



July 2021

Dear friends,

We hope you are well and enjoying the start of summer. It's been a busy few months at Birth Companions, with in-person services restarting in prisons and the community, new staff members joining the team, loads of policy and engagement work, and several births!

If you would like any further information on our work or would like to discuss ways to support Birth Companions in these challenging times, please do contact us at info@birthcompanions.org.uk or visit www.birthcompanions.org.uk.

Thanks as always for your support.

Impact Report 2020/21

After what has been a challenging year for so many of us, we're really pleased to have published our Impact Report for the 2020/21 financial year, covering the vital work our staff and volunteers have done throughout the pandemic. In addition to reviewing all we've achieved in the past year, this also felt like an appropriate moment to reflect on all that we have achieved since Birth Companions started 25 years ago. We've put together a visual timeline of Birth Companions' history and featured first-hand accounts from women we've supported over the years. [You can read the Impact Report here.](#)

Anti-racism statement

We're pleased to be able to share Birth Companions' new anti-racism statement with you. We want Birth Companions to be a safe and supportive organisation for Black and Asian women, and women from all other groups who experience racism, to work, volunteer and be supported in. The anti-racism statement is just one part of this and is intended to be a working document – both a public statement of intent and a point of reference to which we will return regularly, to hold ourselves accountable and to ensure we continue to prioritise our anti-racist work. [You can read the statement on our website.](#)

Current services

Across our Community Services we are continuing to remotely support pregnant women and new mums through our bespoke antenatal learning packs, postnatal activity packs, weekly phone check-ins, practical items and taxis to and from hospital. Plans are now also being finalised for resuming our face-to-face antenatal classes and mother and baby groups in London from September. We're delighted to have supported several women in-person at their births in recent months, and to have been able to support several more over the phone during labour. We've also been able to start meeting up with some women before and after their births, with staff and volunteers going for walks in parks, hospital visits and home visits with pregnant women and new mums. Our volunteers have been doing an incredible job providing remote support to women throughout the pandemic, and we're so pleased that they've been able to get back to some in-person work too. We are delighted to welcome Lauren Shirley to the team as our new Community Antenatal Services Coordinator, and excited that recruitment is now also underway for a new Community Services Manager.

On the Prisons Services side, we have now resumed visiting in two of the three prisons we regularly work in, and are pleased to be having regular, one-to-one meetings with pregnant women and mothers who are separated from children in the community, as well as women who have experienced pregnancy loss who wish to have Birth Companions' support. We've also been able to meet with new mums in groups on the Mother and Baby Unit at one of the prisons, and to get their input on what they'd most enjoy and benefit from when our early parenting groups can restart. In addition to all this in-person work, women in all three prisons are continuing to receive support via telephone and email, through advocacy and casework, and through the provision of practical items, wellbeing resources and activity packs. Our new Peer Support project is now also underway in one prison, and we are looking forward to starting training with several new peer supporters next month.

Our Lived Experience Team

The Birth Companions Lived Experience Team (LET) has continued to be extremely active despite the constraints of the pandemic. Members of the LET are currently involved in several projects including a review of prison Mother and Baby Unit applications with the Chief Social Worker; an audit examining racial and socioeconomic inequalities in maternity care with the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists; development of a new national protocol for maternity and social care professionals with the University of Lancaster; and work with the team leading on the independent review of children's social care. It's brilliant to see our LET members using their experience, knowledge and insight to inform such a diverse range of research, policy and practice in the maternity, social care and criminal justice systems. If you would like any more info on their work, or to discuss engagement opportunities, please contact [Kate](#).

Influencing policy and practice

In May we launched our latest report, 'A Window of Opportunity', in partnership with [Clinks](#). This research explores the needs and experiences of pregnant women and mothers of infants who are serving community sentences, under probation supervision or on bail. Informed by women's lived experiences and those involved in their care, we have made 16 recommendations for change aimed at criminal justice agencies, health services, voluntary sector organisations and social services. [You can read the full report here.](#)

We are pleased to have been able to work with our friends at [Women in Prison](#) to inform amendments to the government's controversial Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, relating to the [sentencing of primary carers including those who are pregnant](#).

Last month we responded to the Department of Health and Social Care's call for evidence to help inform the new Women's Health Strategy, with a written submission focusing on the health inequalities experienced by women facing disadvantage and deprivation during pregnancy and early motherhood; [you can read our submission here.](#)

Many aspects of our work include a focus on women's experiences of social services and the family justice system, and we recently convened a workshop discussion with the Royal College of Midwives, Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, Family Rights Group, Centre for Child and Family Justice Research and the Homerton Hospital to explore pre-birth assessments and newborn care proceedings. We have also recently supported members of our Lived Experience Team to contribute to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care.

We will provide updates on these and other areas of our work in the coming months but if you would like to discuss any of these projects further please contact [Kirsty](#).

In case you missed it...

Listen: Dr Shona Minson, a good friend of Birth Companions, was on BBC Radio 4's *Four Thought* show this week. In her thoughtful and moving talk, *Mums in Prison*, she explains how she came to research the experiences of children whose parents go to prison, argues that our current approach punishes these children unfairly, and describes some of the changes she believes are needed across the justice, education and health systems. [Listen here.](#)

Watch: Clean Break's new film *Sweatbox* has been adapted for screen from Chloë Moss's highly original and immersive play. It offers a glimpse into the experience of women as they are pulled away from their lives and transported to prison; it is

moving, visceral and really worth a watch. [You can find it here.](#)

Read: *Careless*, a new novel by Kirsty Capes, tells the story of a teenager growing up in the care system, who finds out that she is pregnant. [You can read a review here](#), and find it in bookshops, libraries and online now.

Act: Our sisters at Women in Prison have launched a campaign to stop the government's plans to create 500 new prison places for women. You can take action now by adding your voice to their #StopThe500 campaign. [Find out more here.](#)

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