Kate trained in the United States and is now re-training to meet New Zealand requirements through the midwifery degree course at Christchurch Polytech and Institute of Technology.

Shortly after their first child was born, the family went to the Philippines where Kate managed a maternity clinic and Chris worked for a children's rights organisation.

"I got a lot of exposure to midwifery and maternal health issues. It was quite a learning experience to see some of the things we take for granted here not even being options in the developing world.

"Things that were available in New Zealand in the fifties were only just becoming available now in the Philippines. The whole notion of a father being involved in the birth process and planning and prenatal care was a totally new one."

The birth of Piper is fresh in Chris's mind and was a much shorter, more straightforward labour than the one that preceded the arrival of Maia. CPIT midwifery lecturer Julie Richards was the midwife for Kate's second pregnancy and birth.

Julie's approach had been "very collaborative" and "worked for all of us".

The pre-natal meetings with Julie often appeared low key but Chris says that he could see that over time their midwife was building a relationship with himself and Kate.



Chris Henderson and Maia



Paul Dobbin and Felix



Adam Hay with William and Wyatt

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As well as teaching, Chris is also a consultant to the Social Innovation Trust, which provided the support of the Student Volunteer Army that delivered help to thousands of Christchurch residents in their properties hours after the February earthquakes. At the Trust Chris works alongside co-founder and chief executive Louis Brown. Louis featured in the June issue of Midwifery News because of his work with midwifery student Ashleigh Peck in distributing donated supplies to mothers and babies in Christchurch after the earthquake. Louis had a strong empathy with what Ashleigh was trying to achieve because as the father to a three-year-old daughter, Luciana he had personal experience of the service midwives provide. Louis and Luciana's mother Diana were living on the West Coast during the pregnancy and they were advised to



Louis Brown and Luciana



Lean on me; Malia Forde on dad Dom's shoulder



Mike Chunn and family

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transfer to Christchurch for the birth. Their West Coast midwife did not come with them as they wanted to transfer some time before the birth rather than waiting until Diana was in labour.

But Louis recalls that West Coast midwife Lesley was "a really powerful communicator" throughout the pregnancy and was also skilled at mediating while the couple had to make a decision about transferring to Christchurch.

Luciana's journey into the world involved quite a team effort; one of Louis' cousins, the mother of three children herself, assisted and there was a midwife from Christchurch Women's Hospital as well as Diana's mother all the way from Colombia and Louis.

He recalls being uncertain during the antenatal classes what would be his practical role once the waters broke but found his place while doing a "dress rehearsal" for the birth about a week before the due date.

"One of my jobs was making sure that the towels were hot. We had a big pile of hot towels, hot water bottles to keep them not and it was my job to deliver towels to Diana seconds after each contraction began as pain relief. It worked and we avoided medical forms of pain relief."

"Men love this sort of practical stuff."

Back on the West Coast after Luciana's birth, the new family returned to the care of midwife Lesley who helped with breastfeeding. Diana experienced huge discomfort and bleeding to begin with for several weeks but Lesley helped her to sort out the technique.

"We might have had to put Luciana on formula if it hadn't been for Lesley."

Paul Dobbin is the creative director for an advertising agency in Auckland, dad to three year old Felix and married to Paula Dobbin, administrator in the Auckland office of the New Zealand College of Midwives. Felix was born before Paula started work for the College and at the time, the world of birth and midwifery was new territory for his parents.

But Debbie MacGregor, the midwife who cared for them during the pregnancy made a deep impression on Paul.

"We struck veritable gold," he says. He liked the fact that Debbie was a midwifery lecturer at the Auckland University of Technology.

"Call it a guy thing," says Paul. "Technical ability is important."

"Debbie was very professional all the way through."

The couple had planned a homebirth although Felix was born in hospital because Paula developed pre-eclampsia. Paula was in hospital for three weeks. During that time Debbie and her back-up midwife Jude Cottrell, who also worked with the couple over that period, supported their desire to have a natural birth if possible.

Paula eventually went into labour naturally at home at 1 am in the morning, and she and Paul met Debbie at the hospital at 6 am. Felix arrived just after 9 am.

"At all stages everything seemed to be under control," says Paul.

"I felt I was the central support person but Debbie supported me as much as Paula. If I had a question I knew I could shout out."

Adam and Ally Hay have two sons, William 22 months and Wyatt, four weeks. The central Hawkes Bay family has worked closely with three local midwives. Their LMC for the birth of both boys was Liezel Venter but a colleague, Rizwaana Latiff attended William's birth at Hawkes Bay Hospital because Liezel was on holiday.

For post natal care the family has worked with Sue Davey.

"She has become an extremely good family friend. William calls her Nanny Sue," says Adam, a branch manager for building supplies company Carters.

One of the aspects of the care received from Liezel that Adam particularly liked was the preparation of the birth plan.

"At about 36 weeks she went through a complete plan and asked questions about things we hadn't thought of, right down to whether I wanted to cut the umbilical cord. In the heat of the moment these were things that might have been forgotten."

For Justine Soares, food technologist father of one month-old Mia the teamwork between midwives at Middlemore Hospital made a deep impression during a long and difficult labour.

Justin's wife Rebecca went in to labour naturally but contractions weakened part way through and she was given syntocinon. Several hospital midwives worked alongside Rebecca's LMC midwife and an obstetrics registrar as Rebecca pushed 10lb Mia into the world.

"The midwives at Middlemore were outstanding. They really worked to put my wife at ease."