



Hearts&Minds

June 2020 - June 2023

**Connecting, Supporting
& Celebrating the
England-wide
VCSE Community in
Perinatal Mental Health**





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THE STORY OF OUR PARTNERSHIP TO DATE....

The Hearts and Minds Partnership was set up in 2020 and funded as a three-year programme of work by the National Lottery Community Fund. The Partnership is a collective of three aligned grassroots perinatal mental health charities: Acacia Family Support (West Midlands), Bluebell Care (South West) and Smile Group (North West) who came together with a shared vision to connect, support and celebrate the VCSE community in perinatal mental health across England.

Stating the Case

NHS England states that perinatal mental health problems affect 20% of all new mothers. At the time of the Partnership's conception (2020), there was a clear lack of consistent support identified at a community level across England for new and expectant parents presenting with mild to moderate emotional wellbeing challenges.



Setting the Scene....

When Hearts and Minds was set up, significant progress had been made nationally in raising awareness of, and securing funding for, the 5% of women experiencing the most severe types of perinatal mental health difficulties, such as postpartum psychosis and previous severe mental illness. Newly formed Perinatal Mental Health teams were developed across the country.

Despite this excellent progress, there was no equivalent investment into support services for mothers who experienced mild-moderate perinatal mental health issues and, as the maps from the Maternal Mental Health Alliance showed, there was a far greater number of mothers and families (over 200,000 per annum) unable to access new specialist teams because they did not meet the very strict threshold of support criteria.

These statistics contribute to the fact that suicide remained the leading cause of direct deaths occurring within a year after the end of pregnancy (Source - MBRRACE-UK annual report of the Confidential Enquiry into Maternal Deaths and Morbidity: Nov 2018).

Support available across England for families affected by mild to moderate perinatal mental health issues

If new parents did not meet the threshold for specialist perinatal support, they could consider access to support from a variety of different primary care and universal services. This included: GPs, specialist mental health midwives, Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT), Health Visitors, and via Children's Centres. Despite this, it is important to note that most of these services did not offer specialist perinatal support and there was considerable variability in the knowledge, skills and expertise of people in these roles, with not all areas receiving the same level of support.

The power of grassroots support

The Voluntary Community & Social Enterprise sector (VCSE) has a vital role to play. Across the UK, there were a number of emerging and established local community organisations offering early interventions and grassroots perinatal mental health support for women and their families. However, the reality exposed significant gaps between need and demand, with many women and families facing a postcode lottery in accessing the services they needed. While much work had been done nationally to reduce stigma and raise awareness of perinatal mental health, there was still a marked shortage in equitable, high quality support within the community across the country to complement investment in clinical services. While pockets of excellence were visible, there was an opportunity for greater coherence across the community to support emerging and established VCSE services.



Hearts and Minds set out to connect, support and celebrate the VCSE community in perinatal mental health to ensure that families across England could have better access to high quality grassroots services, operating below the threshold for specialist NHS provision.

Every maternity unit across the country should have in place a clearly defined care pathway for referring women to local specialised perinatal mental health services which all women can access when needed

Dr Alison Wright, Consultant Obstetrician and Vice President of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists

SPOTLIGHT ON EACH PARTNER CHARITY

Acacia Family Support



Acacia exists to improve the lives of mothers and families from Birmingham and Solihull affected by maternal mental health issues, particularly pre and postnatal depression (PND) and anxiety. Established in 2003 by two local mothers who had experienced severe PND, today Acacia provides free support services to more than 600 families annually. Providing a safe haven for families, we offer a range of individual and group support services from our three centres and in beneficiaries' homes. Our central ethos of love, kindness, hope and going that extra mile is woven throughout our work.

Acacia is a Christian charity and our services are open to anyone regardless of their background, faith or beliefs. Aside from our team of 30 permanent, part-time staff, our services are delivered by an incredible team of over 50 trained volunteers. We are a lived-experience charity and 75% of our team have their own experiences of maternal / mental health issues. This user led approach enables us to offer non-judgemental peer support which encourages mothers to be open about their worries and take their first steps to recovery.

Acacia's impact extends beyond Birmingham and our grassroots service delivery. We believe all families should have access to the help they deserve and employ specialist staff to reach parents who are the most in need of support, yet least likely to access it.

As we have grown, we have kept the voices and needs of our service users at the heart of our decisions, developing a reputation as established leaders in the field of third sector perinatal mental health care. Our work is highly respected regionally and nationally by families, clinicians and commissioners.



-  An intensive mobile home visiting service and twice weekly group sessions for vulnerable teenage parents from school age to 24
-  Raising awareness and supporting parents from minority ethnic communities
-  'Acacia dads / partners' help for fathers struggling with their partner's PND
-  Practical and emotional help at home for mothers who are particularly isolated and lack the confidence to attend one of our centres via our Helping Hands at Home project



Bluebell supports parents' mental health and wellbeing during pregnancy, birth and for the first two years of life. They work across Bristol, Bath and North East Somerset, South Gloucestershire, North Somerset and Torbay and South Hams in Devon; providing one-to-one peer support and therapeutic group programmes both at home and in the local community, equipping parents with the tools, skills and strategies they need to be better able to manage their own mental health and support the parent-infant relationship.

Bluebell peer support workers help over 700 families a year, visiting parents at home or in the community. All have lived experience of perinatal mental health difficulties, so can truly empathise with parents. They also know every situation is unique and can give parents tailored, holistic support, offering a listening ear, practical tips for wellbeing and signposting to other services; working closely with health professionals to ensure a positive outcome for the whole family. 90% of parents supported in a 1:1 capacity, feel calmer, more able to cope, more able to voice their concerns to health professionals and feel they can access the tools they need for recovery.

Parents referred to Comfort Zone, Bluebell's evidence-based therapeutic programme, take part in 11-weekly therapeutic group sessions, usually held in their local Children's Centre. Led by a Bluebell therapist and co-facilitated with a Bluebell peer support worker, often with a specialist Early Years team on hand to look after the infants, the Comfort Zone gives parents space to relax and have honest conversations. Each session is designed to equip parents with the tools & strategies to improve their emotional wellbeing, empower them in their role as a parent and support the development of their relationship with their child.

Since 2016, Bluebell has been providing a safe haven for parents in Bristol City Centre at their hub, Bluebell Place – one of only a few city-

centre perinatal wellbeing hubs in the UK. Here, parents can access free group activities to support their mental health and wellbeing. Over the last 6 years they have welcomed over 4,000 parents to exercise classes, craft activities, baby massage courses, yoga sessions and antenatal wellbeing groups. Many groups are supported by the Early Years team who care for babies and infants whilst parents focus on their own wellbeing. Parents can also access support on sleeping, feeding or play from the Early Years lead or talk to them informally at one of our stay & play sessions. Bluebell Place was nominated as a finalist in the health category of the National Lottery Awards 2018.



AIMS:

To provide peer support for families affected by perinatal mental health challenges in a safe and supported setting

To alleviate the isolation that is associated with perinatal mental health challenges

To provide relief and lifelong coping strategies through access to person-centred talk therapy and 1-1 home visits

Smile Group runs four weekly peer support groups for parents experiencing perinatal mental health issues. The two-hour drop-in sessions are based in Macclesfield, Sandbach, Congleton and Nantwich Children's Centres across Cheshire East. The sessions offer a child-friendly environment for babies and toddlers to play while parents are welcomed by trained facilitators. The social element of the group helps to reduce attendees' sense of isolation while sharing their experiences with their peers.

Group members can access 6-8 free solution-focused therapy sessions with trained counsellors. There is also a 1:1 home visit programme for parents who are not ready or able to attend group, following a referral from a healthcare professional.

Family sessions are held monthly at a sensory centre. These are well attended by whole families and allow mums who are returning to work following maternity leave to continue accessing support.

In 2022, Smile supported 352 parents, with more than 1,800 contact points. The charity works closely with the specialist perinatal team to offer a step-up / down service to ensure families benefit from a more seamless pathway of integrated support. Smile was included in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) review of services regionally and sits on the steering group for the North West Coast perinatal mental health clinical network. The charity has featured on BBC Breakfast, ITV Lorraine, Woman's Hour and in national and regional print press, offering thought leadership within the perinatal mental health sector.

Overall, Hearts & Minds is an authentic, aligned partnership which is:

**People Led Strengths
Connected Based
Collaborative**

People Led

Strengths Based

Connected

Collaborative

The Partnership was designed, developed and delivered by the people we are set up to serve, e.g. parents with lived experience of perinatal mental illness and VCSE organisations delivering support.

We worked collaboratively within our VCSE PMH community to share learning and best practice. With sustained engagement across our workstreams we have established ourselves as a voice of the sector and a vehicle to create an even more robust, effective and connected grassroots space.

We have leveraged our local / regional connections and enhanced this to develop sound national stakeholder relationships with the likes of the Maternal Mental Health Alliance, Mind, the Royal Foundation, Home-Start UK, 1001 First Days, NCT and the Maternity Consortium.

As a grassroots partnership, we are a conduit for harnessing momentum on the ground and ensuring equity of partnerships by 'meeting in the middle' with strategic services. Through Hearts and Minds there is an opportunity to advocate for the VCSE sector in PMH, articulate our value in a more consistent way and ensure we sit in decision-making spaces to represent the needs of families in local communities across the country.

Hearts & Minds' Original Intentions

Supported by the National Lottery Community Fund for a programme of work from 2020-2023, our original Partnership aims were:

1

Families across England affected by perinatal mental health issues will have better access to robust, local, user-led peer support services, operating below the threshold for specialist NHS services

2

Both emerging and established groups are able to set up quality assured, cost effective and safe services that are responsive to local needs

This demonstration of generous leadership was conceptualised as goodwill in motion and not only removed duplication of effort but enabled us to draw on a proven track record of 30+ collective years of growing and sustaining charities in the sector.

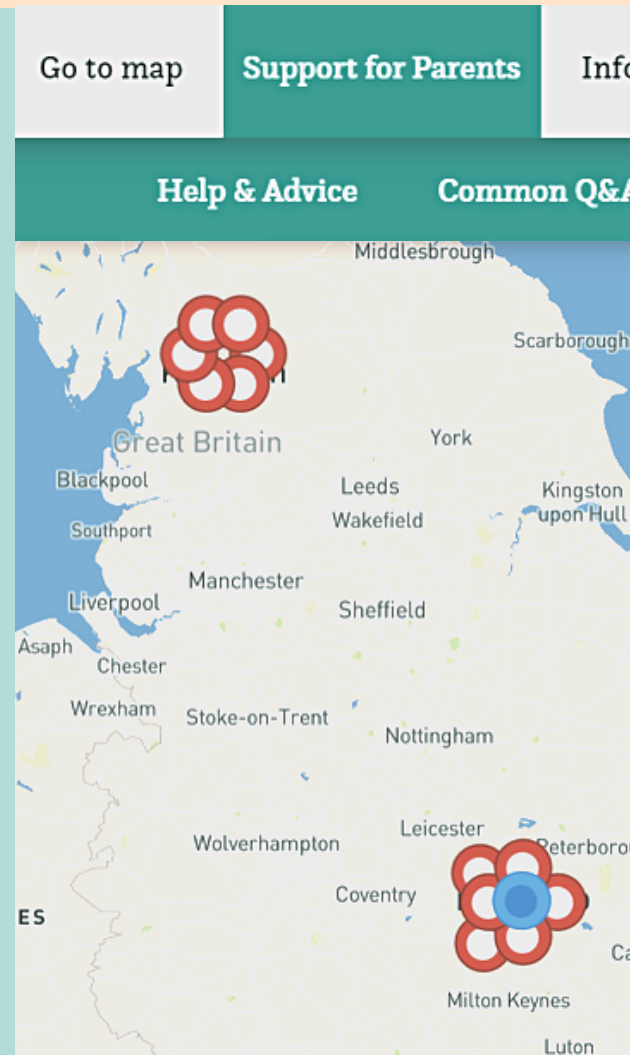
Our Three Workstreams

Hearts and Minds met its intentions to support, connect and celebrate the VCSE perinatal mental health sector across England, by developing three workstreams:

1

DIGITAL MAPPING

Co-designing, launching and populating an online map of 78 VCSE services in perinatal mental health across England, using a checklist process to capture vital information as well as cover safety checks around core aspects of service provision (DBS, safeguarding, supervision, confidentiality and data protection). This supported emerging organisations to put in place core measures to protect their services and beneficiaries and provide a strong foundation for growth. The map is designed to be accessible to parents, health professionals and VCSEs who are looking for support in their local area. It also provides an overview of what provision exists across England, highlighting geographical gaps.



The map is a wonderful tool and will certainly be utilised by our NHS team. It's an efficient way of finding additional services that offer support and resources to complement the care we provide within our service

NHS Perinatal Mental Health Peer Support Worker



Visit our map at:

www.heartsandmindspartnership.org/map

2

TRUSTED SPACES

Conversation Space

The creation of trusted spaces for the VCSE community to come together and share best practice, as well as celebrate success and discuss key challenges affecting the sector. Conversation Space – a monthly online forum - was launched in 2021 and has been consistently well attended. These free sessions align with the Hearts and Minds ethos - being informal yet professional, holding space for people to be open and honest. Conversations are guided by participants though sensitively facilitated by our team. Titles* included:



* for full list of titles see appendix 3 p.32

HOW MANY HATS ARE YOU WEARING?
(focusing on multiplicity of job roles and responsibilities)

EVOLVING WITHOUT DISSOLVING
(navigating the challenges of the growth curve)

WHEN LIVED EXPERIENCE KEEPS ON LIVING
(translating lived experience into service provision, while being mindful of boundaries)

EVALUATION EVER AFTER
(revisiting the ways in which we tell the impact story)

The Hearts & Minds Partnership has provided an essential space where perinatal peer support services can support each other. People from all backgrounds feel safe, valued and supported – which in turn has a motivating and uplifting impact. This renewed confidence can support services to remain sustainable, and ensure safe peer support is developed.

Shelley McBride
Connected Perinatal Support



Visit the VCSE space on our website:
www.heartsandmindspartnership.org/vcs

2

TRUSTED SPACES

National Meet-Up

A National Meet-Up held in Birmingham in January 2023 brought 78 members of the community together, showcased our work, and provided powerful learning experiences. It was primarily aimed at VCSEs, though was also attended by commissioners, researchers and healthcare professionals. The day included:

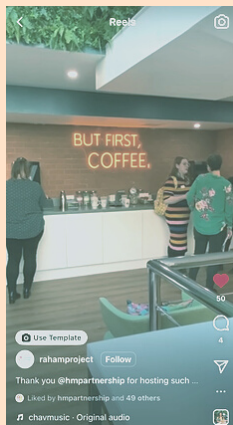
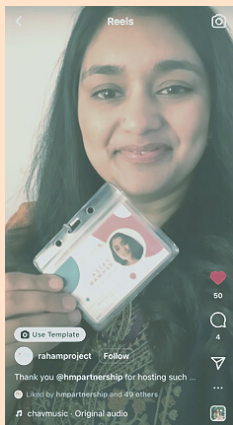
- Networking activities
- Conversation Spaces
- Scoping exercises
- Panel discussion from thought-leaders across the sector
- Resource room including a soundscape of parent voices*

*Listen to the soundscape:

<https://www.youtube.com/@hmpartnership>



Screenshots of an Instagram Reel documenting the Hearts and Minds National Meet-Up by Faiza Rehman from the Raham Project



3

TRAINING

The development and delivery of a free programme of accessible, online training (Smart Space) to meet the practical and holistic needs of emerging and established VCSE services in perinatal mental health. This was launched in December 2022 via a digital platform accessible from the training page of our website and is free to the learner. The programme covers a range of themes, including*: perinatal mental health overview, growing and sustaining your service, promotion and marketing, evaluation, fundraising, peer support principles, resourcing an expanding service and navigating the growth curve.

*for a full list of Smart Space contents see appendix 4 p.35



Smart Space

Smart Space is proudly endorsed by the Association for Accredited Learning.



Smart Space is really important to our organisation because finding the right training can be so time-consuming and expensive... and so it's brilliant that we've got this tailor-made service right here

Suzy Cristinacce
Frome Birth Talk



Find out more about Smart Space:
www.heartsandmindpartnership.org/vcs/training-and-support



Watch the Smart Space trailer:
<https://www.youtube.com/@hmpartnership>

3

TRAINING

Smart Space training modules are delivered by a range of people from the perinatal mental health VCSE sector who share their rich learning and insight in bite-size chunks.

A Living Library of over 100 resources sits alongside the training modules and includes useful websites, guidance documents, reports, podcast links and book suggestions. Material is either directly referenced in our training modules or provides additional learning opportunities.



Honest Conversations

VCSE HACKS



Tips, pearls of wisdom and gems we wish we'd known earlier when starting and growing a perinatal mental health VCSE service

Complementing the training modules are our podcast style 'Honest Conversations' which provide authentic insights into real life experiences of VCSE service leaders as they navigate the ups and downs of growing and sustaining their services






Listen to Soundbite clips from Smart Space:
<https://www.youtube.com/@hmpartnership>

Reaching out to VCSE Services across England

-  Outreach work with over 100 VCSE groups including: intro meetings; check-ins; map on-boarding support; and responding to specific 1-1 requests for support and engagement
-  Regular newsletter to our community with 135 subscribers, updating on news, events and training and development opportunities via Smart Space

Our Social Community

-  484 Followers
-  1,645 Followers
-  2,693 Followers

Digital community: 4,822

Developing a skilled team aligned with our values

Regular project board meetings have been central to the programme oversight, as well as the development of our Partnership brand, values and tone of voice. This became the core means of orienting our ways of working – supporting flexibility, mutual respect and a spirit of continuous learning.

Good communication is at the centre of the Partnership, enabling us to forge relationships based on reciprocity and build trust to enable meaningful discussion. Integrity is also a key cornerstone – we do what we say we'll do and we endeavour to be accountable. In the spirit of Hearts and Minds, we're mindful of the balance between compassion and rigour within our work and across the wider VCSE community.



Forging mutually-beneficial stakeholder relationships with:

Mind

Maternal Mental Health Alliance

NHS England

First 1001

Perinatal Mental Health Partnership

Days Movement

iHV

Home-Start UK

Parent Infant Foundation

(Institute of Health Visiting)

NCT

Royal Foundation for Early Childhood

NSPCC (Pregnancy in Mind)

Maternity Consortium

Although 'co-production' is something of a buzz word across the health landscape, at Hearts and Minds we are committed to 'living' this philosophy and were keen to ensure collaboration underpinned the foundations of our work. We worked alongside our digital partner, Rocketmakers, to host a series of focus groups in 2020/21 across parent, VCSE and clinical sectors to inform the navigation and site-map of our website and map development. These sessions were also fundamental in the development of the map on-boarding safeguarding questions to protect both VCSE services and their beneficiaries.

Co-creation has been integral to developing our Conversation Space format, which invites free online participation from a capped number of attendees. Themes are developed in partnership with the community to reflect the day-to-day successes, challenges and key considerations of growing a VCSE service in this sector. Our Smart Space training is also co-delivered with guest trainers from the PMH landscape to offer meaningful, authentic content from our collective learning, under the umbrella of 'generous leadership'.



Testimonials from Conversation Space participants

Wonderful to join @hmpartnership's VCS Conversation Space today - there is so much to gain from sharing & learning together.

Great to reflect on how important it is to value and celebrate what VCS do, and how what we deliver is unique. #collaboration #peersupport

Parents 1st (Twitter)

Conversation Space has really helped me learn ways to help broaden what we do and meet others from the same areas of health care

Becca Todd, The Happy Mums Foundation

I just wanted to feedback how useful I found the Conversation Space last month.

It was so good to connect with like-minded people and hear about everyone's experiences within their own organisations

Caroline Ridge, Pregnancy Sickness Support

Sensitive storytelling is at the heart of our partnership...

We have endeavoured to listen to authentic voices from across the sector and provide trusted spaces for learning, best practice and shared challenges to be heard and held in safety:

While our work focuses on VCSEs, the experiences of parents and families remain central to our vision. Our National Meet-Up showcased the parent voice with an opening address from a previous VCSE client whose personal experience inspired her to move into volunteering then a paid role in the sector. We also developed a soundscape for our interactive 'Discover' room of resources, which was an audio of open conversation facilitated with parents affected by perinatal mental health challenges benefiting from VCSE support. This highlighted the clear benefits of VCSE services and the importance of a fully integrated PMH system (listen to the Soundscape on [YouTube](#)).

We collaborated with Mind / McPin Foundation to promote their co-produced Perinatal Peer Support Principles, working together to facilitate a themed Conversation Space, a dedicated Honest Conversation, and providing space at our National Meet-Up to share their work.

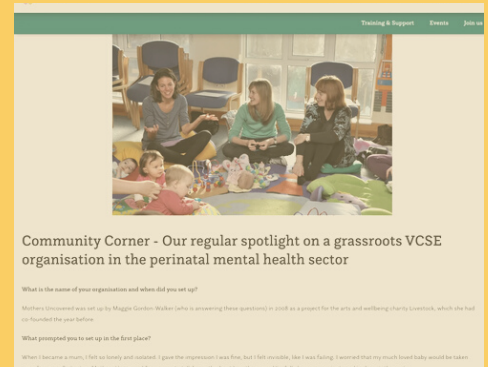
Smart Space training modules, Honest Conversations and Living Library resources are informed and created by parents, VCSE services and partner organisations from across our sector, making them authentic representations of real-life experiences.

Our blog features a case study on [the Pillars of Partnership Working](#), featuring approved editorial commentary from Shelley McBride, Co-director of Connected Perinatal Support CIC, and Helen Martinez, a Community Peer Support Worker in the Derbyshire Perinatal Mental Health Service. This has already been shared across social networks and actively incorporated in clinical newsletters as a living and breathing example of cross-sector working.

I was so delighted to be asked to tell the Mamas Matter CIC story and contribute to the blog and I love being a part of the H&M community

Jo McGregor
Mamas Matter CIC

Community Corner



Our Community Corner Blog Posts shone a spotlight on eight different VCSE services within our community.

Using a Q&A format, leaders from the sector told the story of how their services began and where they are today. These blogs highlight the breadth and diversity of the VCSE offer, which includes support for perinatal depression / anxiety, birth trauma & baby loss through: group & 1:1 peer support; counselling and workshops; creative therapies; mindfulness; arts & crafts and home visits.

The blog provides a platform for services within our community to reach a wider audience and inspire others in the development of their organisations.



Read our blog posts, including Community Corner:
<https://heartsandmindspartnership.org/blog>

Our External Evaluation

Our evaluation supported the 3-year programme of work and was undertaken by Clear Impact Consulting. It was underpinned by a developmental approach, enabling us to test and refine the theory of change. This drew on quantitative and qualitative data taken from engagement across a multitude of audiences, such as the VCSE community in perinatal mental health (including parents with lived experience), healthcare professionals, national stakeholders and the Hearts and Minds team.

Findings are taken from the final evaluation report as well as interim evaluation reports throughout the 3-year programme. The final evaluation report and our interim reports are available by email request: hello@heartandsmindspartnership.org The following key themes emerged from the evaluation:



National Context ...

The programme began against the backdrop of a global pandemic, which prompted significant restrictions on face-to-face engagement and placed immense pressure on NHS systems. Throughout the 3-year period there has been political turbulence and uncertainty, impacting on the direction of policy.

A shift in policy focus was widely acknowledged, with the risk of the spotlight moving from perinatal mental health to a broader approach.

The roll-out of the Government's 'Best Start for Life' programme points to the delivery of an integrated, universal offer with a focus on early years. Transitions in the commissioning landscape also have an impact on the role of VCSE, alongside the financial constraints of a contracted economy.



Website ...

While engagement with the map was initially the dominant area of user interaction, development of the website has translated to 35% user engagement with the blog. Prior to the map development, there was no consistent, central database of VCSE services in perinatal mental health.

The map is used by new and expectant parents, VCSEs, and there is some engagement from healthcare professionals who know about the resource. The map has reportedly been used in academic research about the sector and is cited by national stakeholders as an England-wide resource.

There is an opportunity to 'map the gaps' in geographical support as well as identify under-represented communities to inform a focus on equity, diversity and inclusion.



Awareness & Perceptions ...

The evaluation consistently points to high levels of awareness and understanding of Hearts and Minds among VCSE organisations. Responses to VCSE surveys included phrases such as ‘sharing learning’, ‘a community of organisations’ and ‘peer support for peer support’. The majority of respondents saw the Partnership as a good way of connecting with other organisations and some were recommended it by other organisations as a source of support when starting out.

"The infrastructure the Partnership gave was very appealing. We became aware of them at the same time as our service was launching... other charities were saying it can be quite isolating and quite daunting, and actually we recommend you tap into Hearts and Minds"

It became apparent in initial engagement that there was some confusion around what it means to be part of the Hearts and Minds community, with a sense that an organisation had to be on the map in order to ‘be part of it’. This learning informed greater clarity in our communication to reassure services of the opportunity to sign up to the Charter*, the multiple ways to engage and that map on-boarding wasn’t a prerequisite.

National stakeholder engagement helped to embed Hearts and Minds in the national perinatal mental health landscape and secure high profile speaker opportunities. However, while some national stakeholders could describe the role of the Partnership, they weren’t fully aware of the breadth of the workstreams.

Awareness among the wider healthcare professional community was relatively low – potentially due to contextual issues stated around pressure on statutory services and a turbulent political climate. Healthcare professionals generally acknowledged the credibility of the VCSE sector but felt provision varied across the country.

*The Hearts and Minds Charter can be found in the appendices



VCSE Engagement & Outcomes ...

Engagement across the VCSE community in perinatal mental health was consistently high throughout the programme, with positive feedback documented about the value of Conversation Space and the development of the free Smart Space training modules.

Three key benefits of the Partnership cited by VCSEs were:

- 1 Reassurance and a sense of shared experience

- 2 An opportunity to connect with their purpose
- 3 Reinvigoration for leaders - motivating them to continue facing challenges

Three core VCSE outcomes were:

- 1 Connections enabled grassroots organisations to build networks and learn from one another
- 2 Increased motivation. Interviewees mentioned that the three coordinators' approach was positive, passionate, motivating and engaging
- 3 Greater support from the development of resources and partnership working. The development of the map, Smart Space modules, living library and trusted spaces like Conversation Space were recognised as valuable assets for the VCSE community

For me the connectivity and meeting with other VCSEs [is the most useful thing about the Partnership] and talking about perinatal mental health and how we support the communities was really key. It is something that in this sector can feel quite isolating. I wish I could think of a word about how I feel when I engage with Hearts and Minds – I guess it's safety

It's good for connections, networks and learning and also as I get to know the three of them who run it, they are brilliant – they are very passionate and engaging. They are contagious

I have found how they brought everyone together very useful – they have this interactive map so it's easy to find other support services in your local area or more broadly, so that's been really helpful to have and that's ongoing, you can be added to the map. The online training modules have been really helpful for us. And just knowing other services who are doing similar work in our locality, enabling us to start conversations and complement each other's work

Our Evaluation Approach

Feedback from 1-1 interviews emphasised the ‘warmth’ and ‘kindness’ which characterises the Partnership, while also acknowledging its professionalism. One VCSE representative commented: “They make promises that they keep, which is really important.” This combination of compassion and rigour informs the Partnership’s tone and aesthetic appeal.

VCSE services have increasingly regarded Hearts and Minds as a trusted source. Services expressed that they would like to see Hearts and Minds take a more active role in calling for change at a national level. This stems from the way in which Hearts and Minds has built the legitimacy to act as a representative voice through its programme delivery as well as national stakeholder relationships, which are underpinned by a values-based approach.

The Partnership’s work in this regard has enabled it to build a platform from which it could work to influence on a national scale. This and previous rounds of evaluation have shown that most of the VCSE organisations included in our fieldwork would be keen for the partnership to take on this national influencing role.

**Hearts & Minds
Final Report
Clear Impact Consulting**

Email hello@heartsandmindspartnership.org
for copies of our interim or final evaluation reports

Equity

National stakeholders and VCSE organisations that we engaged with as part of the evaluation shared that they thought the Partnership worked in an equitable way. They described the Partnership as a network of locally-rooted organisations, who hold deep connections with their local communities and because of this are able to reflect their needs and views.

Interviewees felt the Partnership was inclusive and representative, though acknowledged their own subjective bias and some felt that there was room for improvement in terms of representation from marginalised communities.

Evaluation Report Recommendations:

Maintain core features of the Partnership

Explore suggested routes to develop the partnership's work on equity

Lean into the strengths of the Partnership as a place for sharing ideas and collaborative leadership

Seek opportunities to influence at a national level

Consider fundraising routes beyond grant funding from trusts and foundations

During the three-year delivery of our three workstreams, we successfully achieved the following:

Developed a website for parents and professionals to access information about the Partnership and perinatal mental health VCSE support, including our England-wide interactive map of services. The map and blog are the most popular pages on the website.

Outreach and engagement with

131

services within the VCSE community

Hosted an online launch with

160 sign-ups

to introduce our work & invited a panel discussion with diverse representation from the PMH community

Grew a social network of more than
4,800
people who are engaging with our content

Saw representation from **79** services at
21 Conversation Space sessions - our free, monthly online chats

Received checklists from

86

services to feature on our England-wide map.

73

appear on the map at this time

Released two interim and one final evaluation reports, following 1-1 interviews with VCSE leaders, a series of healthcare professional focus groups, a VCSE survey, stakeholder interviews and ongoing engagement across our sector

Hosted a successful National Meet-Up in Jan 2023 with

78

attendees (93 registered) and a panel of national thought leaders from across the PMH landscape which received an average of

9/10

on our event feedback forms

Created 'Smart Space' our free online training resource for emerging and established VCSE groups, with

159 individuals signed up

The average rating on our end of module feedback form was

8/10

Impact Across Our Key Audiences

VCSE

The VCSE is our primary audience. The intention to connect, support and celebrate the grassroots community in perinatal mental health has underpinned the development of the sector by mapping services, bringing the sector together and creating meaningful engagement opportunities, shared learning and bespoke training and development. It has also fortified the rigour and quality that is so instrumental to greater recognition and investment, by exploring the impact story, hosting meaningful conversations and starting to capture raw data. The natural by-product of a stronger, aligned and more connected VCSE community is equitable access to community PMH support for families across the country.

We are just starting our own steps along the journey and have definitely found value and support along the way so far from all involved in the @hmpartnership – look forward to learning more from you guys and working in partnership to provide safe & effective local peer support.

**Shelley McBride,
Connected Perinatal Support (Twitter)**

Just wanted to say a HUGE continued thank you for everything you do for the perinatal mental health world. It makes such a difference to so many . . . I suspect you will never fully know of the wider impact your organisation has, through the more subtle avenues (I for one share your map with other individuals on an ongoing basis, it's such a fab resource!).

**Bella Bastable,
NCT Parents in Mind**

It was such a privilege to meet other organisations, connect with common goals and share organisational struggles. We talked about findings, partnerships and made lots of contacts. Our heads are still buzzing from all the ideas and thoughts. You created safe space and challenged us with some provoking conversations.

Anna Rutkowska, Support ME CIC

It's actually a big deal for us to be involved and recognised as a safe space for accessing support. We are thrilled to be part of Hearts & Minds.

**Sally Wilson,
Mothers Mind**



Sector Stakeholders

In order for Hearts and Minds to establish and consolidate its position within the perinatal mental health landscape, it has been vital for us to ensure we are working in partnership with stakeholders to define our offer, develop mutually beneficial relationships and remain abreast of key strategic themes to share across our community. We have worked with stakeholders to articulate key challenges, be conversant with new policies and to plot the shifting commissioning landscape.

We hosted a discussion at our National Meet-Up about multi-sector engagement, which enabled meaningful dialogue between VCSEs and commissioners. This included helpful insights into Family Hub roll-outs across the country, to avoid a fragmented approach and enable VCSEs to understand the regional translation of national policy.

It has been a pleasure to collaborate and work alongside Hearts and Minds to better support the VCSE in navigating and embedding their perinatal services into their local landscapes of family support. It has never been more important, nor difficult, for smaller grassroots organisations to have their services recognised, valued and funded as the need rises for their support.

Alex Corgier, Home-Start UK

It was a very informative webinar: learnt a lot from different partnerships. Found new organisations and contacts which could help me in my line of work. Lots of avenues to research and look at to improve our service and the work we do.

Maternity Consortium Event Attendee

After attending our National Meet-up, Dudley local commissioners arranged a meeting with Hearts and Minds to discuss initial scoping ideas for setting up a peer support service in their area. This conversation was informed by best practice from within the Partnership and across the sector as a whole

Events we have presented at or been a guest panellist:

Panelist at MMHA/The Centre for Mental Health launch of their Covid-19 report

iHV PIMH Champions national online event

Maternity Consortium national engagement events

Contributed to the theme and programme content of PMHP's #MaternalMHMatters campaign with a

Zoom recording about our map on-boarding process

Panel speaker at NSPCC Pregnancy in Mind event

Parents & Families

While the majority of our work is aimed at supporting the VCSE community in perinatal mental health, we must remember that grassroots services are often formed, led and shaped by parents with lived experience. Our own partnership is made up of experts by experience and we continue to engage with parent beneficiaries and their families, as our ultimate audience.

Parent voices shape the development of our programme of work and our soundscape* audio content with parents with lived experience who had actively engaged with VCSE services was broadcast at our National Meet-Up and is available in our [Living Library](#) and via our [You Tube channel](#).

I have to say I love the H&M map. I've used it to signpost a new referral who spends half her time in our area and half in Manchester, so it was AMAZING that I could send her the link

VCSE Manager

The resources around mental health and support (for men) can be very laddish, very gendered, very aggressive. The human connection I've experienced with my buddy is a connection that never defaults to cliché, it never defaults to clip art. It's very honest. It's very frank. It's transparent. It's given me realistic tools that I can interpret as an adult and as a person as opposed to just 'a man' . . . It's changed the way I am with my other male peers. My experience has just been transformative

Parent quote from our Soundscape*

Being supported by a VCSE helped my mind unquestionably.... it fixed my heart, I suppose. It helped me process my emotions and ... it took me on this journey that I really wasn't expecting, to the point now that I'm working in this sector. So the work that the VCSE do is fantastic, as is the work that The Hearts and Minds Partnership do to bring them together and bring them into the light

Parent speaker at our National Meet-Up



*Listen to our soundscape of parent voices: <https://www.youtube.com/@hmpartnership>

What's gone well?

Hearts and Minds has achieved incredible momentum in the last three years by bringing coherence and a greater sense of direction to the VCSE community in perinatal mental health. Our evaluation demonstrates that the Partnership is a trusted organisation and that the community is actively requesting us to act as a voice for the sector to influence policy-makers, commissioners and strategic bodies.



Here are some of the highlights of our programme of work:

Sold-out National Meet-Up in Birmingham '23, with a panel of highly respected thought leaders from across the perinatal mental health landscape.

Invitations to be speakers and participants at national and regional stakeholder forums.

The Hearts and Minds community supports a call for us to become a thought leader and supports our intention to explore a feasibility study to articulate the impact of the sector.

Feedback shows that people value our balance of compassion and rigour and the warmth and professionalism of our approach.

The COVID 19 pandemic was a challenging time but it brought to the fore the agility, responsiveness and innovation within the VCSE sector. Our sector responded promptly and was able to continue supporting families, despite restrictions within statutory services.

The development of the online map of VCSE services in perinatal mental health across England has been well-received as a central resource. It is used by parents, healthcare colleagues and NHSE commented that they actively signpost people to it. It also appears on national stakeholder websites, such as the Royal Foundation for Early Childhood and PANDAS Foundation.

The map has potential to develop a focus on equity, diversity and inclusion. By observing the gaps we have the opportunity to encourage a more inclusive map to represent minoritised communities.

Our free online Smart Space training is co-created with leaders within our community and has been welcomed by both emerging and established VCSEs as a valuable resource. The Living Library has evolved to become a central resource to avoid duplication of effort and mutually signpost to resources, crediting people / organisations appropriately.

What's proved challenging or unexpected?

The Hearts and Minds Partnership was conceived against the backdrop of the COVID 19 pandemic. This posed challenges given that it was an extremely difficult landscape for health services and meant an increase in demand for VCSE services, who were able to respond swiftly and with versatility. As with any programme of work, unexpected situations can arise and the context of significant changes within the health, economic and political climate play a key role.

Here are some of the challenges we have faced along the way:

The contextual background of significant pressure on the NHS has meant a reduced workforce across perinatal mental health, which translated into decreased clinical engagement in our focus groups. This has also meant an increase in demand for VCSEs given clinical case-loads, and a greater reliance on community-based services to alleviate the pressure from statutory care.

Lack of sustainable funding in the grassroots has certainly put excessive pressure on VCSE services, with feedback showing that 'many services lurch from one fund to the next' without any guarantee of future-proofing organisations. Our map has also recorded grassroots service closures across the landscape in the economic downturn.

Pressure on the wider health landscape in this period of economic and political instability has also meant a lack of equity in strategic focus when it comes to the VCSE's role as a partner within the perinatal mental health ecosystem. This was reiterated at our National Meet-Up when thought leaders acknowledged that it was 'time for the VCSE to take its deserved seat at the decision-making table'.

Shifts in our team also presented unexpected recruitment challenges with a change in regional coordinators. This was a reminder that short-term contracts can be unsettling for workers in the third sector, where sustainability is a constant challenge.

The development of our website prototype presented challenges in terms of the technical aspects of the on-boarding process in the CMS system. As with any prototype, this is an evolving product and a concerted effort was made to refine any glitches in the system being experienced by VCSEs uploading their service information in the map submission process.

Hearts and Minds has recognised a need to be more inclusive in our approach and to have a greater focus on EDI, given that the map is not currently representative of minoritised communities. Equitable access to support continues to be a key challenge in our sector.



Valuable learning taken from the project

Our approach

- Relationships are organic and take time to grow - a true partnership like this cannot be rushed
- Alignment of values / culture is pivotal to the team flourishing. These relationships are core to the Partnership
- Hearts and Minds demonstrates the intrinsic value of 'peer support for peer support' – providing a safe and open space for organisations to offer mutual support is a vital piece of the VCSE framework
- Balancing structure and fluidity – Conversation Space is a prime example of this. i.e. clear expectations and processes around scheduling, technology platform, and planned themes but facilitating an authentic conversation requires us to be nimble and to allow the community to take the conversation where it has most value to them
- Adaptability is key – COVID landscape was challenging for engagement and people value a blend of face to face and online contact
- The above are crucial in an environment where nearly all participants have a history of mental health difficulties - our culture must effectively and sensitively hold people in a safe space

To address

- We experienced a delay in our training plan implementation and recruitment due to an initial focus on online mapping and co-production. The training workstream is a valuable & versatile tool and creates greater accessibility but needs to be supplemented by live learning
- Free training, whilst accessible, can impede motivation for sign-up and module completion. A future charge may increase engagement whilst acting as a vital form of revenue for Hearts and Minds
- Clarity of intentions and offer – people know us but they aren't always sure exactly what our different workstreams are. Some people incorrectly believed an organisation had to be on our map to be a part of our community
- Increased engagement required with healthcare professionals – engagement and awareness is high among the VCSE community but there are more barriers to engagement with HCPs and it's important this is developed

Bigger picture observations

The broader insights from our learning

- There is a noticeable shift, based on feedback from the community, to make a case for Hearts and Minds becoming more of a sector thought leader and a potential campaigning organisation
- In programmes of work of this scope and scale there always is a tension between reactivity and remaining on purpose. Our core objectives and values remain a blueprint to orient any future decisions
- Given the geography of the partner charities, our footprint has been England-wide, though we are often approached by services across the UK. While they aren't able to feature on the online map, we are keen to encourage engagement where possible
- Our work with national stakeholders and active participation in discussions regarding research (eg. The ESMI II PMH study event in London, '23) has exposed a gap in data to articulate the impact of the VCSE community in perinatal mental health. This is something we are keen to progress in the next phase of our work
- The findings of our evaluation programme point to a gap in equitable representation of VCSE services within Hearts & Minds and on our map. This presents an opportunity to develop a specific programme of work around EDI

It can be quite a challenge to do things individually – a collective voice is a lot more powerful. I very much see the Hearts and Minds as leading on that, particularly for smaller charities that don't have the capacity and means to

VCSE Interviewee - External Evaluation



Appendices



Useful links



Visit our map at:

www.heartsandmindpartnership.org/map



Visit the VCSE space on our website:

www.heartsandmindpartnership.org/vcs



Read our blog posts:

<https://heartsandmindpartnership.org/blog/>



Listen to the soundscape of parent voices:

<https://www.youtube.com/@hmpartnership>

Training



Find out more about Smart Space:

www.heartsandmindpartnership.org/vcs/training-and-support



Watch the Smart Space training trailer:

<https://www.youtube.com/@hmpartnership>



Listen to Soundbite clips from Smart Space:

<https://www.youtube.com/@hmpartnership>

Social media



[@hmpartnership](https://www.facebook.com/hmpartnership)



[@hmpartnership](https://www.instagram.com/hmpartnership)



[@hmpartnership](https://twitter.com/hmpartnership)



[the-hearts-minds-partnership](https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-hearts-minds-partnership)

The Charter

The Hearts and Minds Partnership is a community of grassroots perinatal mental health services across England set up by a collective of three perinatal mental health charities; Acacia Family Support, Bluebell Care and Smile Group and supported by The National Lottery Community Fund.

This Charter sets out the intentions of the Partnership, and in doing so, any organisation within the community implicitly demonstrates its alignment with the vision, values and the spirit of the Partnership.

Vision

The Hearts and Minds Partnership set out with a vision to connect and support VCS perinatal mental health services across England.

The Partnership identifies three clear ways to connect, support and celebrate the community of emerging and established VCS perinatal mental health services:

- 1** By creating an interactive map of safe, quality grassroots PMH services across England in order to signpost parents as well as healthcare professionals to support and to identify the gaps.
- 2** By providing trusted spaces to enable VCS groups to share their experiences, learn from each other and create a collective voice for the grassroots PMH sector.
- 3** By developing and delivering training to support existing and emerging PMH VCS groups, to reflect the real-life challenges of growing, delivering and sustaining a safe, quality service.

Tone of Voice

The Hearts and Minds Partnership is a values-led collective. The name was deliberately chosen to establish a careful balance between the emotive, heart-led motivation behind the grassroots PMH sector, and the requirement for quality assurance, rigour and governance that is essential in the development of a third sector service.

The Charter (Cont'd)

Culturally we are passionate, agile, non-hierarchical, responsive and collaborative. We roll up our sleeves and get things done in the spirit of teamship. We are always learning and our approach is shaped by real life experience on the ground of service delivery, celebrating success, being honest and open about the challenges and always exploring new ways of doing things. We act with integrity.

Our language is friendly (with a professional edge when it needs to be), supportive, inclusive, respectful and collaborative. It is imbued with compassion and integrity but also firm when it needs to be (robust kindness).

In external engagement our choice of words is considered and we aim to be responsive and helpful, without promising to deliver beyond the parameters of our scope of work. We refrain from engaging in any sensitive or inflammatory debate and are always mindful that we are representing the Partnership appropriately.

By signing up to the Charter, organisations within the grassroots perinatal mental health community:

- are committed to our vision and ways of operating
- actively participate in sharing its vision and demonstrate an ongoing commitment to quality assurance and best practice. We all recognise that no matter where you are on your organisational growth curve, we never stop learning and improving
- are committed to supporting and listening to each other in an inclusive, open-hearted and generous way
- are within the geographical parameters of an England-wide community
- cannot use their involvement in the Hearts & Minds VCS community to suggest endorsement of specific products or activities

The Hearts and Minds Partnership is not a membership organisation, but rather a community with an aligned vision and intentions



2021

Total of 73 attendances across 46 organisations
Average session attendance: 9

Growing Pains -----	The challenges of growing a developing grassroots PMH VCSE service
Let's Talk About Value -----	How we value our work, measure impact and who we reach
Volunteering -----	The important role volunteers play
Poll -----	Thinking ahead to 2022, what type of learning would suit you best?
Free-Flowing Chat -----	A chance to reflect on the highlights and challenges of 2021

2022

Total of 67 attendances across 39 organisations
Average session attendance: 7

The Comparison Trap -----	The perils of social media scrolling
Managing Expectation -----	Meeting beneficiaries' needs while remaining focused
Mild to Moderate -----	The subjective nature of the term and what that means for us
Sharing VCSE Hacks & Wins -----	Sharing surprising wins that have worked really well for you
How Many Hats Are You Wearing? -----	Juggling numerous roles within a small VCSE
The F Word -----	All about funding
Mind Legacy -----	Peer support principles
Evolving Without Dissolving -----	How can we grow without losing the core focus of the service?
Christmas Special -----	Silly Season



Conversation Space

2023

Total of 27 attendances across 17 organisations
Average session attendance: 7

When Lived Experience Keeps on Living -----	The challenges and benefits of bringing lived experience to the PMH space
Lasing Marks of the Digital Switch - Evaluation Ever After -----	Where online and in-person services meet, 3 years on from Lockdown
Be The Change -----	Telling the impact story
	Leading with courage

National Meet-Up

Plus face-to-face Conversation Space sessions at our National Meet-Up in Birmingham, January 2023

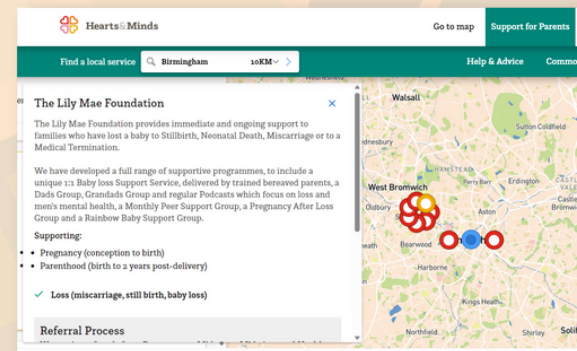


Building Relationships -----	Connecting with stakeholders, joining networks & embedding in pathways
You Matter Too! -----	How do you ensure you are well supported in your role?
Telling the Impact Story -----	Monitoring and evaluating your service
It's All About the Money -----	Funding and resourcing your service

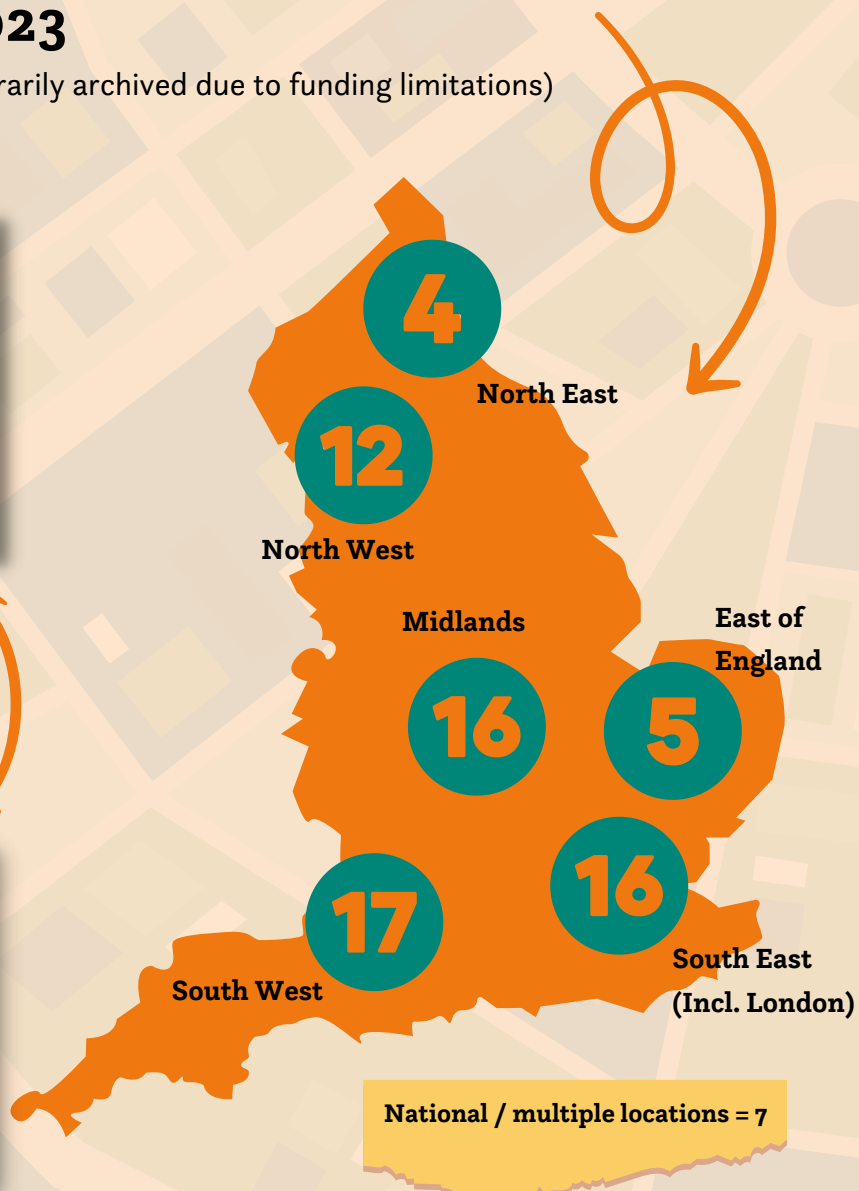
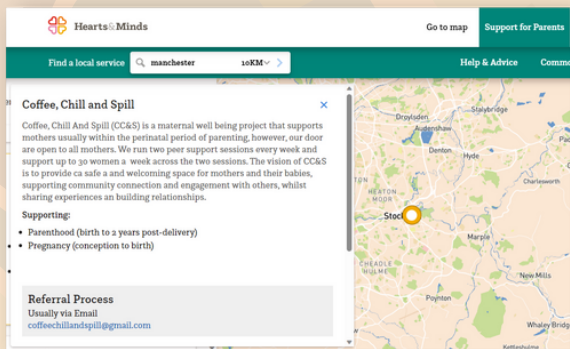
Map Data

There are **77** organisations appearing on the map as of June 2023

(including those who have closed / temporarily archived due to funding limitations)



Examples of 'service cards' discoverable on the map



Meet the Trainers

Abi Yardimci

(Hearts & Minds / Bluebell)

Catherine Briars

(NCT Parents in Mind)

Celia Suppiah

(Parents 1st)

Katherine Dalglish

(Happy Mums Foundation)

Liz Moss

(Acacia Family Support)

Natalie Nuttall

(Hearts & Minds / Smile)

Rob Ewers

(Acacia Family Support)

Sarah Hislam

(Hearts & Minds / Acacia)

Sasha Lee Barber

(Bristol NHS Trust / Bluebell)

Vicki Hook

(Acacia Family Support)

Living Library

Setting up a Service and Getting Started

Developing Your Service

Perinatal Mental Health Support & Information

Creating a Safe Service

Funding & Finance

Governance

Marketing & Promoting Your Service

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

Monitoring, Evaluation & Impact Measurement

Recommended Resources - useful books, podcasts & more

Other Useful Training

Honest Conversations

VCSE Hacks

Steph Leason (Koala NW), Karen Burgess (Petals), Lauraine Cheesman (Shine)

Perinatal Peer Support Principles

Nisba Ahmed and Laura Richmond (Mind Lived Experience Facilitators)

Parent Voices Soundscape

Modules for Emerging Organisations . . .

Module 1

Overview of Perinatal Mental Health

- Making sense of the terminology
- How perinatal mental health presents
- Overview of the PMH landscape
- Specific roles & support
- Befriending & peer support

Module 2

Growing a Service from Scratch

- Developing your offer
- Building links with the clinical network
- Creating evidence-based services
- Setting boundaries and avoiding burn-out

Module 3

Developing a Safe Service

- Safeguarding responsibilities
- Referral pathways
- Managing risk
- Supervision
- Boundaries

Module 4

Promoting Your Service

- Establishing a brand using vision & values
- Social media management
- Building connections
- PR & communications

Module 5

Introduction to Funding and Finance

- Begin to write your case for support
- Financial planning
- Exploring funding channels
- The art of writing funding applications

Modules for Established Organisations . . .

Module 1

The Growth Curve

- Navigating growth
- Culture shifts
- The role of leadership
- Maturing as an organisation

Module 2

Resourcing an Expanding Service

- What expansion looks like
- Building your team
- Recruit effectively
- Outsource specialist roles