



## **Birth Companions**

### **Impact report**

### **2015 - 2016**

#### **1. Introduction**

Birth Companions aims to improve the well-being of pregnant women and new mothers in prison and of those who are facing severe disadvantage in the community. We seek to do this by:

- improving their mental health and well-being
- reducing their isolation
- enabling them to give their babies the best possible start in life
- improving their conditions.

#### **The support we provided**

During 2015-16, we provided a range of practical and emotional support during pregnancy, birth and for as much as six months after the birth of a woman's child. This included:

- pregnancy and early parenting groups in prison
- intensive one-to-one visits at home from staff and specialist volunteers
- a full range of high-quality recycled pregnancy and baby items
- support during birth
- postnatal visits
- specialist breastfeeding support.

#### **The women we supported**

During 2015 – 16, we supported 140 women:

- 103 women were supported in prison
- 35 women were supported in hospital
- 43 women were supported in the community
- 67 women received breastfeeding support
- 8 women received support during separation from their baby.



During the year we began to collect information on the issues experienced by the women we support. From the 23 women who provided this information, we found that:

- 74% had housing issues
- 74% had financial difficulties
- 70% were single parents
- 61% showed signs of perinatal anxiety/depression
- 52% had mental health issues
- 48% were on medication
- 48% were estranged from their family
- 43% had social services involvement
- 35% had experienced domestic abuse
- 30% had experienced sexual violence
- 30% were becoming a mother for the first time
- 26% had no recourse to public funds
- 26% had safeguarding issues
- 17% had a history of human rights violation
- 17% had been in care
- 17% had previously lost a child
- 17% had language issues/needed an interpreter
- 13% had learning difficulties
- 9% had substance misuse issues
- 9% were, or had been, a sex worker
- 9% were HIV+.

Moreover, women tended to have multiple issues; over half (57%) of these women reported between five and ten issues and over a quarter of the women (26%) reported more than ten issues.

## **Evaluation**

As an organisation, we are committed to getting feedback from the women we support in order to ensure that our services are meeting their needs and are effective in making a difference in their lives. We have designed an evaluation framework which identifies the outcomes that we hope to achieve through our work.

Nonetheless, getting feedback from women is challenging as their situations are constantly changing, making it difficult to plan appropriate points at which to ask them to provide feedback. Some women engage with us throughout the perinatal period whilst others only come into contact with us for a short period of time. In addition, some women have literacy issues or do not speak English as their first language. Others may leave the prison or be moved to another area before we have a chance to ask them to complete a feedback form.



We have therefore designed a series of feedback forms which we ask women to complete at different points in their contact with us. We aim to keep our evaluation activities both sensitive to their situations and as light-touch as possible. This means that we can collect information that is specific to their experiences of our services. This year's data is therefore based on feedback from 36 women, which represents over a quarter (26%) of the 140 women we supported during the year. This was comprised of:

- 23 forms completed by women who received antenatal support from us and who were released whilst still pregnant
- 6 forms completed by women after receiving support from us during their baby's birth
- 7 forms completed by women who were supported by our Community Link service.

## 2. Findings

### 2.1 Improving mental health and well-being

97% of the women we supported felt we had helped improve their mental health and well-being (n = 34):<sup>1</sup>

- 97% felt our support had helped them to cope emotionally with their situation (n = 34)
- 94% felt our support had helped them feel better supported and cared for (n = 33)
- 69% felt our support had helped them to maintain their dignity and self-respect (n = 26).

*"It's made the world of difference to me. They helped me focus on my baby and the fact that I'm pregnant even though I'm in prison."*

*"They came and gave me a lot of love."*

In particular, women told us that our support had helped feel less worried during pregnancy (96%, n = 25), about their baby's birth (90%, n = 21) and about becoming a mother (95%, n = 21).

*"I am so grateful for all the help I received. It really helped me to cope and made me feel less stressed and supported."*

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<sup>1</sup> n = the number of questionnaires completed where women answered this particular question.



They also said that it had helped them feel more positive about their situation during their pregnancy (92%, n = 24), in preparing for their baby's birth (85%, n = 20) and in terms of becoming a mother (90%, n = 20).

*"I was under the impression that having a baby in jail made me a bad mum but going to the groups has made me realise that I'm not."*

In addition, all nine of women who received support from us in the community said this had helped them cope better about their situation.

*"Birth Companions supported me and give me confidence."*

## **2.2 Reducing isolation**

83% of the women we supported felt we had helped them become less isolated (n = 30):

- 75% said our support had helped them get more support from other women in prison (n = 20)
- 89% of the women supported in the community said our support had helped them access other services (n = 9)
- 75% said our support had helped them maintain contact with their family and friends during the time of their baby's birth (n = 8).

*"Now I know that I can get through it with the support of my pregnancy group and the staff that run the group."*

*"[I valued] having time with other pregnant women and spending time talking about the baby and birth. It's nice to know someone is there to give you advice from outside the prison."*

*"The fact that I'm not the only one going through it. I really enjoy meeting up with other mums and mums to be."*

In addition, 65% said they would like to join a similar group after they were released from prison (n = 20).



### 2.3 Enabling women to give their babies the best possible start in life

100% of women were able to give their babies a better start in life as a result of our support (n = 34):

- 94% said our support had helped them to know more about pregnancy, birth and motherhood (n = 33)
- 81% said it had helped them feel more confident in making decisions about their pregnancy, birth and motherhood (n = 32)
- 89% of women supported in the community said our support helped them to better understand and meet their baby's needs (n = 9).

*"They helped me focus on my baby and the fact that I'm pregnant even though I'm in prison."*

*"If it wasn't for Birth Companions I don't think I would have had the amazing labour I had."*

*"They often reassured me about how I was bringing up my son in a prison."*

*"I'm a new mum and they told me all I needed to look after the baby. They gave me help with the practical things I needed."*

Many women also said our support had helped them to breastfeed their babies:

- 71% said it had helped them feel more positive about breastfeeding (n = 31)
- 100% said it had helped them feel more confident about breastfeeding (n = 11)
- 100% said it had helped them know more about breastfeeding (n = 10)
- 100% said it had helped them breastfeed for longer (n = 6).

*"[It was important] finding out it's not harmful to breastfeed with the medication I'm on."*

*"[I valued] the support and information received about pregnancy and giving birth, breastfeeding and also providing me with a nursing bra."*



### 2.3 The quality of our services

We also asked women about their experiences of receiving our support. Feedback from women revealed high levels of satisfaction with the services we provide; 100% were very or quite satisfied with the support they had received (n = 35). Women said they particularly valued the feeling of support they gained from being in touch with us; one woman said our support had given her “the power to get through.”

The information and advice we provide also emerged as particularly important to women:

*“They are so lovely and caring as well as supportive and always make sure that if any of us expectant mums have any questions or worries that we were able to ask them.”*

*“They have tried to answer our questions much as they could and that was so helpful for us.”*

Several women also commented on the way we provide our services:

*“[I valued] the non-judgemental and caring support. It’s made the world of difference to me.”*

*“They’ve been caring and listening to my situation.”*

Only a few women made any suggestions for improving our services and these centred on providing more frequent support:

*“There should be more groups - once a week isn’t enough.”*

*“It would be great if we could have more visits.”*

The vast majority of women were both extremely grateful and appreciative of the support we had provided them. One woman simply said:

*“I am so lucky that Birth Companions supported me.”*



## Appendix 1: Evaluation data

Issues faced by women (n = 23)	No.	%
Housing issues	17	74%
Financial difficulties	17	74%
Single parent	16	70%
Perinatal anxiety/depression	14	61%
Mental health issues	12	52%
On medication	11	48%
Estranged from family	11	48%
Social services involvement	10	43%
Experience of domestic abuse	8	35%
Experience of sexual violence	7	30%
First time mother	7	30%
No recourse to public funds	6	26%
Safeguarding issues	6	26%
Human rights violation	4	17%
History of being in care	4	17%
Previous loss of child (either through death or permanent removal)	4	17%
Language issues/needs interpreter	4	17%
Learning difficulty	3	13%
Substance misuse	2	9%
Sex worker	2	9%
HIV+	2	9%
Physical disability	1	4%

Number of issues faced by women (n = 23)	No.	%
0 – 5 issues	4	13%
6 - 10	13	57%
11 - 17	6	26%



<b>Outcomes (n = 36)</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Not sure</b>	<b>% Yes</b>
<b>Improved mental well-being</b> ( <i>one or more positive responses to the following indicators</i> )	33	0	1	97%
More able to cope emotionally	33	0	1	97%
More supported and cared for	31	1	1	94%
Greater dignity and self-respect	18	5	3	69%
Less worried during pregnancy	24	0	1	96%
less worried preparing for birth	19	1	1	90%
Less worried about becoming a mother	20	0	1	95%
More positive during their pregnancy	22	0	2	92%
More positive about the birth	17	1	2	85%
More positive about becoming a mother	18	0	2	90%
<b>Reduced isolation</b> ( <i>one or more positive responses to the following indicators</i> )	25	0	5	83%
More support from other women in prison	15	0	5	75%
More able to access other services	8	0	1	89%
Maintain contact with their family and friends	6	2	0	75%
<b>More able to give their baby a better start in life</b> ( <i>one or more positive responses to the following indicators</i> )	34	0	0	100%
Know more about pregnancy, birth and motherhood	31	1	1	94%
More confident in making decisions about their pregnancy, birth and motherhood	26	2	4	81%
Better able to understand and meet their baby's needs	8	1	0	89%