



Birth Companions
Impact Report
2017-18

Birth Companions Impact report 2017 - 2018

Introduction

Birth Companions works to improve improve the lives of mothers and babies facing severe disadvantage.

We aim to:

- improve the physical and emotional well-being of pregnant women and new mothers
- enable new mothers to give their babies the best possible start in life
- shape the local and national policy and practice that impacts on mothers and their babies

The support we provided

During 2017-18, we provided a range of practical and emotional support during pregnancy, birth and for as much as two years after the birth of a woman's child.

This included:

- pregnancy and early parenting groups in prison and the community
- 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 both in hospital and in a woman's home
- specialist breastfeeding support.

The women we supported

During 2017 – 18 we supported 230 women:

- 115 women were supported in prison
- 22 women were supported in hospital
- 41 women were supported one to one in the community
- 72 women were supported in a group in the community
- 62 women received breastfeeding support

Overall we supported 40% more women during 2017-18 compared to the previous year. In the community we supported more than twice as many women due to the expansion of our services.

During the year we collected information on the issues experienced by the women we supported through our Community projects.

From the 58 women who provided this information, we found that:

- 67% women were becoming a mother for the first time
- 64% women had housing issues
- 59% women were single parents
- 48% women had mental health issues
- 45% women had social services involvement
- 43% women had financial difficulties
- 36% women showed signs of perinatal anxiety/depression
- 26% women had experienced domestic abuse
- 24% women had no recourse to public funds
- 21% women were estranged from their family
- 19% women had substance misuse issues
- 17% women were on medication
- 14% women had language issues/ needed an interpreter
- 14% women had been in care
- 12% women had experienced sexual violence
- 9% women had previously lost a child
- 7% women had safeguarding issues
- 7% women were HIV positive
- 2% woman had a history of human rights violation

Moreover, women tended to have multiple issues; all the women we collected information from were dealing with at least two issues; just over half (51%) of these women reported at least five issues and 7% of women reported ten or more issues.

Evaluation

Birth Companions is 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. Getting feedback from women can be 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 therefore aim to keep our evaluation activities both sensitive to their situations and as light-touch as possible.

This year's data is therefore based on feedback recorded on 85 forms completed by 69 women, which represents 30% of the 230 women we supported during the year.

It should be noted that 16 women completed more than one form because they were supported across different projects over a period of time. Also some questions on individual forms were not fully completed or left blank.

Findings

Improving mental health and well-being

96% of the women who provided feedback felt our support had helped improve their mental health and well-being.

"My child's birth was not a great experience but having a birth companion with me was amazing and I was not alone."

- 97% who provided feedback felt our support had helped them to cope emotionally with their situation.
- 95% who provided feedback felt our support had helped them feel better supported and cared for.
- 98% who provided feedback felt our support had helped them to maintain their dignity and self-respect.

"I love the warm welcome and the respect they give me."

"The mental and emotional support has been wonderful"

In particular, women who provided feedback told us that our support had helped feel less worried during pregnancy (90%), birth (90%) and about becoming a mother (86%).

"The information I received helped me prepare and understand more about having a baby"

They also said that it had helped them feel more positive about their situation during their pregnancy (95%), in preparing for their baby's birth (90%) and in terms of becoming a mother (85%).

"The volunteer workers were very supportive and they gave us detailed explanation about birth. I have learned a lot and gained more knowledge about pregnancy and expecting a baby."

In addition, of the women who were supported by us in through our Community Link and Community Groups projects who gave us feedback 96% said this had helped them feel more positive about their situations and 97% felt less worried about their situations. 89% said our support had helped them get more support from other women.

"My stress is gone since coming here because people smile and are so nice"

Reducing isolation

99% of the women who provided feedback felt we had helped them to feel less isolated :

- 83% said our support had helped them to feel more confident contacting other services
- 83% of the women supported in the community said our support helped them to know more about where to get support from other services/groups
- 72% of the women supported in the community said our support helped them to get more support from other services/group services

“All the members from Birth Companions are really supportive and understanding. I am honestly so glad I asked for a birth companion to be present [at the birth].”

“I value the social life I have built here [at the group]. I feel more confident and have received great service.”

“[I valued] knowing there is other people that can sympathise with what I'm going through.”

“Being able to meet other pregnant women that are not judging you. [The group] was just really welcoming and they were ready to give so much.”

“To feel like a normal pregnant woman not a prisoner.”

“[I valued] the camaraderie of being in a supportive group.”

“I am very happy to come to this group because the staff are willing to help and welcoming people and if I asked anything they are happy to listen and to help. Thank you very much!!!”

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

98% of women who provided feedback felt they had been able to give their babies a better start in life as a result of our support:

- 93% said our support had helped them to know more about pregnancy
- 95% said our support had helped them to know more about giving birth
- 95% said it had helped them feel more confident in making decisions about their pregnancy, birth and motherhood
- 96% of women said our support helped them to better understand more about looking after themselves and their baby.

“Their support makes me feel more self-assured about what I am doing.”

“I feel much more confident and prepared after coming to the group. Everyone has been lovely and supportive. I felt very relaxed and able to talk freely.”

“[I valued the] help received with making the necessary decisions. Meeting and sharing ideas/experiences with other expecting mums [at the group].”

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

- 90% who provided feedback said it had helped them feel more positive about breastfeeding
- 96% who provided feedback said it had helped them feel more confident about breastfeeding
- 94% who provided feedback said it had helped them know more about breastfeeding.
- 78% who provided feedback said it had helped them breastfeed for longer.

“I valued the information about giving birth and breastfeeding and knowing the importance of skin-to-skin [with my baby].”

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% who provided feedback were very or quite satisfied with the support they had received.

Women said they particularly valued the feeling of support they gained from being in touch with us

"I am very happy with everything. I just wish I had known about the Birth Companions earlier in my pregnancy."

"I will never forget all the help I received."

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

"Just being listened to and talked to, made me value [Birth Companions] a lot. I felt like they were my friends, sister and everything in between."

"Excellent advice by lovely volunteers who really care about you"

Only a few women made any suggestions for improving our services:

"A longer course"

"Smaller groups if possible"

"More handouts about the things we discuss"

"It would be nice to have another day with Birth Companions"

"Maybe train to become a volunteer if that's an option"

The vast majority of women were both extremely grateful and appreciative of the support we had provided them.

"Thank you for everything. God bless Birth Companions."

Appendix 1: Evaluation data

Issues faced by women (n = 58)	%
First time mother	67%
Housing issues	64%
Single parent	59%
Mental health issues	48%
Social services involvement	45%
Financial difficulties	43%
Perinatal anxiety/depression	36%
Experience of domestic abuse	26%
No recourse to public funds	24%
Estranged from family	21%
Substance misuse	19%
On medication	17%
Language issues/needs interpreter	14%
History of being in care	14%
Experience of sexual violence	12%
Previous loss of child (either through death or permanent removal)	9%
Safeguarding issues	7%
HIV+	7%
Human rights violation	2%
Sex worker	2%
Physical disability	2%

Outcomes	Yes	No	Not Sure	N/A	Blank	% Yes
More supported and cared for	78	0	4	0	3	95%
Greater dignity and self-respect	78	1	1	0	3	98%
Less worried during pregnancy	36	0	4	0	0	90%
Less worried preparing for birth	35	0	4	0	1	90%
Less worried about becoming a mother	44	1	6	1	2	86%
More positive during their pregnancy	38	0	2	0	0	95%
More positive preparing for birth	36	0	4	0	0	90%
More positive about becoming a mother	44	1	7	1	2	85%
Less worried about Situation	28	0	1	0	1	97%
More positive about Situation	27	0	1	0	2	96%
More support from other women	72	0	9	0	4	89%
More confident contacting other services/groups	56	4	7	1	17	83%
Know where to get support from other services/groups	24	2	3	0	1	83%
Get more support from other services/group	21	1	7	0	1	72%
Feel less isolated	62	0	3	0	20	95%
Know more about pregnancy	37	0	3	0	0	93%
Know more about birth	38	0	2	0	0	95%
more confident in deciding what you want	74	0	4	0	7	95%
Understand more about looking after yourself and your baby	73	1	2	1	8	96%
Feel more positive about breastfeeding	59	1	5	5	15	90%
Feel more confident about breastfeeding	27	0	1	4	13	96%
Know more about breastfeeding	51	0	3	6	25	94%
Breastfeed for longer	18	2	3	7	18	78%