



Annual Report 2014-15





Dedicated to Sheila Kitzinger

Sheila was our Honorary President and is the reason Birth Companions exists at all. Having launched a campaign to get female prisoners out of handcuffs during childbirth, she recognised the hardship and isolation that this group of women faced and sent out an appeal for action which led to our formation. Through the years she was always there for Birth Companions whenever we asked, helping us as we grew with fundraising and utilising her amazing contacts when we had issues which we were unable to resolve. She was an inspiration to many and we shall miss her.

Summary

Birth Companions is a small, unique charity, offering practical and emotional support to the most vulnerable pregnant women and new mothers in prison and in the community. This much needed service is provided by our dedicated team of volunteers and staff.

Our overall aim is to improve the wellbeing of pregnant women and new mothers who are, have been or are at risk of being detained.

Our specific aims are to:

- improve their mental health and well being
- reduce their isolation
- enable them to give their babies the best possible start in life
- improve their conditions

The women we support are some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in the UK. Many of them are dealing with a complex range of needs, typically including mental health and substance misuse problems, experience of domestic and sexual violence, trafficking, asylum issues and unstable housing. What they all have in common is a general lack of support which can impact negatively on both mother and baby health in the short and long term.

Being pregnant, giving birth and becoming a mother is a hugely important and life-changing time for a woman. Research has shown that if a woman feels well-supported around the time of giving birth she is better able to look after her baby. If women are supported in bonding with their babies and are encouraged to feel positive about their role as a mother at this very early stage, this will provide them with a strong basis for parenting in the future. Our intervention at a time of particular vulnerability, but also of hope and change, helps women to seize the opportunity to make positive changes in their lives and give their babies a better start in life.

CURRENT SERVICES

In Prison

We support women in prison through pregnancy with weekly groups and one-to-one contact. We ensure they have the information and support they need to make choices about their pregnancy and birth. Women tell us that their time with us allows them to feel like a pregnant woman rather than a prisoner.

Where possible we provide birth support to women who would otherwise give birth alone apart from medical staff and/or prison officers. We are able to offer a woman emotional support, companionship and advocacy during her labour. We continue to provide postnatal support during her stay in hospital, often giving specialist support with breastfeeding and/or helping a woman prepare for being separated from her baby if she does not have a place on a Mother and Baby Unit.

We also offer support to women postnatally on their return to prison, either on a Mother and Baby Unit or if they have been separated from their baby.

In the Community

We provide post-release support for pregnant women and new mothers who have left prison through what can be a challenging and isolating time. We also support women who, because of their past experiences and complex needs, are extremely vulnerable and face serious health and social inequalities. This includes women who will not have care of their babies after they are born due to the involvement of social services: an area where there are few services or guidelines on supporting women in this situation. We have extensive experience in providing support in this unbearable situation.

Working for Change

Our experience means that we really understand what improvements are needed in the treatment of vulnerable pregnant women and new mothers whether they are in prison or living in the community. We seek to raise awareness of the needs of the women we work with and to influence changes in policy and law in order to improve conditions for vulnerable women around the time of birth.

Our service also offers an important model for other services in the UK and abroad. Where possible we offer support to other groups who are looking to support vulnerable pregnant women around the country.

Chair's report

Looking back, it has been an exciting year for Birth Companions. We have launched a new service in Bronzefield prison, providing pregnant women and new mothers with one-to-one and group-based support. We also set up a new pilot project delivered by doulas in Peterborough. Meanwhile, we continued to provide support to pregnant women in Holloway prison as well as new mothers who were separated from their baby because they did not have a place in a mother and baby unit.

New activities have meant that we have almost doubled the number of women we supported in prison since last year. Our Community Link project in London has seen a 20% increase in the number of women supported and a relative growth of 7% in the number of contacts with women: we are seeing more women a greater number of times.

In addition, we continued to be involved in two important pieces of research funded by the LankellyChase Foundation. One of these studies is investigating the impact of our Community Link project whilst the other is comparing the birth outcomes of the women we support with those of other women. Finally, we continued to work with PramDepot, an arts and recycling project run by one of our volunteers and funded by the Arts Council which acts as a store for all the second-hand baby clothes and goods that are donated to us and which we pass onto women who need them.

Another important part of Birth Companions' work is to raise awareness about the needs of the women we support. This year we organised several events to bring together women who had used our services in the community in order to collect further feedback and information from them on what women need around this time.

It is our 19th year working with mothers and babies in prison. This year, we have been bringing together all this expertise, including feedback from the women themselves, in the form of a Birth Charter. We hope to use this to raise awareness, share good practice and improve the experiences of future mothers and babies in prison.

As ever, none of our work would have been possible without the dedication and enthusiasm of our volunteers who work with women in the most sensitive, non-judgemental way, empowering women in the most difficult of circumstances. These volunteers are, in turn, supported by the work of our wonderful staff team and trustees whose hard work and commitment also should be acknowledged.

Over the coming year, we will be embarking on a strategic and operational review to ensure that our plans for the future fit the changing context in which we are working, that we have the appropriate infrastructure to support our plans and that we continue to deliver services of the highest-quality.

Diana Parkinson, Chair of Trustees

"thanks to the women we journey with - so resilient in the face of adversity, and such loving mothers".

Director's Report

2014-15 has been a year of great change for Birth Companions and the expansion of our services has been challenging but rewarding for the organisation.



We have seen exponential growth in the number of women we supported, working with 120 pregnant women and new mothers in Holloway, Bronzefield and Peterborough prisons and giving intensive one-to-one support to 52 women in the community in London and Peterborough. Of course growth is only a good thing if we are still able to maintain the approach which impacts on the lives of very vulnerable women in a way unlike any other organisation. The women we support have common backgrounds of trauma and severe disadvantage giving rise to multiple, complex needs. The individual challenges they face are set against a backdrop of deepening public service cuts, particularly in the prison service. The testimonies you will read in this report demonstrate how staff and volunteers work with women in this environment, and what a difference it makes to them and their families.

Women facing significant health inequalities tell us our support helped them make informed choices during pregnancy, birth and motherhood and improve their parenting skills. Those in unbearable situations, such as being separated from their children, tell us that Birth Companions helped them feel supported, cared for and better able to cope. Mothers who are alone tell us they felt less isolated and have been helped to access other services as a result of our support.

Thanks first to our funders, supporters and partners without whom this work would not happen. To our staff and volunteers who pour so much love into their support. Finally, thanks to the women we journey with - so resilient in the face of adversity, and such loving mothers.

Naomi Delap, Director

Overview of the year

Although we were working with many more women, in two new prisons and in a new city, we were determined to keep our very woman-centred way of working which is about listening and being sensitive to women's needs, being non-judgemental and empowering women. It is also about having an awareness that the women we are working with are very likely to have experienced trauma of some kind. Our approach is trauma-informed and conducive to women feeling more physically and emotionally safe around the birth of their baby.

120 of the women we worked with were in Holloway, Bronzefield or Peterborough prisons, either pregnant, on a Mother and Baby Unit (MBU) or separated from their baby. We ran 65 pregnancy groups for women in prison, covering topics such as breathing and positions for labour, skin-to-skin contact, breastfeeding and bonding. Since the closure of Holloway's MBU, women who will be able to keep their babies with them are transferred to Bronzefield or Peterborough prison, which both have MBUs. As well as continuing to provide women in prison with information and practical and emotional support, it is now really valuable to be able to give women from Holloway continuity of support as they make this difficult transfer to a new prison to give birth.

Our Community Link service in London provides intensive support for women who are isolated and marginalised for a variety of reasons. These include women fleeing situations of violence and conflict and those affected by mental health, disability, homelessness, domestic violence, drug and alcohol misuse, and having recently been released from prison. The women we worked with also faced significant challenges in accessing care and services because of economic and other disadvantages; 61% of women spoke

English as a second language. Several women had been moved to temporary accommodation far from their hospital and needed financial assistance to get to or from hospital or even to call us when going in to labour. Almost all women were in need of essential items for their baby or themselves and we have been able to provide more practical items than ever this year through PramDepot, an amazing project started by one of our volunteers.

This year, two women who have been a great source of inspiration to us passed away. Sheila Kitzinger brought Birth Companions into being and then became our Honorary President. Sheila influenced many of us through her writing and in training sessions and meetings, and she was always there at the end of a phone for advice and support with our work. Helen Bamber was another great woman who influenced our work with women in the community. Helen set up the Helen Bamber Foundation, who refer women to us who have experienced human rights abuses. We were lucky enough to spend a day with Helen in 2011 when she ran a session for us on the work of the Foundation and we established what has become one of our most important partnerships.

All of this work would not be possible without the input of our staff, sessional workers and volunteers (birth companions and trustees), who are an extraordinary group with a passion for supporting the women we work with. They come from a variety of backgrounds and life experiences. Some have come through work in pregnancy and birth, others through family or breastfeeding support and others through their own life experiences.

The vast majority of visits to women and all our birth support in London is carried out by birth companion volunteers. They undertake a year of training for this role which could include visiting a pregnant woman to listen and talk through her hopes and fears for giving birth, staffing our 24-hour birth line or leaving home at 1am to be with a woman in labour in hospital overnight. I love a description given by one of our volunteers of Birth Companions as "a moveable village or family - a network of brilliant women ready to assemble...and ensure that these most precious moments in women's and babies' lives are as they should be - surrounded and supported."

Denise Marshall, Group Coordinator

2014-15

This year we provided support to a total of 164 women during pregnancy, birth and early parenting. This involved:

Supporting 120 pregnant women in prison.

Supporting 52 pregnant women in the community.

Being with 29 women giving birth, and/or in the following hours or days while in hospital.

Giving postnatal support to 38 new mothers in prison.

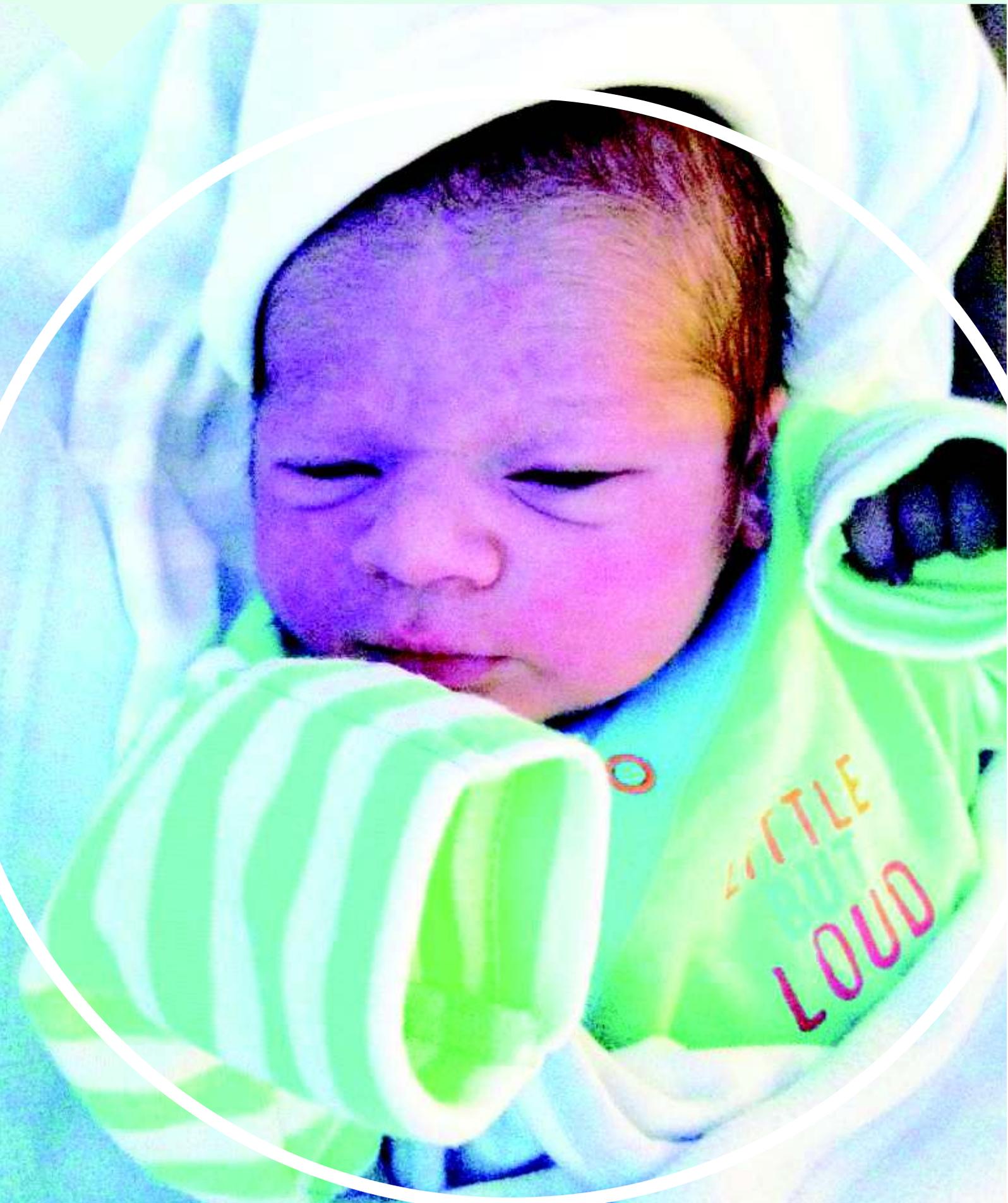
Providing 40 new mothers in the community with postnatal support.

Helping 68 women with breastfeeding support and information.

74 prison visits.

a 24-hour, 7-day a week birth support phone line, run by our volunteers.

a weekly pregnancy group for pregnant women in HMP Holloway and HMP Bronzefield.



Community Link Project - London

It's been a really busy year for the Community Link Project. We have supported more women than ever.

Almost 60% of the women we have worked with are asylum seekers. Many have recently arrived in the UK, pregnant and with little or no support and we have been able to offer them unconditional support through the perinatal period. Asylum seekers are less likely to have had any antenatal preparation, often have nothing ready for the baby, and are unlikely to have friends or family to be at the birth or visit afterwards. This is very worrying for them, and can cause severe stress and anxiety.

There are many ways in which we support asylum seekers and all of the other women we work with to help alleviate this stress and anxiety. We offer one-to-one antenatal sessions with one of our experienced antenatal teachers, sometimes with an interpreter if needed. We provide practical items for mum and baby through PramDepot, and can supply all of the essential items for her hospital bag and for when she brings her baby home.

When I meet a woman for the first time, I often find that she expresses an enormous sense of relief when she knows she can call us day or night if she would like us to be at her birth. When she finds out we will visit her in hospital and bring her the essential items she and her baby

need, many times the reaction is total disbelief. A lot of these women have had such bad experiences that the realisation that we can be there, just for her, with whatever she needs is at first difficult to comprehend.

This year, more than ever, our birth companions have demonstrated a deep level of shared humanity throughout. Our volunteers continue to deliver unconditional woman-centred, tailor-made support to women in significant need, and I am proud and honoured to be a part of this work.

Katie Bottle, Community Link Coordinator

Pregnancy and complex needs

The vulnerable women we support in the community face many challenges.

- Rates of perinatal depression are higher amongst women experiencing disadvantages such as poverty or social exclusion. This has been shown to contribute to the poor mental health of their children in the short, medium and long term.
- The stress caused by issues such as poor housing, domestic violence and poverty can exacerbate symptoms of anxiety and depression.
- On average pregnant women with complex health and social needs book later than other women for their antenatal care. Late booking is associated with poor obstetric and neonatal outcomes.
- It has been estimated that there are approximately 500 pregnant women seeking asylum in the UK. Despite recognition of the complex social and health needs of pregnant women seeking asylum in the NICE guidance, the UK Border Agency has only acknowledged pregnancy as representing a very limited health need unless there is a major pregnancy complication.
- A woman who is experiencing domestic abuse may have particular difficulties using antenatal care services. For example, the perpetrator of the abuse may try to prevent her from attending appointments; the woman may be afraid that disclosure of the abuse to a healthcare professional will worsen her situation.
- All of the pregnant women living in temporary accommodation interviewed as part of a study carried out by the Maternity Alliance felt that their pregnancy had been negatively affected by their housing issues.
- There is a high incidence of unplanned pregnancy among young women living in homelessness centres. An estimated 76% of young homeless women surveyed by Crisis were going ahead with their pregnancy.
- Additional issues creating health risks for pregnant women seeking asylum include traumatic experiences undergone in conflict and war zones including rape, trafficking for sexual exploitation, and reluctance to seek maternity care because of fears about immigration status.



Irma's Story

My name is Irma and my daughter's name is Hayley and my son's name is David. Hayley is three years old and David is one. I found Birth Companions through the Helen Bamber Foundation. I was pregnant with David and didn't have anyone to be with me when I gave birth.



The day my labour started I had seen the midwife and she said I wasn't in labour. I was very confused but I spoke to someone from Birth Companions on the phone and she helped to explain everything. Once I was in established labour, Birth Companions sent someone to be with me but the hospital turned her away because they didn't understand why she was there. But as soon as I had given birth to David, I let Birth Companions know and someone came to see me – I felt so good when she came because I didn't have any visitors until that moment – she got some nice food for me. She asked me what I needed. She also helped me to breastfeed my baby.

After I went home, Birth Companions continued to visit me. I was visited by a few different birth companions who gave me a lot of help. I was alone with two kids, I couldn't go out shopping, even to get food for my daughter because I had just given birth. They helped me and brought me all the necessities you need for a baby that I couldn't get for myself: nappies, wipes, breast pads. I will never forget this because it helped me so much.

They also continued to support me with breastfeeding. This was really helpful because when I had my daughter I had no support and it was very difficult, but this time having the help made it a much better experience and a lot easier – they taught me so much.

The midwife only came to see me at home once but it was really hard for me to get out of the house with a new baby so soon after giving birth and with a two-year-old. Birth Companions helped me by coming to my postnatal appointments with me. Eventually they gave me a double buggy which meant I could get around more easily. I could get to the shops and buy food for my kids and take them out to the park. Birth Companions encouraged me to go to a playgroup and now I've met some other women in my local community. I've also met some women through the playgroup at the Helen Bamber.

Birth Companions visited me regularly for three months after David was born. They always checked to find out what I needed – clothes for the baby and so forth. I felt so much warmth from them, they felt like my family. I don't have anyone here apart from my children, it's just us. The emotional support was great – it couldn't have been better.

I'm so happy to be able to tell my story – anything I can do to help Birth Companions after they helped me so much.

Thank you doesn't seem like enough.

Irma

Prison Work

This past year has been an exciting one of expansion, development and relationship-building as we have started to work in two new prisons and offer continuity of support to pregnant women and new mothers in custody.

In June 2014, we first visited HMP Bronzefield in Surrey to discuss how we could best introduce and deliver our services to the women in prison there. We were warmly welcomed and supported by the staff on Bronzefield's Mother and Baby Unit (MBU) and in July we ran our first pregnancy group at the prison. We used our experience of delivering pregnancy groups and antenatal support in HMP Holloway and mirrored this model in Bronzefield. It went brilliantly and we were encouraged and motivated by the positive response we got from the women we met. In September 2014, we began visiting Bronzefield once a week to run a pregnancy group and to visit new mothers and their babies in the prison's MBU.

Now, almost a year on, our work in HMP Bronzefield continues to develop. The tried and tested model of support we have been delivering in Holloway for so long has given us a firm foundation on which to base our approach and tailor our services in Bronzefield. We have learnt how best to engage with vulnerable women who may be resistant or reluctant to access or accept support. We know which antenatal topics are most important to women in prison and our experience has taught us how to use teaching aids and lead discussions that are relevant and appropriate in a prison context.

As Holloway no longer has an MBU, a considerable number of the pregnant women we meet there apply for a place on a unit in HMP Bronzefield and also HMP Peterborough. Our services in Bronzefield coupled with our pilot project in Peterborough gives us the chance to offer ongoing support to women who transfer from Holloway to either of these prisons. This puts us in the unique position of being able to offer cross-prison support to pregnant women and new mothers; something that no other organisation is currently doing. Our working relationships with staff in all three prisons helps us to ensure that continuity of care and information sharing can be facilitated during this very disruptive and confusing time for women in this situation.

Our move into other prisons has given me the chance to expand my role within the organisation and to take more of a lead in the delivery and development of our support services for women in custody. My new job title - Holloway & Bronzefield Prison Co-ordinator - comes with the responsibility for co-ordinating our prison visiting teams in both prisons. I plan and help to deliver our pregnancy groups and liaise with staff and other support agencies to make referrals and recommendations based on a woman's individual needs and circumstances.

I often meet women in Holloway who then go on to transfer to Bronzefield which is hugely rewarding. The women welcome seeing a friendly face in an otherwise strange and unfamiliar place and we have noticed that women are more likely to engage with our antenatal and postnatal support if they have been able to establish a trusting supportive relationship with us early on in their pregnancy.

More so than ever before, my work as a birth companion has taken on new challenges, rewards and directions. We have learnt and continue to learn so much from our work with the incredibly vulnerable, but in many ways inspiring, women we meet in prison. I feel privileged to be part of their journey through pregnancy, birth and parenthood and proud to be part of such a special and unique organisation.

Abbi Ayers, Holloway & Bronzefield Prison Coordinator

Laura's Story

My name is Laura and this is my story. When I was 21 I did something stupid that would shape the rest of my life. This stupid thing landed me in trouble with the law and on bail for over two years. Living my life as normally as I could on police bail, I eventually came to the conclusion I would not be going to prison, the arrest was a long time ago, and I was told by my solicitor I would most likely get a suspended sentence. During that time I met a man that I fell in love with and I was working in a full time job, then suddenly I had a call from my solicitor that I had to attend court. Only a week before that I had found out I was pregnant.

At five months pregnant I had to attend court but I thought no way on earth could they send me to prison. I would never fit in, I was educated and had come from a good upbringing and from a little village. I have never been so wrong in my life. When they said the words 'Guilty', I couldn't believe my ears. I cried and held my bump in my hands and shouted out 'my baby'. I was sentenced to three years and ten months which actually meant I could keep my baby with me for the whole sentence. It sounds ironic but I was so grateful. I went to HMP Holloway at five months pregnant and I left prison when my daughter was 15 months old.

Being pregnant in Holloway was a very lonely and dark time in my life. The joys of being pregnant were completely ruined by being in prison. No one to feel your baby kicking apart from inmates. Nobody to talk to about your worries and fears. The officers monitoring you. I could not talk to them in fear that if I said something like 'I'm scared' or 'I feel so down', they would not let me keep baby, it was horrible. Then I was introduced to Birth Companions. What a breath of fresh air, someone non-judgemental who really did care. Birth Companions offered support and listened. Any concerns or worries they would try and help. The closest you would get to a friend inside prison.

Being in prison and having hospital appointments in a community hospital was an awful experience. When I was eight months pregnant and had to go for a late scan, I was handcuffed on the way to my appointment. It was so degrading, people looking at you and judging. It was the worst feeling in the world. Incidents like this you can talk to Birth Companions about, they can at least listen and help you get over the experience.

While I was in labour I had two prison officers at the end of my bed. I was having difficulties, which I am sure was partly because of being so stressed having officers present. The birth companion with me asked them to wait outside the room. I felt a lot more at ease then. My mum, dad and partner had to travel 100 miles to get to me. If the birth companion hadn't been there it would have just been me and the officers in the room. Thank God she was there. She rubbed my back to ease the pain, an officer couldn't do that. She was brilliant and as soon as my family arrived she took a step back and let my mum take over, but was still there for support.

Not only did Birth Companions offer great support but they also gave great advice to set me up with breastfeeding, which to me is the most important thing any woman can do for their baby. They ran groups in Holloway about how to breastfeed. The groups were a nice thing as it allowed time for you to focus on your baby and forget that you're in prison for a while. I breastfed my daughter for a whole year, and six years after having my daughter I'm currently breastfeeding my son who is two years old. I have breast fed for three years of my life, which is a great achievement.

Once I returned to Holloway from the hospital it was not nice. I'd had a caesarean and there was no one to help me. The guilt of taking a baby back to prison is a memory that is still very raw to me. An innocent child spending time in a prison cell, it still makes me cry now.



I transferred to HMP Peterborough when my daughter was four-weeks old. HMP Peterborough had an outside garden with space, grass and at last I could feel the sunlight. I was nearer to my family so saw them more often and I handed my daughter out regularly to my family so they could bond with her. I would express milk and store it in the prison freezer. The prison and the senior officer were really good and let me hand my milk out. They also never forced me to go to education they let me stay mostly on the unit so I could breastfeed my baby. While I was in Peterborough my partner found an open prison in York called HMP Askham Grange. As soon as I heard about that I asked to transfer there and moved there five months later.

At Askham Grange the MBU was a few minutes' walk down a hill from the main prison. There was gardens and a pond and ducks. Even now I can show people pictures of my daughter playing in the grounds and you would never know it was a prison. Although we all still wanted to go home, it was a less stressful environment. The health visitor was lovely too, she took me out in the community to give a talk on breastfeeding to the pregnant mums. This was a real confidence boost as no one knew I was in prison and they all wanted advice from me. It was a lovely feeling to try helping others - I felt like a human again not just a prison number.

I think prison made me a better mum. It helped me concentrate fully on my daughter. I am extremely close with her and will be eternally grateful that she supported me through the most difficult time of my life. I was released seven years ago. I have managed

to fit back into life as I have support and I have people around me who have helped me financially. I have also managed to maintain my relationship with my partner. I have used this bad experience and tried take a positive view on it all.

A lot of girls go out to nothing which is much harder with a baby. I can understand how some maybe could fall back down again with no support and with a baby in tow. In my opinion, support is needed for the mum to ensure the baby is not affected and Birth Companions should be in all prisons - it would cost the government a lot less money if they supported charities like Birth Companions to help prevent reoffending. Once my son is weaned, I would love to work alongside women who have experienced the troubles I did, I am very passionate about how things need to be improved.

Laura

Women in Prison

- It is estimated by the NSPCC that 100 babies are born to women in prison each year in England and Wales.
- In 2013, 49% of women prisoners in a Ministry of Justice study were assessed as suffering from anxiety and depression.
- Evidence suggests that women in prison who are pregnant or who remain with their infant in MBUs do not receive the same quality of perinatal healthcare as those living in the community (NSPCC).
- There is currently no specific Prison Service Order in England for pregnant women.
- There is no requirement in England and Wales for the NHS to provide antenatal classes for women in prison.
- Prisoners who take part in antenatal classes provided by voluntary sector organisations cannot count this participation towards their 'purposeful activity' target.
- There are seven mother and baby units located within prisons and secure training centres in the UK providing for approximately 73 women and babies (one centre is for under 18s) and two mother and baby rooms in Northern Ireland.
- The majority of mothers of babies in the prison system are separated from their babies because they did not apply for, or were not eligible for admission to an MBU.
- 83% of women entering prison under sentence have committed a non-violent offence.
- 46% of women prisoners reported having attempted suicide at some point in their lives.
- 59% of women in prison report problems with relationships, such as poor childhood experiences and poor close family relationships (including abuse) (NSPCC)



Being a Volunteer

My name is Melanie and I have been a volunteer with Birth Companions for a couple of years now. I was first introduced to the idea of volunteering when I attended an introductory course on becoming a doula.

The Birth Companions training provided in the first year is thorough, very well coordinated and lots of fun. It is an opportunity to learn how to be a birth companion but also to bond with the others in the group. The support we provide each other is secondary to that we give to the women we work with but also of great value and helps us to keep giving unconditionally.

I am now a fully active birth companion and also a phone-holder on our emergency birth-line coordinating things when a woman calls for our support in labour.

I have supported around 20 women since I completed my training in a variety of ways. I have attended antenatal appointments at the hospital; delivered clothing and baby items to women; been to births, including natural deliveries and Caesarean sections in

theatre; followed up with postnatal visits in hospital and have helped women travel home with their newborns. I have had a number of very challenging situations to deal with but have always had full and professional support from our Community Link and Group Coordinators. On one occasion, I supported a woman who had agreed to give her child into adoptive care. It was a complex situation and one I shared with another volunteer, which helped tremendously. Birth Companions always offer debriefing support, have counselling available if required and run reflective practice days where we can share our thoughts and feelings about the work we do.

The group of women working for Birth Companions are wonderfully inspiring. The vulnerability of those we support makes this all the more important. In every instance, whatever the circumstances, I feel it is such a privilege to share with someone their intimate and special moment and to support them in what is a very personal journey.

Melanie, Birth Companion & Phone Holder

Being a trainee and getting involved

I am currently a trainee with Birth Companions and have attended the first five FANTASTIC training days. The quality of the course has far exceeded any expectations I had. I think this is because each part has had a strong and clear focus and the people chosen to facilitate our learning are highly informed and passionate about what they do.

'The Physiology of Pregnancy and Childbirth' is one that stands out for me; it put to bed any doubts I had as to how exactly the baby gets into the best position to navigate through the pelvis on its journey into the world. The Community Link training days were meaningful and touched on some really sensitive areas around supporting vulnerable women in the community. We learnt about how complex some women's situations can be and with this in mind were encouraged to explore what it really means to 'listen', 'reflect', 'stay mindful', 'set boundaries', 'debrief', 'be available' and 'remain non-judgmental'. I left these sessions with a strong sense of what I have to offer the women that I will work with in the future.

As well as the required training, we are encouraged to attend as many group meetings as we can. These meetings are where we get to meet and listen to active birth companions as they feedback on the support they have given over the past month.

I met Karen, who set up and runs PramDepot at a training day. I was so impressed by the beautifully presented Moses baskets that she creates for each woman, filled with freshly washed clothes, bedding, soft toys, and if requested a sling, bottles or sterilizer, breast pump, nappies, car seat, often accompanied by a buggy. Each one is tailor-made to what the mum and baby need. A gift, recycled and sent with love and care to a mother and her baby. I felt compelled to support the project as I really could see that each bundle required a lot of work to co-ordinate, clean, fold, sort, and deliver. At the same time it is this bespoke, person to person/mother to mother detail that makes PramDepot's work so touching and so relevant.

I now volunteer on a weekly basis at PramDepot helping Karen to continue her amazing work. As I write this I realise how proud I am to be a part of both PramDepot and Birth Companions. I look forward to the next part of the training course and to beginning my voluntary work supporting women antenatally and postnatally in the community.

Anoushka Giltsoff, Trainee Birth Companion

Feedback from service-users

Feedback from the women we have supported in the last year shows that our support has:

- helped 97% to improve their mental health and well-being
- helped 82% to feel less isolated and/or access other services
- enabled 90% to feel they have given their babies the best possible start in life

Things women have said about our support:

"I loved the sessions and even though it's not my first child, I have learned a lot."

"Just stay the same as you all are, being supportive and treating us with respect. Thank you."

"It is nice to know there are such people as Birth Companions there for women like me who might be on their own during their pregnancy and giving birth."



"To be treated as a person, not a prisoner. To be helped with information that I couldn't get for myself. The opportunity to acknowledge that I am actually pregnant as I couldn't share the experience with friends or family."

"Kind and caring volunteers, who always brightened up my day."

"Everything was good - the support I got at the hospital and at home, the breastfeeding, the care for my baby. All the women were very nice."

"They have been so helpful for me and they have done everything they can. I was so happy to have them to support me. They were so kind to me."

"They are the best in the UK."

"I felt comfortable and safe around Birth Companions – they helped me a lot – calmed me down before labour and then helped me and my mum."

In addition:

- 85% of the women who gave us feedback said that our support had helped them feel better supported and cared for
- 88% also said that it had helped them feel less worried about their situation
- 92% said that it had helped them feel more positive about their situation

Peterborough Pilot Project

The Birth Companions' Peterborough Pilot Project came to fruition after many months of discussions, planning and training. It has been an incredible year with many challenges but also much to celebrate as we supported vulnerable women in a new area.

The pilot ran from April 2014 to March 2015 and in that time we supported ten women in Peterborough; two of the women were from HMP Peterborough and eight were from the local community.

We recruited local doulas to provide the support during the pilot (a doula is an experienced woman who offers emotional and practical support to a woman (or couple) before, during and after childbirth, usually paid for their services). This differs from the volunteer base in London; the doulas came from diverse backgrounds and brought a wealth of experience and skills to the project and the group has evolved to become a strong and committed team. The project was underpinned with the same ethos as Birth Companions in London with the key ingredient being an unconditional positive approach. Through information and support delivered in a kind and caring way we hoped to alleviate fears, help with individual challenges and to support the early bonding experience between mother and baby. We began actively supporting women in July 2014.

All of the service users were referred by the Rainbow Team of midwives at Peterborough City Hospital. The women referred to us were from a range of different backgrounds, with differing home situations, some were first time mothers, whilst others already had children. We met each woman in pregnancy and were able to offer emotional, practical and physical support in pregnancy, labour and in the postnatal period. The early weeks with a new baby are challenging for all mothers but when facing this with no family support, an uncertain future, or being held

in custody, this presents additional and more complex issues.

We tailored the support we offered to each woman according to her specific needs. We were able to provide information on pregnancy, birth, breastfeeding and early baby care. We also supported women by offering them good quality second-hand donated items such as baby clothes and equipment.

One of the women we supported was Ruby, who was seeking asylum with her partner and child. The family had lived in difficult conditions and suffered persecution. Being pregnant, with a toddler and not knowing what the future holds can be incredibly stressful. When we first met, Ruby rarely left her home and was very isolated. Due to complex health needs, walking was painful for Ruby and we helped with transport to hospital appointments. We supported Ruby during her labour and enabled her partner to see the baby in the first moments of life. With our support, Ruby attended a breastfeeding group in the community and we also supported her with regular visits when her toddler began pre-school. We gave her donated baby clothes, toys, a sling and a pushchair.

She said of Birth Companions: "they stood next to me as part of my family"

It has been a privilege over the past year to meet such courageous and exceptional women and to be part of their lives at this wonderful, precious time.

Kate Chivers
Peterborough Project Coordinator

"This was my first baby and my relationship with husband was very strained. Birth Companions helped him to participate and be involved, so he also had a good experience."



An external evaluation of the Birth Companions' Peterborough Pilot Project stated the following:



"It is so good to have an outsider come in to talk and go through things with. You don't always want to talk to a prison officer... I would definitely recommend Birth Companions. It's such a thing to have someone to talk to who isn't judging."

Feedback from the mothers we interviewed has been overwhelmingly positive, highlighting the exceptional sense of support, continuity of care, confidence and companionship that the doulas gave them.

- Women were able to access continuous birth support from a doula and half of the women chose doula support for the birth.
- Women had positive birthing experiences, which for most of the mothers avoided the necessity of interventions during labour.
- Families were also supported throughout the birth experience which, in some cases, led to fathers being more involved with their baby.
- Mothers felt they bonded well with their babies as a result of the positive support they received from the doulas.
- Mothers who wanted to breastfeed were given specialist advice and support so that they were able to persist when they experienced problems.
- Women were empowered to speak up for themselves and their newborn babies. In some instances, this ensured their baby received the right diagnosis and care.
- Mothers and babies were supported to participate in community initiatives and utilise local services and facilities.

Feedback about the project:

"The help I received with breastfeeding was amazing."

"They've been part of the most important experience in my life. I'm always going to be indebted. I was in a heap, a complete and utter mess, and now I'm not in a dark place, I'm in a happy place".

"I was really stressed because I have a 28-month old boy and I don't have any family or friends around here, so I was really worried about labour and who would look after my little one or me but when I spoke to Birth Companions they did a really care for me and my family. I'm feeling amazing now. It's made a huge difference to my life. Thank you so much."

"I was able to have a quick birth without intervention and [received] kindness and nurturing. I was at a very low point and had depression throughout my pregnancy. However the birth was a good experience. I feel the birth has been a turning point."

"It is so good to have an outsider come in to talk and go through things with. You don't always want to talk to a prison officer... I would definitely recommend Birth Companions. It's such a thing to have someone to talk to who isn't judging."

PramDepot

Originally created as an-arts led recycling project funded by The Arts Council, PramDepot has established itself in the local community as a flourishing recycling centre for baby clothes and equipment.

Through our collaboration with Birth Companions, we have been able to provide good quality, beautifully presented baby clothes and equipment, tailored to the individual needs of over fifty women and their babies in the last year. We have had some really wonderful feedback from the women who have received items from PramDepot and although we give the items to women without any requirement that they be returned, we have found that many women really want to return the items to ensure others can benefit as they did:

"I have a Moses basket, two stands and a big bag of clothes from L. She was so grateful for everything Birth Companions and PramDepot did for her. It is so special for her to now be able to give back the things her baby no longer needs and know that they will be loved and cherished by someone else. It made her very happy. Well done! I had never considered how important it is for our women to be able to give back"(Volunteer after visiting L)

As the first year's funding came to an end it was decided that PramDepot would be developed into a social enterprise. This means that we can apply for the funding we need to continue our work and to grow with the aim of developing a sustainable future. Funds to pay for some of this year's running costs have already been successfully raised through crowd funding, a workplace raffle at Unite the Union and a prize draw at The Chocolate Factory, all of which has been generously matched by Collage Arts.

We will continue to work in collaboration with Birth Companions delivering baby items to the vulnerable women they support in prison and in the community. We will also forge new links with other agencies such as Helen Bamber Foundation, Re-Unite Project, and Haringey Migrant Support Centre and HMP Holloway HUB with the aim of providing a similar service.

I would like to thank all the trustees, staff and volunteers at Birth Companions for their ongoing support, collaboration and contributions, which have enabled PramDepot to flourish, as well as Collage Arts for its generosity, Unite the Union for its backing and HAVCO for its ongoing support in PramDepot's transformation.

Karen Whiteread, PramDepot





Annual Report 2014-2015

Financial Summary

In 2014-2015 we brought forward £58,420 from grants received in the previous year and raised a further £165,318. Our total expenditure was £166,411. We therefore carried forward £57,327 into 2015-2016.

The charity was grateful to receive funding from:
 Anton Jurgens Charitable Trust
 Big Lottery
 Esmée Fairbairn Foundation
 Lankelly Chase Foundation
 Noel Buxton Trust
 The Henry Smith Charity Evan Cornish Foundation
 The South Square Trust

Our summary accounts are as follows:

	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Total Funds 2014-15	Total Funds 2013-14
INCOMING RESOURCES				
Voluntary income	62,258	103,007	165,265	79,815
Investment income	53	–	53	121
TOTAL INCOMING RESOURCES	62,311	103,007	165,318	79,936
RESOURCES EXPENDED				
Charitable activities	67,978	95,814	163,792	133,544
Governance costs	2,219	400	2,619	1,232
TOTAL RESOURCES EXPENDED	70,197	96,214	166,411	134,776
Net incoming / (outgoing) resources for the year	(7,886)	6,793	(1,093)	(54,840)
RECONCILIATION OF FUNDS				
Total funds brought forward	54,230	4,190	58,420	113,260
TOTAL FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD	46,344	10,983	57,327	58,420

Our accounts have been independently examined and a full set is available on request.

Thank you

As ever, we would like to thank all those who have helped us during the year.

Honorary President

Sheila Kitzinger

Patrons

Baroness Helena Kennedy
Professor Lesley Page

Trustees

Ann Sedley
Anne Stephens
Avan Wadia
Diana Parkinson (Chair)
Janice Fawell (Treasurer)
Liz Hogarth
Lucy Ball
Michele Stokes
Suzanne Collins
Viv Gray

Staff

Naomi Delap - Director (Maternity Cover)
Annabel Kennedy - Director (Maternity Leave)
Denise Marshall - Group Coordinator
Abbi Ayers - Holloway & Bronzefield
Prison Coordinator & Breastfeeding Supporter
Anna Wise - Information and Administration
Officer
Katie Bottle - Community Link Coordinator
Kate Chivers - Peterborough Coordinator
Suzanne Wilebore - Community Link
Coordinator

Prison Visitors

Abbi Ayers
Anna Wise
Jeannie Lorenz
Jill Benjoya Miller
Kate Chivers
Lea Ouai
Lola Alcaraz
Marjorie Dill

Phoneholders

Carolyn Banbury
Chamutal Isaacs
Eleanor Stapleton
Jeannie Lorenz
Joanna Wright
Melanie Quacquarelli
Rosanna Lowe
Sarah Bayley
Scarlet Granville
Vicky Scarth

Volunteer Birth Companions

Anna Wise
Beverley Maragh
Chamutal Isaacs
Eleanor Stapleton
Harriet Jennings
Janice Martin
Jeannie Lorenz
Jessica Belsey
Jill Benjoya Miller
Joanna Penaranda
Karen Whiterhead
Kay Hall
Lea Ouai
Lola Alcaraz
Melanie Quacquarelli
Michele Stokes
Monidipa (Dipa) Bhattacharjee
Ronke Oseni
Rosalind Simpson
Sarah Bayley
Scarlet Granville
Sherridan Stymest
Sonia Anderson-Cunningham
Suzanne Willebore

Peterborough Birth Companions

Beverly Gazy
Elizabeth Chudley
Khadijah Zyss
Kornelia Brett
Laura Abbott
Louise Clough
Lucinda Story
Lucy Nelson
Sally Lewis
Sarah Stephen-Smith
Verina Henchy

Trainees

Abi Lee -Carter
Alice McAllister
Anoushka Giltsoff
Carolyn Banbury
Christina Johnson
Claire Miller
Clare Clarke
Clare Powell
Eva Freeman
Eva James
Humaairah Jama
Isla Robertson
Kirsty Howe
Laura Abbott
Linda De Lange
Lisa Hallgarten
Marisa Santos
Maryam Muhammad

Nicole Martin
Rachael Okenla
Rebeca Vila Guerrero
Roisin O'Cearnaigh
Rosanna Lowe
Rosie Crabtree
Ruth Sabrosa
Sally Laine
Samantha Luff
Sanita Ellis
Sonia Maynadier-Bolt
Vaida Milne Tyte
Wendy Green
Zosia Kmietowicz

Funders

Anton Jurgens Charitable Trust
Big Lottery
Esmée Fairbairn Foundation
Lankelly Chase Foundation
Noel Buxton Trust
The Henry Smith Charity
Evan Cornish Foundation
The South Square Trust

Supporters and advisors

Alan Miller
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Rachel Stock
Rebecca Gill
Sam Matthews
Selina Coeur-de-lion
Shane Benoit
Sharmila Desai
Simon Latham
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Our staff & Volunteers





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Birth Companions is also a company limited by guarantee (company number:6269047),
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