

## **REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE ABORTION ACCESS PROGRAM**

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### **ABORTION DOULA PROJECT REPORT OCTOBER 2021**

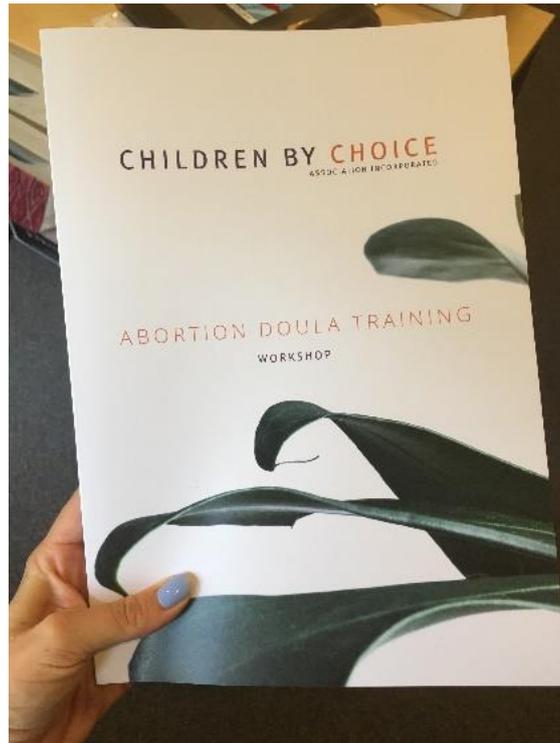
#### **ABOUT THE PROJECT**

The Regional, Rural and Remote Abortion Access Program (RRRAAP) was tasked with establishing an abortion doula initiative to ensure effective support mechanisms were in place for women and pregnant people seeking abortion care in Queensland.

A doula is a non-medical support person who can provide emotional, physical and informational support through any of life's transitions. This includes support across the full spectrum of pregnancy, including abortion. A doula specialises in non-judgemental and compassionate care, and is respectful and client-centred in the way they provide support.

In 2020, Children by Choice (CbyC) delivered Australia's first abortion doula training program, in partnership with the Australian Doula College (ADC). This partnership was established between CbyC and ADC to deliver the abortion doula training as a Masterclass, initially available to Queensland students and graduates of ADC's birth and end of life doula training programs. In 2022, the Masterclass will be available to ADC (and other) trained doulas nationwide via an online self-paced course accessed via ADC's online learning platform, Canvas.

The abortion doula training workshops were initially offered at no cost to participants during the pilot period, however the online training and future face to face workshops will be offered as fee-for-service to ensure CbyC can continue to deliver the training in a sustainable way after the RRRAAP has ended.



## PROJECT OUTCOMES

The 2 day abortion doula training was held once in 2020, and once in 2021, with a total of 17 participants completing the training to become abortion doulas. The training covered a range of topics including reproductive justice, values exploration, pregnancy options, global and local abortion statistics and law, medical and surgical abortion procedures and access pathways, counselling skills and self-care.

Some feedback from the post-training evaluation survey included the below:

- **100%** of respondents rated the value they obtained by attending the event as **high or very high**
- **100%** of respondents rated the knowledge they gained from the speakers as **high or very high**
- **100%** of respondents rated the overall quality of the training they received as **high or very high**

*"I came into the training with very little knowledge about the processes to abortions, not naive just not educated or really more so exposed to them. So I personally found the training very informative & confirmed to myself that this is definitely a space where I can give support as a doula"*

The training also garnered a lot of positive interest from national media, with a feature in The Monthly magazine, as well as articles and radio pieces from ABC and Triple J.

# Meet Jo Bolger, the abortion doula who helps people through pregnancy terminations

ABC Sunshine Coast / By Edwina Storie

Posted Tue 1 Jun 2021 at 9:06am, updated Tue 1 Jun 2021 at 11:20am



Jo Bolger was in the first round of abortion doula training and supports people through early and late-stage terminations. (ABC Sunshine Coast: Edwina Storie)

The online Masterclass consists of 8 modules, with a range of written, audio, visual and video information, as well as activities, written responses and quizzes. Participants are also required to attend a live 90 minute virtual session delivered by CbyC. The live session will include values clarification activities, as well as opportunities to reflect on the learnings overall in a real time group setting.

Doulas that complete the training (either online or in person) in Queensland will be able to be part of the client referral process between CbyC and ADC. Doulas in other states will be encouraged to contact their local services to let them know they are available to provide doula support to abortion seekers.

To October 2021, 7 CbyC clients have been supported through their abortion journey by an abortion doula.

Outcomes of the abortion doula program were presented at the Rural Medicine Australia conference in October 2021.

## RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

CbyC has continued their partnership with ADC to conduct research on the pilot abortion doula training with Southern Cross University (SCU). The research questions the study seeks to answer are:

1. *What are the experiences of doulas completing the abortion doula masterclass*
2. *What are the views of the doulas completing the masterclass with respect to the appropriateness of the material and method of presentation of that material*
3. *How did doula support shape women's abortion experiences*

While the expansion of doula work to include abortion is well established internationally, it is a relatively new concept in Australia. To our knowledge, Children by Choice's Abortion Doula Masterclass is the first of its kind in Australia, with the clients supported through the program the first to receive doula support here. The study will provide an important opportunity to evaluate both the training program itself, as well as explore and describe the experiences of doulas providing abortion support, and also the women and pregnant people receiving doula support during their abortion journey.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The abortion doula training program is an important organizational initiative, and a great advocacy tool for working towards achieving compassionate abortion care across Australia. It is recommended that the Education Team offer the abortion doula training at least once annually in person to students and graduates of ADC's program, in line with our partnership agreement. This should be delivered as fee for service, and utilizing the facilitator guide, workbook and PowerPoint, all saved [here](#).
2. The online abortion doula training is another asset of the project. This online program will need to be monitored and updated regularly as any new information emerges in the sector to ensure its accuracy and relevance.
3. It is recommended that conversations with other organisations and states around developing and delivering abortion doula training be progressed. This includes: Tasmania project (funding for doula work TBC); potential partnership between CbyC, ADC and Multicultural Australia (grants to be explored if all parties agree to progress the project); Cairns Sexual Health service are progressing their own abortion doula program, it is recommended that the Education Team stay across this and be aware of any opportunities to support the project; Birth for Humankind in Victoria also expressed interest in abortion doula training.
4. Income from the online abortion doula training masterclass should be used to evaluate the training, cover costs for running the abortion doula training in person twice per year, and/or paying doulas for their time. These funds may also be used to develop more CbyC online courses (on Canvas or other platforms).
5. The abortion doula training is a project that has the potential to be replicated and expanded. Following an initial 12 month review of the Canvas platform, CbyC may want to explore grant funding to upgrade the training into a new platform that aligns with CbyC website, and is more interactive and user friendly.

## CONCLUSION

Abortion doulas are a key part of CbyC's vision of ensuring safe and compassionate abortion care for all. One Children by Choice client who was supported by an abortion doula reflected she had never felt seen or heard before when navigating the medical system, and that she actually felt human. Despite never experiencing that kind of support in her life previously, she now knows that people can be compassionate and show her care. Abortion doulas have the potential to redefine the abortion experience in Australia, especially for those who don't have access to other supports in their own life. Providers of abortion services are a passionate, kind and supportive group; abortion doulas compliment their work, and take it beyond the clinic setting. They provide a unique service, bridging the gap between medical practitioners and the client.



*"I thank you for a wonderful training. I feel I know so much more than I ever did about abortion, access, remoteness, the law around it and just what a great need there is to have doulas supporting these women at this time"*

Image: Student doula Kelly, ADC trainer Jackie, and Founder Renee, and Dr Nicole Gestaldin experimenting with dragonfruit manual evacuations at the 2020 abortion doula training in Brisbane.