

## Teen Family Support Ensures Fathers are Fully Included

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When Francisco (Franky) and his girlfriend, Brianna, learned that they were going to be parents, they

were excited but also nervous. In their early 20s, they wondered if they were prepared. Franky was particularly concerned about Brianna's birthing experience and worried she wouldn't be treated well at the hospital.

Teen Family Support at Easterseals Serving Chicagoland and Greater Rockford was there to assuage the couple's fears, support them with resources and education, and provide them with a dedicated doula (a trained professional who provides continuous physical, emotional and informational support before, during, and shortly after childbirth.) They also ensured that Franky, not just Brianna, felt fully involved in the process every step of the way.

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"The program staff provided so much information and always gave me encouragement and reassured me that I was going to be a great dad," says Franky, who says he was able to ask all of his burning questions about parenthood ahead of his baby's arrival. "Most importantly, our doula ensured Brianna was taken care of during childbirth. The whole staff made us feel like we weren't alone; they believed in us and that made us believe in ourselves."

Franky was included—alongside Brianna and their doula, Angelica—in the development of the birth plan that would guide the medical intervention before, during, and after the baby's birth. Angelica shared information to empower both parents to speak up and share their expectations with the medical staff. She also demystified the labor process, explaining to both parents what to expect from labor, how things could deviate from the birth plan, and how Franky could assist during labor.

"Franky was a great support to Brianna during and after labor," explains Angelica. "He fed the baby during the golden hour (the hour after the baby is born) as mom had some complications after the birth, and I made sure to encourage and support Franky in his new role as Dad, as well as help keep him calm during a scary time."

Fortunately, Mom, baby, and Dad are all currently healthy and doing well. And while the labor did run into complications, Franky and Brianna felt prepared and supported to deal with the expected, as well as the unexpected, because of Teen Family Support.

"We welcomed a beautiful daughter named Cataleya and she's amazing! Being a parent during the newborn stage is rough, but I wouldn't change it for anything. I love being a dad and already see how much she has grown," says Franky, who credits Teen Family Support for making the transition to

parenthood easier. "I've already recommended Teen Family Support to a few of my friends. It's amazing what you guys do and I'm very appreciative."



## **Fathers are more involved in childrearing than ever.**

American fathers are more involved in childrearing than ever. The amount of time that fathers spend taking care of their children has increased an hour per week in the past two decades and while approximately 43 percent of fathers confessed to never having changed a diaper in 1982, that percentage has plummeted to around 3 percent. This welcome change in involvement levels means that programs and services (and public bathrooms with changing tables) need to meet today's fathers where they are: here and ready to be hands on!

Teen Family Support has stepped up to ensure fathers feel just as included as mothers in receiving support during the pregnancy process, birthing, and infancy. Teen Family Support assists pregnant and parenting teenagers or young adults (ages 13-25) living in Winnebago County with supports, resources, home visiting and doula services.

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"Over the past few years, we've really seen the interest from fathers increase. There's been a big uptick in the participation of dads, like Franky, who are involved in our hospital-attended doula births, as well as our home-visiting services. We are committed to capitalizing on that interest and we've been working to change our environment here to be more welcoming and inclusive of fathers and partners, as well as updating our marketing literature. We are also educating staff on how to appeal to fathers with trainings and are eliciting and incorporating our fathers' feedback to get better and better," says Beverly Redmond, Doula Supervisor at Teen Family Support.

Teen Family Support is not just available before and during birth, but also assists in developing and improving healthy parent-child relationships after birth. After the birth of Cataleya, Franky learned information about child development and attachment, safe sleep and the risks of co-sleeping with your infant, shaken baby syndrome, and the crucial the role of the father in raising healthy children.

"While in our program, Franky is also learning about more than just how to take care of his daughter, he is also learning other aspects of how to thrive as a father and individual by setting goals, taking care of his mental health as well as his physical health, and developing healthy communication with his partner," says Redmond. "We are thrilled to see Franky grow more and more as a father."