



A Better Start case study



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Bradford Doulas



A Better Start

A Better Start is funded by the Big Lottery Fund using National Lottery funding. It is a ten-year programme focused on developing and testing new approaches to promoting Early Childhood Development (ECD). The A Better Start partnerships have developed locally tailored strategies to promote ECD, focusing on three key child development outcomes: diet and nutrition, social and emotional development, and speech, language and communication.

Bradford Doulas

The Bradford Doulas Service offers practical and emotional support to pregnant women and their families through trained volunteers.

The service is being delivered across Bradford, including in the Better Start Bradford area.

A Better Start early childhood development outcome the service aims to improve **social and emotional development** and **diet and nutrition**.



What are the key aims of the service?

Doula is the Greek word for wise-woman. The Bradford Doulas Service aims to support pregnant women to make the best choices for themselves and their babies, helping them to achieve a positive birth experience, and make informed decisions about childbirth, nutrition and breastfeeding. Volunteer doulas accompany women to appointments, provide practical and emotional support at the birth, and help them build positive relationships with other services.

Bradford Doulas Service is run by Action for Communities Ltd, which is based at the Carlisle Business Centre.

Who is the service for?

The Bradford Doulas service is available to all women with a maternal need. Pregnant women are able to request the support of a doula from their 28th week of pregnancy. They can also be referred to the service by professionals including midwives, GPs, health visitors, early years practitioners, and social workers; as well as children's centres, voluntary and community sector organisations or other Better Start Bradford projects.

What is the evidence base for the service?

A Cochrane evidence review has shown that continuous support from a doula during labour increases the chance of a shorter labour and a spontaneous vaginal birth without the need for intervention (pain medication, epidurals, vacuum or forceps-assisted delivery, or Caesarean section). It also increases positive feelings for women about childbirth. The review identified additional positive outcomes of using a Doula during pregnancy and childbirth including:

- increased social support for pregnant women
- improved communication between pregnant women and health care providers
- the creation of an environment of trust and friendship
- support for breastfeeding and the parent-infant relationship

Hodnett E.D, et al. (2013) Continuous support for women during childbirth. Cochrane Database Systematic Reviews.

How is the service run?

The Bradford Doulas Service has been running since 2011 in Bradford, and has supported over 200 women, babies and families. The project was initially funded through Department of Health and rolled out by the Goodwin Project. It has been partly funded by BSB since May 2017. Better Start Bradford's funding is being used to train a further 54 Doulas and aims to support 198 additional families by the end of 2020.

The Bradford Doulas Service has been commissioned by Better Start Bradford. It trains Bradford women as CERTA accredited volunteer Doulas to provide non-judgmental, consistent, tailored information and physical and emotional support at six weeks prior to birth, during labour and six weeks after birth.

Most support is in the home and volunteer Doulas also accompany women to appointments, antenatal classes and hospitals for birth. Training for volunteer Doulas is held at Carlisle Business Centre.

Core content of the service

The Bradford Doulas Service offers the following support to women:

Antenatal support:

- building a relationship with the family
- weekly home visits and contact via telephone
- accompanying to GP or midwifery appointments, antenatal classes, and visits to the Maternity Unit
- helping develop a birth plan and assist with choices around birth
- encouraging active birth
- assisting with packing a bag for hospital
- discussing benefits of breastfeeding
- providing emotional and practical support through the latter stages of pregnancy

At the Birth:

- assisting with the practicalities of birth - including breathing, relaxation, movement and positioning - at home or hospital birth
- accompanying as a birth partner
- hand and back massage
- encouraging an active and natural birth (keeping active / using balls / getting in and out of the pool)
- working professionally with maternity staff to help create the desired birthing environment
- assisting with skin-to-skin contact and breastfeeding at birth.

Postnatal support in the first six weeks of life:

- weekly home visits
- breastfeeding support
- referral to other organisations for support
- accompanying mums and babies to Children's Centres or making necessary referrals
- emotional support and looking for signs of baby blues or postnatal depression

Volunteer Doulas are trained to understand the limits of their work. Doulas do not give clinical or medical advice or interfere with medical or clinical aspects of labour. They are not trained as interpreters.

How is the service being evaluated?

A local implementation evaluation is being carried out by the Bradford Innovation Hub and is due to report in July 2018 . This aims to provide a clear picture of programme delivery, implementation, fidelity, reach and engagement.

The implementation evaluation will measure the following outcomes:

- maternal wellbeing
- maternal satisfaction with the Doula
- birth outcomes
- pre-natal and post-natal attachment
- breastfeeding (at birth and six weeks after birth)
- engagement with services

There are plans for an effectiveness evaluation at a later date.

Better Start Bradford

“For the past six years, Bradford Doula have been demonstrating that the support their Volunteer Doula provide to expectant families is invaluable. Good pregnancy and birth experiences can be a great foundation to build a happy parent-infant relationship so we are thrilled that we are able to extend this successful service to pregnant mums in the Better Start Bradford area.” **Michaela Howell, Better Start Bradford Director**

“My Doula encouraged me to stay calm and helped me with arrangements so I could then concentrate on my labour and birth. My volunteer Doula was very supportive and stayed with me the whole time.” **Parent, Bradford**

“Someone to hold my hand and look after me.” **Parent, Bradford**

“Doula listened and responded to support when needed.” **Parent, Bradford**

“I was alone in my previous births, my Doula was a Big support and help, it was an amazing experience having someone there with me.” **Parent, Bradford**



Blackpool
Better Start



For more information about A Better Start
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