



Department  
of Health

# High Impact Area 2: Maternal (perinatal) mental health

Health visitor programme

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**Author: Directorate/ Division/ Branch acronym / cost centre**

Public and International Health Directorate/ International Health and Public Health Strategy/ PHPSU / 10100

**Document Purpose:**

Engagement

**Publication date:**

03/15

**Target audience:**

Directors of Public Health – Upper tier Local Authorities  
Directors of Children’s Services – Upper tier Local Authorities  
Local Authorities  
Health Visitors

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# Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS Trust: Improved Perinatal Mental Health

## HIA 2: Maternal (perinatal) mental health

**Elaine Meredith – Clinical Lead**

### Rationale behind the work

Traditionally, maternal mental health issues were addressed during the perinatal period by listening visits carried out by health visitors in the postnatal period, and referral to the GP if needed. However, there was no clear guidance, and training for health visitors was on an ad hoc basis.

The mental health team decided to develop a clear pathway for health visitors to follow during the perinatal period, and up to 12 months, to address this issue.

### Case study overview

Four Maternal Mental Health champions were trained to give specific training on identifying mental health issues and supporting mothers with mental ill health during the perinatal period and beyond.

The training was rolled out to all health visitors during 2013/14, and was then provided for all support staff in health visiting teams. The training was also offered to all newly qualified health visitors. In addition, six members of staff were trained to become Promotional Guide Trainers, who were used to provide training to all health visitors about the importance of relationship building and identification of needs during the antenatal period. It was also provided to all student health visitors in the local university as part of their training.

### Impact

Since this project was initiated, staff stated that having the Perinatal Mental Health Pathway to follow makes them feel more supported.

For mothers, the identification of maternal mental ill health is being picked up at an earlier stage, often in the antenatal period, allowing for care to be planned.

Since the initiation of the Pathway there has been an increase in the number of antenatal visits by health visitors. The earlier identification of perinatal mental health problems results in more timely intervention and de-escalates the need for medical or social care intervention.

Future plans are to increase the number of antenatal visits until every mother receives a visit by the health visitor from 26 weeks of pregnancy.

# National: “The multi-agency approach was beneficial”-Health visitors, children’s centres and artists helping with postnatal depression

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Philippa Forsey, Creativity Works

Creativity Works runs arts and health projects offering creative activities and courses to help with mental wellbeing. The ‘My Time My Space’ project supports women with postnatal depression to come to terms with how they feel and gives them space to express themselves creatively. The projects are facilitated by experienced artists who come not only with an amazing toolbox of ideas to inspire group members but also to enable the group to feel safe, in a non-judgemental environment where they can bring their own thoughts and ideas. It’s a collaborative effort – Children’s Centre staff and a health visitor run the sessions alongside the artist so that the mothers can talk through any specific concerns they have and their or their family’s wellbeing.

Mums have made so many positive comments about the groups. One mum who came said that she wanted to come on the course to *‘connect with mums with the same issues’*. Another said she wanted to *‘ensure I can be the best mum I can be to my children by helping myself and to not let things get on top of me.’*

Thanks to the course, mums have said that they were able to *‘connect with mums with the same issues’*. One mum explained *‘I felt it was time for me and I really enjoyed the support from the Children’s Centre, and the artist and group. The artist’s enthusiasm for everything we do and over the smallest things is so contagious, puts you in a happy mood and inspires you to try new things in your life whether creative or otherwise.’*

At the heart of the project is giving mothers time and space, and this is something they all recognise as important.

*‘I enjoyed having ‘me’ time’ and ‘look forward to the course every week, it is relaxing, inspiring and there is a very good atmosphere’.*

Another mum goes on to say: *‘I feel relaxed now; it has been an excellent experience. I made lots of friends and I am more patient with (my children), lots of smiles and cuddles, less tantrums.’*

The project has improved confidence levels as well: *‘I’m more confident and don’t worry so much about how others see me’.*

*‘I’m a lot happier, I feel good about life and realised how important it is to be able to have time to be myself’*

*‘I never thought of doing anything until my health visitor mentioned it. Before that there was no other support. I now know there is support out there’*

And we’re seeing the impact it’s having on postnatal depression – on average in the latest group, scores in the Edinburgh assessment (which measures mental wellbeing) have reduced by almost 7 points – a vast improvement.

We're so pleased that this year the project continues to help more families and hope that we can find a way to embed the service so that it runs year round in more areas. We continually see the effect of this innovative partnership and mums are noticing this too:

*“The multi-agency approach was beneficial to the group e.g. health visitors, Creativity Works and Children Centre workers. The continuity of staff was particularly important for the group as parents were able to form trusting relationships”.*

And for parents the impact of the project goes on way beyond the course. Mothers continue to meet and support each other beyond 'My Time My Space', families are helped through the ups and downs of their lives and relationships, and the children benefit from the support by having happier parents who have been able to address issues of wellbeing at a crucial time in their lives.

# Norwich: Post-natal Depression – “I’m able to turn negatives into positives” by a mother of two

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### Anonymous service-user story

I had post-natal depression with both of my children and the health visiting service really helped me through. The first time was when my son was six-weeks old. It was a normal pregnancy, but the birth was by emergency C-Section.

The health visitor came to see me as usual, along with a student health visitor. They took me through the Edinburgh questionnaire which is used to identify if mums have postnatal depression.

They found signs of depression, so they rang the doctor for me and got me an appointment as quickly as possible. The doctor had wanted to give me Prozac, but because I was breastfeeding I wanted to try therapy instead, and I’ve never been very good at taking tablets. The health visitor was so supportive of this choice which helped me make the right decision for me. My health visitor didn’t just palm me off and disappear once I started my therapy – she was there for me until I was better and then put me in touch with the local SureStart services.

When I had my daughter, the midwife warned me I was likely to have post-natal depression again. My daughter was a surviving twin, which meant numerous scans, a lot of worry and a high chance of losing her. The pregnancy was incredibly stressful and I wouldn’t wish anything like this on anyone.

I remember vividly one day when she was sitting on my knee when everything came to a head. I had a horrible moment when I imagined I had lost her and started crying. I realised this was impossible and knew that this was a warning sign. I remembered how good the first health visitor had been, so I rang her and asked for help – in tears imagining my daughter had died. She arrived very, very quickly and said it sounded like depression.

She linked me up with SureStart and HomeStart. I was given therapy again as well, and just like the last time, her support didn’t just stop here. The health visitor I was assigned was a student one and I was more than happy for her to visit, she was excellent. She carried on visiting me for over a year, just to make sure that my daughter and I were OK.

It’s thanks to the health visiting team that I got better, and I’m still in touch with SureStart and HomeStart now. Talking to other mums helps a lot. People don’t always know what’s services are out there, but I’ve signed up for a job-hunting course through SureStart and am able to look forward. I no longer have depression – the therapy has helped me move on. I’m even studying for a degree and I’m finally able to turn negatives into positives. I can’t fault the service I received and I am so grateful to everyone who helped me get back on my feet.