



*In 2002, Bina Holland, a grandmother in her 50's, was a community-based doula to pregnant teens at Easter Seals Children's Development Center, in Rockford, Illinois. Her story about her doula work with a 14-year old mom shows the power of this important program to improve infant health, strengthen families and establish supports for families to ensure ongoing family success.*

My client was 14 years old and five months pregnant when I started working with her, but the baby was small and the teen only weighed 100 pounds. I asked her to tell me what she had for breakfast. She said she hadn't eaten anything yet, and I told her she needed to eat something. We discussed the fetal brain, organs, and growth and development. She finally said, "We haven't had a refrigerator for over a month; that is why we don't have any food in the house. The landlord keeps promising that he will replace it but never does." I suggested they call the Health Department. At the next visit I asked again about the refrigerator; they still didn't have one. She asked if I would call the Health Department to complain about their situation, and I gladly did. At my next visit she greeted me with a big smile and invited me in. She said, "We have a refrigerator; the landlord brought it on the third day after you called," and she proceeded to tell me a list of food items she had in it. I felt a gradual trust happening. She was beginning to understand that I was there to support her and that the questions I asked were because I was concerned and not just being nosy. She was making me earn her trust.

She told me that she couldn't sleep, that she was afraid to go to sleep. She said, "Every night I have nightmares about her. It's too scary, Bina." I suggested she talk to the baby and tell her how much she loves her, to caress her tummy, to sing and read to her baby, to write letters to her baby, to play soft and relaxing music. I suggested she start showing off her tummy and be proud of her baby—that the baby will be happy and feel loved. She agreed to do it. On the following visits, she started to show me her tummy and how big her belly was. We both grinned from ear to ear with pride. There were no more complaints of sleepless nights.

She had lots of questions. Some I answered, and some I suggested she make a list and ask her doctor at her next prenatal appointment. She said she was too scared to talk. I told her, "This will show them how intelligent you are, that you ask very good questions." She said, "Ok, Bina." At her prenatal appointment, I was so proud and impressed when she started asking the doctor questions and clarifications regarding her previous visits and about her baby's health. When we stepped out of the room she looked at me and said, "The doctor was so different today." I said, "No, honey. It wasn't the doctor that was different, it was you because you asked all those good questions, and the doctor was happy to answer them."

During an afternoon home visit, my cell phone rang, and a sweet voice said, "Bina, I am in the hospital, and they are going to do a C-section because the placenta is separating." I said, "I am on my way." Initially, she said that she definitely did not want to breastfeed. I respected her decision, but still

explained the benefits. She agreed to pump. The baby weighed 2.5 lbs; every week she would relate to me how many ounces her baby had gained. At times she would say, "Bina, the baby is so small." I would say, "But you are giving your baby the best gift a mother can give to her baby; she will grow. Just keep saying, 'my baby is going to make it!'"

I asked her, "How does it feel to be a mommy?" She said that motherhood was beginning to kick in. The following week I went to visit her, and the baby was home! I asked her, "Are you getting enough sleep? How often does the baby wake to feed?" She said "She wakes up about three times during the night, but she falls back to sleep right after I nurse her." My eyes opened wide. She actually said NURSING. I asked, "How did you do it? Does the baby latch on ok?" She said, "Yes, one week before the baby came home I told the nurse that I will breastfeed when I get home, and the nurse said "Honey, you better start right now before you go home. Otherwise you might have some difficulty getting the baby to latch on.' So the nurse helped me." I congratulated her on what a great mom she was and how proud I was of her.

This GREAT MOTHER has completed the doula program and now comes to the parenting group; she stops by our office on her way. She places her baby in my arms with a big proud smile."