

press release

APRIL 1997

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DOULAS – THE LATEST CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN CHILDCARE

TOP NOTCH NANNIES, one of the UK's leading nanny and babysitter agencies, is to run special training courses for women who wish to qualify as doulas – people who provide invaluable help and reassurance to new mothers before, during and after the birth of their baby.

Doulas are ideal for mothers who want to look after their babies themselves, but who welcome the help and advice traditionally offered by sisters and mothers in the days when extended families lived close enough to be constantly on hand.

Becoming a doula represents an ideal career opportunity in a new growth industry. And there's the additional advantage that doulas are paid from £10 an hour – often considerably more than nannies and maternity nurses.

Doulas have been popular in the US for a number of years and the new trend is fast taking off over here. Jean Birtles, who runs TOP NOTCH NANNIES, has seen interest in doulas grow significantly over the past 12 months to the point where demand has outstripped supply.

'We realised that something had to be done,' says Jean, 'so we contacted the leading doula trainer Sharon Ledbetter in California and asked her for advice. We were delighted when she offered to come over and run a course herself. This will be the first doula-training course in London and we can't wait to have some newly qualified professionals on our books!'

The first five-day doula training course takes place in central London from May 22 to 26. The course costs just £350 and includes all necessary tuition, from practical aspects of pregnancy, birth and postpartum to the emotional, social and spiritual issues associated with the process of having a new baby.

The only requirement for becoming a doula is that you have a love of babies and motherhood. Age and nationality are unimportant.

At the end of the course, trainees will receive certification from Birth and Bonding InternationalSM to demonstrate that they are fully qualified to work as doulas, and will automatically be entitled to become members of the British Doula Association.

**For further information and interviews or to apply for a place on the course
please contact Mike Halson on 0468 814362**

Sharon Ledbetter can be contacted for interview in the UK from May 19th

TOP NOTCH NANNIES

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Background information

How is a doula different from a nanny?

Unlike maternity nurses or nannies, doulas do not take charge of the baby – but they are there to help with feeding and nappy changing, as well as running errands, cooking and occasionally taking the baby away for a while to let the mother sleep. The idea of the doula is to help their employers become confident and self-sufficient mothers, while enabling them to enjoy to the full the experience of looking after a new baby.

Doulas are not usually medical professionals, although some are nurses. They will not offer medical diagnosis or treatment. Just as importantly, they can offer reassurance when parents are worrying needlessly about blotchy skin or an occasional sneeze.

What hours does a doula work?

Doulas can work full-time or part-time, depending on the client's needs. Some mothers find that they only need help for a couple of weeks, while others value their doula so highly they want her with them for months.

How much does a doula earn?

Doulas working in the UK typically earn around £10 an hour, or more if they are particularly well qualified and experienced. They are unlikely to work for less than 3 hours a day.

Where does the word 'doula' come from?

The word 'doula' means 'handmaiden' or 'servant' in Ancient Greek. The term was coined in the US by Dana Raphael, a medical anthropologist, in her book *The Tender Gift*, which promotes the benefits of women teaching other women about mothering.

SHARON LEDBETTER

Sharon Ledbetter, who will run the Top Notch Doula Training Course, lives in California USA. She holds a masters degree in pre- and peri-natal social psychology and is a certified childbirth educator, birth guide and doula.

Sharon believes strongly in the value of the sharing of wisdom and experience during the birth process, and in 1988 she founded the Birth and Bonding Family CenterSM, an organisation which provides information and educational programmes for pregnant, birthing and postpartum families. She initiated the Doula Training course in 1990 and more recently helped set up the Birth Service FoundationSM, a non-profit organisation which supports community network development of 'families serving birthing families'.

TOP NOTCH NANNIES

TOP NOTCH NANNIES was established early in 1993 to provide childcarers to families in London and the Home Counties. The agency has grown to cover the whole of Britain and several countries abroad (including New Zealand, where an office has been opened in Papanui, near Christchurch).

The agency is run by Jean Birtles, herself a mother with years of experience in all aspects of childcare. When she set up the agency, Jean was appalled by the casual way in which childcarers were taken on by many other agencies without their references being checked. TOP NOTCH NANNIES has a strict policy that every applicant is thoroughly checked and all references are spoken to in order to ensure they are genuine.

TOP NOTCH NANNIES provides a range of childcare professionals, including nannies, mothers' helps, maternity nurses, domestics and babysitters – and of course doulas. Jean Birtles is a regular guest on radio and TV programmes discussing issues surrounding childcare, education and behaviour, and is often quoted in the press. She is also the co-author (with her daughter, Jasmine) of the authoritative *Top Notch Nannies Guide* (Summersdale) which is stocked widely in bookshops around the country.

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