
River Ridge East Birth Center- A Place to be Born

Van James, Honolulu, Hawai'i



If you had a choice of where you could be born this may well be the place! Hamilton, New Zealand, may not be on every unborn soul's wish list as a first stop on earth but if incarnation is inevitable then the River Ridge East Birth Center may be the best place to enter life.

Although it was quite late for me to drop-in during my present incarnation I figured "better late than never." I visited the center in my sixth decade of life, in my mature years, yet I can still appreciate this birthing place even from such a distant vantage point.

First of all, the architecture is formative and inviting. Art-work is sensitively displayed throughout the hallways, rooms and gathering places. The aesthetic environment of colorful paintings and photos, thoughtful sculptures and handcrafts infuses the entire Center. There are flow-form water features in a courtyard at the middle of the homey complex. There are four fully modern, well equipped, birthing rooms with adjoining en-suites and access to birth pools for pain relief and water births. The postnatal rooms have a soothing décor and are designed for a support person to join the mother and newborn. On their website it states: "The building has a multicultural character design, and with the qualities of 'warmth, welcoming, protective, daylight, privacy.' Auckland architect Bill Algie's brief was to design a birth center more like a 'cottage maternity home' than a medical building; it was not to look like a hospital – women who come here are not sick." This has been accomplished exceptionally well and of course the warm staff and professional midwives are the icing on the cake.

The focus of River Ridge East Birth Center is clearly easing women into motherhood. This starts with antenatal assessments by a midwife, and whanau-centered antenatal classes, leading to labor and birth. The mother and her new baby are cared for post-natally in a supportive environment with healthy food, assistance with establishing breastfeeding, rest and provided with general information about self and baby care. A visiting paediatrician is available for assessment and referral of minor baby problems and reassurance to the whanau (extended family). To encourage and support long-term breastfeeding a lactation consultant solves any feeding issues.





River Ridge East Birth Center is the head, heart and hand-child of midwife Clare Hutchinson. A graduate of the Amsterdam Waldorf School and a trained anthroposophical nurse, she and entrepreneur husband Warwick also were involved in founding the Waikato Waldorf School and, more recently, Kowhai Tui Childcare. Thoughts for the future are to extend the services offered at the Centre to include more early childhood services like baby development checks, hearing and vision checks and dietary advice. All of these endeavors have flourished over the years and the Center is presently undergoing an expansion to accommodate even more mothers and newborns.

Maternal mental health is under-acknowledged in today's society and requires a creative approach. In New Zealand's multicultural community the Center offers many individualized care programs to meet these diverse needs. Still, this presents challenges as well as great opportunities. On a cultural organizational level, the goal is to provide a positive, supportive environment which allows the individual to shine, be it mother, midwife or staff member. A free, continuing education program is open to all interested parties.

The Hutchinson's are forthcoming to note: "When providing a wonderful maternity service for mothers and babies it is also essential to have a clear focus and investment in the basic pedestrian amenities required like car parking, outside lighting, door locks, general cleanliness and building maintenance. There is a continual struggle between living up to and achieving an ideal, and the reality and limiting circumstances in which we work. Although we can have lofty ideas and dreams we must also remain grounded in the real world." This is really the brilliance of River Ridge East Birth Center; it brings together one of the most spiritual and most physical experiences we have in life—birth—and does it right by honoring both in equal measure.

So if you happen to know of any souls ready to be born you might want to direct them to this very special reception area into life. Or maybe it should be on your bucket list of places to checkout for the next time around.