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[INTRO]

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Welcome to a new episode of the BirthGuidePodcast. I'm Anne Nicholson Weber, and today I'm speaking with Kaitlin McGreyes, who is the founder of BeHerVillage, which is a new kind of online baby registry. Welcome Kaitlin.

Kaitlin McGreyes: [01:24](#)

Thank you so much, Anne. It's wonderful to be here.

Anne Nicholson Weber: [01:27](#)

I wonder if we can just start by having you dive into explaining exactly what is BeHerVillage and how it works.

Kaitlin McGreyes: [01:35](#)

Absolutely. So BeHerVillage is, at its most simplest, a gift registry for parents to get support instead of a bunch of baby stuff. So it works just like any other baby registry out there where you create a registry, you add the gifts that you'd like your friends and family to buy and you share it with your loved ones who then give you the gifts that you're interested in getting. However, BeHerVillage is all about support for the parents rather than getting overwhelmed with a bunch of baby stuff. Because in the United States, we have over 12 billion dollars each year spent on baby gifts and yet parents can't access basic support like postpartum care, meals, house cleaners, doulas, childbirth education, lactation support, pelvic floor PT -- all things that are really the standard of care everywhere else in the world. And so our gift registry is helping parents register for what they actually need -- support.

Anne Nicholson Weber: [02:40](#)

That is, I think, so cool. And I have the impression that a lot of people are resonating to this idea. Why do you think that is?

Kaitlin McGreyes: [02:51](#)

I think that people are really . . . there's a shift happening in our country. I think this next generation of parents is really different from their own parents in a big, wonderful way. I don't think that they want big houses filled with stuff. I think that they value their own self care way more than most generations before. And I think that they value experiences and experiential gifts versus material items. And I also think that people are waking up to what is wrong with our maternal healthcare system or lack thereof. I always try and put maternal healthcare system in quotes because it's truly a smattering of for-profit payers and providers and people who don't necessarily have the mother baby dyad's best interest at heart. And women and birthing people are waking up to the fact that their needs are not at the forefront of the system, not hospitals, not medical providers and certainly not big box retailers who are trying to convince them that they need thousands of dollars of gadgets and gear and plastic and stuff.

- Kaitlin McGreyes: [04:10](#) And what I think they're realizing is they really need is somebody to validate them, someone to show them the way, someone to help them learn how to advocate for themselves, someone to teach them how to get through this system, you know, unharmed. Someone to show them the way, to pass along this generational wisdom that we've passed along for eons. And there is a return to that in a lot of ways. And I think part of why BeHerVillage and what we're building here is resonating with people is because we're not saying to people, "Hey, this is what you need." They've been saying to us as doulas -- that's my background -- they've been saying to us, "I need you. I need this support. I need something different than what I'm getting" And all of the existing baby registries out there just keep talking to them about stuff they need.
- Kaitlin McGreyes: [05:02](#) And we are the only ones, the only ones out there that are saying you don't need that stuff, get support for yourself, get support first. Everything else will fall into place. It's literally our tagline: support, not stuff. And people are getting excited because it finally resonates. It finally resonates that, yeah, I actually need someone to help me figure out how to breastfeed or how to figure out how to get the baby to sleep or how to return to exercise or how to get ready for my birth instead of, you know, four different baby swings and bouncers and crib bumpers and whatever other crap is on the market today.
- Anne Nicholson Weber: [05:39](#) And those really cute baby clothes, which you do need a little bit.
- Kaitlin McGreyes: [05:43](#) So cute. But there's so many baby clothes! So one of the things we've been doing recently is interviewing various people, not even people that have used BeHerVillage, but just like people who have ever bought a baby gift or people who have already had their kids and received gifts. And the one thing that is said again and again, is just so many baby clothes. And they go to waste. You know, babies need like a few things sure, but they don't need \$20 onesies, no matter how cute they are. And they don't need all the same size and they don't need all of this stuff. And you have the American mother sitting in her home with hundreds and thousands of dollars of stuff. And I have to tell you -- this isn't something that is really being publicized all that much, but we're, we're working on it --
- Kaitlin McGreyes: [06:36](#) most of them, if not every single one we've interviewed, take that pile of stuff and they return it for cash and they return it to go pay for what they actually need, whether it be another thing or it be a lactation consultant or it be support for themselves. Because even mothers know-- like mothers know, especially --

that these nurseries filled with baby clothes and stuff is not, it's not really helpful. It's a beautiful token of generous well-intentioned friends and family members that do not have a better alternative for gifting. Right? There's so many people, everybody wants to support the new mom, especially people who've been through it because you know, you know how hard it is. Like those 4:00 AM feedings where you're like, how, how can I do this for another minute? I love my baby so much, but I can't do this anymore. Every single mother has faced that moment. I remember just desperately wanting, loving my baby and like wishing I could give him back <laugh> cause, cause it was all so sudden. And so when you give someone a gift to support it really just you're there in those moments, even if it's not you, it is the support team that you've helped fund that is uplifting and supporting that new mother. And it'll forever change her life and her trajectory of parenthood.

Anne Nicholson Weber: [08:02](#)

Maybe you could just give a couple of examples of specific gifts along these lines.

Kaitlin McGreyes: [08:08](#)

Oh, absolutely. So on BeHerVillage, you can go to our registry guide. We actually have a whole page with all the different types of support that is available. And anyone who already has their support teams lined up, can add any of those supports to their registries. But we have things from like, uh, doulas, midwives, birth center fees, postpartum doulas pelvic floor therapy, exercise classes, lactation, support, acupuncture, chiropractic care. We've had people are so creative too. Like we had somebody register for . . . "buy me my hot chocolate or my hot tea while I take my morning walk with the baby and the stroller." Like there's, there's just these feelings of support that you can send, uh, well wishes to. But it's really, really flexible for parents because the idea is that we're giving them the funds that they need to pay for their support.

Kaitlin McGreyes: [09:08](#)

And if we know one thing about birth, pregnancy, birth and parenthood, it is that it is unpredictable. Plans change. Babies have their own ideas. And you know, people say, "you make plans and God laughs." I say, "we make plans and babies laugh." <laugh> cause, cause that feels, at least that was my descriptor for motherhood. So what we do is we really just make it super flexible so that parents can register for those things that they're looking for and their friends and family send them money directly into their accounts, but with intentions. So it's not just like "here's a hundred dollars cuz I love you." It's "Hey, I really want you to have that doula support. I know that your birth is important to you. So I'm gonna chip in this money for that purpose." Similar for lactation consultants, pelvic floor

providers, childbirth education. It's pretty much anything that you can think of that supports a new parent during their entire journey is what you can register for on BeHerVillage.

Kaitlin McGreyes: [10:10](#)

I wanna also point out that one of the things that people do register for is stuff. We just had someone reach out to us and say, "I wanna buy . . . , forget what it was like, a crib or a dresser or something. I wanna buy this, uh, second hand. Can I create a fund on my registry for that?" And I said, "oh yeah, absolutely." People have already done that. They create diaper funds. They create stroller funds. They create secondhand furniture funds. It's not really about us dictating to parents what they need. It's about us giving parents the flexibility to register for the type of parenthood experience they would like.

Anne Nicholson Weber: [10:53](#)

So let's take a specific example, like someone who wants to have a home birth, which typically needs to be paid for out of pocket mm-hmm <affirmative> and the timing of this I'm interested in because you choose your provider early in pregnancy while the gifts tend to be given in the third trimester at a baby shower. So how does that work?

Kaitlin McGreyes: [11:14](#)

Yeah. I mean, it works similar to any other baby registry, right? Like you, you can do it two ways, right? You can set up your registry early, knowing that you want that early support and share it early. It's essentially, it's just like anything else. It's just putting yourself out there and letting people know how to support you. Since the pandemic, things have really shifted. I don't think people need like one gift buying occasion, right? Like the baby shower has sort of become . . . not obsolete necessarily but it used to be the entire focus. And I think since the pandemic and since our shift into the virtual, it's really changed because now it's as simple as like setting the intention of like, Hey, we're having home birth and we'd love our gifts of support to come in this way and you can send it earlier and people will fund earlier.

Kaitlin McGreyes: [12:10](#)

Part of what I love about BeHerVillage and this is like my doula heart getting excited about this, but it's really an exercise for many people the very first time of stating their needs and allowing themselves to be uplifted by their community. And it's not something a lot of people are comfortable with. I certainly wasn't, I'm learning still. And so yeah, sometimes it's just a matter of letting people know what you're doing and that you'd like their support doing it and allowing them to support you. And it doesn't necessarily have to be attached to a specific gift giving occasion. The other thing I would say is that if you have the funds available, you can pay for those supports upfront and

then have your gifts sort of replenish that account. One of the, one of the best emails we got was from a person, a birth worker,

Kaitlin McGreyes: [13:01](#)

I believe she was a doula in Michigan. And we had never had contact with her and she wrote to us and said, "I love what you guys are doing. I have a doula client who was struggling to pay. And she had set up this very long term payment plan. It was uncomfortable for her to even ask for it. And she started her BeHerVillage registry and she came in and paid me in full." And so I think that is also part of where this can shift is like, you can, you can set up the payment plans, you can figure out how to pay, but then use BeHerVillage and use this sort of anchor event of the baby shower in order to pay for the things that you actually want to get as you become a parent.

Anne Nicholson Weber: [13:48](#)

A lot of the services are . . . well, there certainly are hugely expensive things that people can ask for, for their baby showers. But in general, I would imagine that the kinds of services and support that you're talking about tend to be more expensive than most gift givers are comfortable doing in a single lump. So how do you get people . . . do people go in together? Is there like a share, like you can buy one 10th of a birth doula <laugh> and that's part of the register or how does that work?

Kaitlin McGreyes: [14:18](#)

Yep. That's exactly how it works. So there are two main obstacles that I thought of. I was a doula for five years before I created BeHerVillage. And the doulas before this really weren't able to access the baby shower market, right? There's billions of dollars being spent. And yet we're told all the time, "oh, I can't afford your services" by people who are then a month later pushing a \$900 stroller. There's a real disconnect. And for some reason, doulas were not -- and birth workers in general were not able to tap into this gift buying occasion. And I saw two obstacles there. One is that it is so intimate choosing a lactation consultant, a doula, a pelvic floor therapist, any of these people who are going to be in your personal space in your laboring time. It is so intimate and so special that you can't buy one of those things the way you would buy a onesie or a stroller or something that's a little more impersonal. So BeHerVillage helps remove that obstacle of intimacy because parents are able to register for exactly the support they want and the provider that they want to get that support from.

Kaitlin McGreyes: [15:15](#)

Secondly, is the price. Of course, the typical gift bought for a baby shower is between \$25 and \$125. And most of the services and support that's available to parents is well, well above that. So with BeHerVillage, it's like a small fund where if you have a thousand dollars needed for your doula, people can donate \$5

to that. They can gift a hundred dollars sometimes. And it's amazing when it happens. Sometimes a family member will come -- usually the grandparent, or like a wealthy aunt I think will come -- and just fund the entire doula. But it's really, really flexible because we want people to be able to buy a gift in the price range that they are comfortable buying. And in talking to people who gift to new parents, we're actually seeing that many of them go in together. So we're making it really easy for people to just like shoot a text to their group text and say, "Hey, here's the support we wanna fund. It's 50 bucks each. Let's do it." And that sort of thing.

Anne Nicholson Weber: [16:44](#)

If you could describe what you think is a, almost a minimal package of care that would be ideal for most families, what would that look like?

Kaitlin McGreyes: [16:54](#)

Oh, that's such a great question. So actually we have that set up on our registry. So if you go to BeHerVillage.com and make a registry, we start every body off with registry services already set up. That's so that number one, they can see what it looks like. But number two, they can start thinking about things that they haven't necessarily thought of. So for me, it is a birth doula, a hundred percent: a birth doula. You need support, you need to learn how to advocate, no matter what birth you're planning, it's good to find your voice and have somebody specifically there for you during your birth. Number two, childbirth education. With birth having gone into the hospitals over the past 100 to 150 years, there is this gap in the generational knowledge. We used to be surrounded by people birthing and breastfeeding and parenting and raising their babies.

Kaitlin McGreyes: [17:46](#)

And now that has sort of disappeared behind locked maternity wards. And so coming into your birth and getting childbirth education is so, so, so critical just to get a baseline of thinking about "what should I think about?" It's like, we don't even know what we don't know when we go into our birth. So childbirth education, birth doula. And lactation support. If you do want to breastfeed, which many of the people that come to BeHerVillage do, that is part of their intention, then having lactation support lined up ahead of time is critical. Do not take weeks and weeks to figure out if this is gonna work. If there's any doubt, if you need just reassurance, I would be in touch with a lactation consultant earlier than later, even before you have your baby get on the phone with someone and have that relationship made so that if there is any issue coming up, you can get the support immediately.

Kaitlin McGreyes: [18:37](#) And last but not least -- definitely not least -- we round it out with pelvic floor physical therapy. Our pelvic floor is this incredibly important basket of muscles that connects every major part of our body together and is deeply impacted by parenthood and pregnancy and childbearing. So pelvic floor PT in other countries is standard. It's just what you get when you get pregnant and after you give birth. So we like to put that on the starter registry just to get people either thinking, "oh yeah, I know I need that." Or people saying, "oh, what's a pelvic floor and why do I need a PT for them?" So that would be my four basic like minimal registry starter kit: doula, childbirth education, lactation support, and pelvic floor PT.

Anne Nicholson Weber: [19:32](#) And when you said doula, I think we're talking about birth doula. What about postpartum doula care?

Kaitlin McGreyes: [19:36](#) I think postpartum doula care is essential and we need to de-stigmatize it. And that's part of what we're trying to do with BeHerVillage. There is this, there is this stigma that only bougie people use postpartum doulas. And I'm like making a face right now because that's the attitude. We have this snotty, like, "Ugh, we're gonna judge her. What a bitch for getting a baby nurse," you know? And it's like, oh, hold on. We all should have that. Why are we judging other people for getting basic support? Absolutely. Postpartum support is having someone come in and just mother you as you mother your baby, helping you answer your questions, helping validate the wild roller coaster of emotions that you're having, helping you figure out how after living your life on an eight hours of sleep wake cycle to then switch to an every three hours cycle, how to handle the anxiety that spikes when you're fully, you know, the only caregiver for a tiny little dependent being that you've never loved anything more in your entire life.

Kaitlin McGreyes: [20:46](#) It is a wild experience to become a parent. I think postpartum care, it's vital. It's absolutely vital to new parents. And again, the United States is the only country in the developed world that does not guarantee in-home postpartum care. Every other mother in the developed world is having health visitors come, midwives come, nurses come, and people are looking at parents and teaching them and showing them and ushering them through this transition. And instead of American mothers thinking this is something that's bougie, it really should be something that we all demand. And I wanna also . . .like the reason we consider it bougie is because only wealthy people can afford it right now. And that's just, that's just the fact. Money and finances are the barrier to care in our country. Because even

insurance, you know . . . usually it's like, "oh, well I have good insurance."

Kaitlin McGreyes: [21:42](#)

Well, no insurance in the U.S. is covering postpartum doulas, is covering postpartum in-home care -- and it should. And in the meanwhile you can at least go register for it and get some funds from your community to be able to get this support that's basic everywhere else, that mothers just get everywhere else. I think that every single mother should have access to what Rihanna is having right now, right? Like all these celebrities that we watch who are snapping back into their bodies and who are posting on Instagram all their things, they have a team of people behind them, and we're not seeing that. And we don't have access to that. And I think every single one of us deserves access to get that sort of care.

Anne Nicholson Weber: [22:25](#)

I feel like BeHerVillage is addressing a number of cultural trends that I can think about. And one is materialism. And another is how mobile the society is so, that people aren't around their community that they grew up in, where their grandmother is, where their best friends are. There's so much less of a built-in local structure for support. And then a last thing I would say is rituals. You were talking about the baby shower and how all this well-meaning love is being expressed through the giving of stuff. And I guess that goes to the materialism in our culture, that many of our rights of passage, maybe even most, and our high holidays are marked primarily with the giving of things. Mm-hmm <affirmative> I was interested your . . . at the beginning, you talked about what you see as a cultural shift in terms of a new generation looking for something different. Where, how do you observe that? Where have you picked that up as a trend?

Kaitlin McGreyes: [23:32](#)

Well, I think it's in spending patterns. Quite frankly, this newer generation of parents, they are known for having smaller homes, for having less stuff, for rejecting that handing down of all their parents' things. Uh, they are known to spend more money on local sustainable companies and products. So they really value where their money goes, how it impacts the future of this earth and the climate and our ability to live on it. There's also a real shift into care, right? Like this next generation speaks openly about going to therapy. They speak openly and vulnerably about the things that are going on for them. There's also been a major shift in the way people are choosing their support teams for birth. In a recent study that actually ended in like 2012 -- which we know already in the past 10 years there's been a major shift -- but doula-supported births went up by a

hundred percent. There was a hundred percent increase. They doubled.

Kaitlin McGreyes:

[24:42](#)

Doula-supported births, midwifery-supported births, both in home and in hospital, went up. Home birth rates are increasing. So people are truly waking up to a desire for something different. And that pairs quite perfectly with our awareness of our abysmal maternal mortality rates, of our abysmal birth injury rates, of our abysmal perinatal mood and anxiety disorder rates. There's a failure happening at the systemic level. We are failing mothers across the board and there is a shift happening in so many ways. I mean, people are getting active. People are looking at the status quo and saying, this isn't good. So they're, they're getting more active politically, but they're also choosing differently where their dollars go. But the mountain that we are standing in front of is convincing gift buyers, convincing the people who are opening their wallets, that these are important gifts. And so we are, we're working on, you know, ways to educate the gift buyer about what they're buying, why it's important, but also how impactful it is. Like literally I just scheduled an email out for our gift givers with a video from parents that have received support and parents that haven't, and it's a tear jerker. And I think there's a need for people to speak up about their stories and to tell their stories of what gifts meant to them.

Anne Nicholson Weber: [26:21](#)

I'm thinking that part of the challenge is that many of the gift givers are of a different generation, right? That in general it's the parents and the grandparents who are gonna give the biggest gifts. And they're not people who have made this shift culturally, necessarily -- their children are asking for something that they never had and never even occurred to them they would want. Is there any way to address . . . I mean, you're talking in general about talking to gift buyers, but is there anything specific about addressing that generation gap?

Kaitlin McGreyes:

[26:52](#)

I mean, that's, that's really what it is. We've been talking to gift buyers now, and there's such a distinct difference between the older generation who is like, literally telling us, "if it's on their registry and I don't get it, I'm just gonna buy my own thing." And the younger generation who's like, "oh, it's on their registry. Cool. I don't know. I sent a group text and we all just chipped in." At the core of BeHerVillage is that we trust women. We trust mothers and we trust parents. So when we are setting up this registry that puts funds directly into the pockets of parents, we trust them that they will know what they need and they will spend that money on what they need. And I think that part of our job with BeHerVillage is to build that trust in that older

generation to say, Hey, she's got it. She knows what she needs. Here's how it's gonna impact. Here's where you can, you know, share your wisdom and, and still kind of like get that urge of, of showing her the way without buying her something she's not interested in. So we're building that bridge between gift givers and the people that they love. And it's gonna be a long road, but it's one we're on and we're gonna do it until the shift happens because it needs to happen.

Anne Nicholson Weber: [28:14](#)

And the way that people are responding to your idea, I think is a sign that there's a general, in-the-zeitgeist feel that this shift needs to happen. So well, I am so grateful to you for talking to me about BeHerVillage, which I personally think is a genius idea.