



Hannah Longson accessed the support of rural registered midwife, Tarina Johnson, early on in her pregnancy and following the birth of her daughter, Juniper, now seven months. She appreciates the fact that RhPAP supports professional development for midwives and other health professionals through the Rural Education and Advanced Learning (REAL) program. — Photo supplied by Hannah Longson

Having a baby may be natural, but it can be an emotional, uncertain period in the lives of some women.

Thanks to RhPAP's Rural Education and Advanced Learning (REAL) program, people like Hannah Longson have some support in their pregnancy journeys.

Early on in her pregnancy, Longson was relieved to connect with Tarina Johnson, a registered midwife, who practised just down the street from her home, in Drayton Valley, a community about 1.5 hours southwest of Edmonton.

"It's really awesome to see that Tarina wants to stay up-to-date with the forever changing research of babies," says Longson, whose daughter, Juniper, is now seven months old.

"She was so respectful of the choices that I made."

Staying on top of the latest research is important to Johnson, who became a midwife in 2020. She enrolled in the online course, Breast/Chestfeeding for Healthcare Providers through Douglas College, just over a year ago so she could provide lactation support for the community and her business, Wild Rose Midwives.

Johnson says having the ability to take the course online was crucial since she was working 24/7 as her business partner was overseas at the time.

RhPAP helped fund the course, a cost Johnson says she wouldn't have been able to cover at the time due to other business expenses. Even though she completed her midwifery studies just five years before, she found the course beneficial.

"It was all new information that is something completely different than what the guidelines were saying when I was in school," says Johnson.

“There was quite a bit of information in the course, especially related to mastitis and clogged ducts. I had heard about the changes through a couple students, but this went more in depth.”



Lisa Froese holds her baby, Timothy, shortly after giving birth with the guidance of

registered midwife, Leesha Mafuru, left. — Photo supplied by Leesha Mafuru

Keeping up with the latest midwifery developments is also important to registered midwife Leesha Mafuru.

Fifty to 60 per cent of her births occur in the home with many Mennonite, Hutterite, and Reformed Dutch-practising women accessing Mafuru's services through, Cherry Blossom Midwives.

She was intrigued by the course, Reclaiming Childbirth, which aligns with the beliefs of many in her community of Taber and the surrounding area.

"This course was about reigniting our belief in natural birth and that most of the time, women's bodies can do it on their own," she explains.

"Of course, there is an appropriate time for intervention, but sometimes in medical practice, we kind of do too much, too soon."

Mafuru appreciates that REAL funding is available to assist with professional development, as was the case with her Australian-based online course.

"As midwives, we're independent practitioners, so we don't get ongoing education funded through our employer. REAL makes it a little bit easier and propels you to do it more often. The funding makes it less of a barrier."

[REAL](#) helps rural health professionals access continuing professional development and education opportunities that help them enhance the healthcare services they offer in their communities.

Applications for REAL's current intake will be accepted until Feb. 18.