

BY KERRY CHAN-LADDERAN '16 PHOTOGRAPHY GARVIN TSO

Inside a small cell in San Francisco's County Jail, a pregnant woman awaits her first meeting with Darcy Stanley — doula and co-founder of a program called Birth Justice Project, which provides labor support for incarcerated women.

When Stanley (B.S. '14, Nursing) enters the anterior chamber of the cell, she's already mindful of her new client, who she says does not yet have reason to trust or like her.

"It takes a lot more time and gentleness around building trust because of the dynamic of a free person coming in to talk to a locked-up person," Stanley says. "[A pregnant woman] meeting a doula for the first time and deciding to let them into one of their most intimate life experiences and trusting them is incredibly courageous."

There's no shortage of need. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 5-6 percent of female inmates are pregnant at the time of admission to jail or prison, approximating to more than 6,000 pregnant women in 2015 — and black women are incarcerated at twice the rate of whites.

It's a demographic Stanley and her co-founders are passionate about supporting. After starting Birth Justice Project in 2011, the doulas collaborated with UCSF in 2013 to apply for (and win) a \$194,000 grant from the Alameda County Public Health Department — all while Stanley was still a Cal State East Bay student.

In recognition, she received the university's Alma M. Gessman Memorial Scholarship in 2014.

For alumnus Patrick Devine and his wife Kathy, proprietors of the Gessman scholarship, Stanley's work makes her

a hero in their eyes. "Darcy has shown incredible empathy and given invaluable service to some of the most vulnerable in prison and society," Patrick Devine says. "My wife and I are great admirers, and extremely proud to have been involved in supporting her."

With the money from the scholarship, Stanley was able to finish her degree at Cal State East Bay while focusing on Birth Justice Project. And in turn, with the grant from ACPHD, Birth Justice Project not only replicated the San Francisco program at Santa Rita Jail in Dublin, but also partnered with an organization called Black Women Birthing Justice to create an outside training program for women to become doulas in their communities.

"People trust and prefer being treated by someone who looks more like them," Stanley says. "It's about creating a system that supports culturally appropriate care, including a way to destigmatize women who have been formerly incarcerated by giving them meaningful, empowering work."

In fact, the doula training program has been so successful it has spawned a collective of its own — Roots of Labor in the East Bay. Now, together, doulas from Roots of Labor are servicing the Santa Rita Jail alongside those from Birth Justice Project.

"People on the outside, most of them have somebody going to the birth with them," Stanley says. "And people in jail don't have that all — they don't even have access to that. Giving these [women] the opportunity to have love and compassion and someone who's there just for them, that's what we want to provide." **EE**

## What's a Doula?

Doulas are nonmedical laypersons who provide emotional support and physical comfort to women during childbirth. Doulas can receive certification through many organizations, but they do not perform clinical tasks and do not have direct communication with or responsibility to a woman's care provider. (Midwives, by comparison, are licensed professionals who provide obstetric prenatal care and deliver babies.) Studies have shown that women who have continuous support during labor reap many benefits, including shorter labor, reduced use of analgesics and anesthetics, decreased cesarean rates and improved Apgar scores (a shorthand reporting system for the status of an infant at birth). *Provided by Professor Roberta Durham, R.N.*

# DOULA FOR Justice

ALUMNA SUPPORTS INCARCERATED WOMEN THROUGH CHILDBIRTH