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Birth Center Profile:

Reading Midwife Center for Women’s Wellness

Tammy Witmer, CNM, WHNP-BC

Lyudmila (Lucy) Searce, CNM, WHNP

What exciting things are happening in your practice?

“We survived our first year!” They have obtained all needed facility payer contracts—a task that was, at times, a full-time job.

Based upon client feedback, they have started a postpartum support group that meets 4-5 times each month. Recognizing a growing need for perinatal mental health services, they are working with mental health practitioner interns.

What are you most proud of about your birth center?

“Our staff. They are dedicated and so often go above and beyond.” “Our strong support and skill at facilitating physiologic labor and birth. Safety comes first, but there is always room for the client’s voice and informed decision-making.”

“We are respected at the hospital and work well with the nurses and OB residents.” Tammy and Lucy have presented at department meetings and are involved in interprofessional education of midwives, nurses, and OB and Family Practice residents. They have also reached out to EMS personnel with tours, education, and collaborative drills.



What advice do you have for someone who is thinking about opening a birth center?

Tammy - “Don’t do it alone.” Find the right person - someone with the same practice philosophy and with skills that complement yours. Take time to recharge. Operating a birth center is time-intensive and challenging. You must take care of yourself so that you have the energy and resources to do the work.

Lucy – “Learn the business side of it very well and have someone you can turn to for advice.”



We recently had the opportunity to chat with Tammy Witmer and Lucy Searce, co-owners of the Reading Midwife Center for Women’s Wellness in Reading, PA.

The original birth center in Reading, McTammany Nurse-Midwifery Center, opened in 1978. It closed in 1985 and after a 2-year hiatus, the current birth center opened. Although they have gone through several different owners, the birth center has been in continuous operation since 1987 and midwifery is thriving in the area in all birth settings.

The last owner, a large area health system, announced that they were closing the birth center as a result of serious system-wide financial issues. Rather than having the birth center close, Tammy and Lucy made the decision to take over as owners. Their difficult decision was bolstered by the outpouring of community support that they received. Also, having attended births in all three settings, their hearts were in the birth center. Lucy noted that she simply would not practice in a hospital-only midwifery practice. “I feel strongly about having the birth center choice available in our community.”



Have an idea for a future newsletter topic? Let us know!

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What is Your Birth Center’s Greatest Challenge?

“Maintaining a work-life balance for the midwives and staff. This is mostly for on call providers. We try to make sure no one is on call "too much", but also want to have enough births so they aren't giving up their time and not getting called in. Lucy and I struggle the most as the owners and full time midwives, but we are glad to have a part time CNM. Our goal is to convert the part-time position to full-time in the near future so we can take more full weeks off.”

“The other struggle is trying to fully support physiologic birth while at the same time maintaining safety. We live in a community with many "birth keepers" and community midwives. Our birth center gets bashed for ‘only taking healthy clients’ and we get bashed for transferring per our guidelines-- or as they say ‘following rules’.”

“We live in a world where we are constantly balancing traditional midwifery with medical skill and knowledge. We are not medical enough for OB providers and not hands-off enough for those at the other end of the spectrum. It’s frustrating sometimes.”

Why do you think it is important for your Birth Center to be CABC-accredited?

CABC-accreditation helps us to keep both our care and the birth center safe. Having outside eyes look at what we are doing is very helpful. We are always open to improvement. It is also a selling point for potential clients and enhances our credibility with our medical and hospital colleagues.



What Changes Have Been Made at the Hospital Because of the Birth Center?

- Skin-to-skin and the Golden Hour
- Delayed cord clamping
- Vaginal breech birth at the hospital
- Resident education about the birth center and community birth. Our practice presents quarterly to the OB medical staff and serve as sort of a liaison between the hospital and community birth providers.



What Inspires You?

Tammy: “Those who made sacrifices in the past and helped to provide the foundation for what we are doing now.” “Relationships with clients and colleagues.” Tammy was a midwifery student at the birth center and decided that “This is the right way to do things.”




Lucy: “Herbalism. Other ways of treating our body and maintaining its function to the optimum level.”

Tell us something that most people don’t know about you?

Tammy: She is a avid soccer player and a doting grandmother with 12 grandchildren, including twins. “I bought a motorcycle and learned to ride, but couldn’t ride because there was no place to keep my midwife bag!”

Lucy: “I love gardening, trees, berries, flowers, and vegetables. I love drying flowers and making them into wreaths and arrangements It brings me joy. I am learning about wool and different ways to use it.”

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