



Dear friends,

This year has been a major one for Birth Companions.

Our staff, volunteer and Lived Experience teams have all grown. We have established new services, hosted new training programmes, and built new partnerships. We launched our new centre for expertise, the Birth Companions Institute, and a brand new website along with it. We focused on the power of supporting hope and strength in mothers, and raised over £26,000 during our annual Big Give campaign.

We could not have done any of this without you, our incredible friends and supporters. We hope you all have a peaceful end to 2025, and can't wait to continue working alongside you all in 2026.

Read on for a roundup of news from the past few months.

**With love,
Birth Companions**

Celebrating Denise Marshall's remarkable career

After an extraordinary 30 years, Denise Marshall, our Director of Services, is retiring this month.

Denise's story with Birth Companions began in 1996 as one of our original birth companions, when a group of doulas and antenatal teachers came together to offer support to women from Holloway Prison following a Channel 4 News investigation into handcuffing during labour.

Since 2005, Denise has been a treasured member of the Birth Companions staff team and the beating heart of our frontline services - supporting pregnant women and new mothers facing some of the most challenging circumstances with unwavering compassion and expertise.

In recent years as our Director of Services, she has led our growing services team with care and dedication, passing on her invaluable insight and shaping our evolving models of support.

Denise's deep knowledge of the criminal justice system, pregnancy and early motherhood, and trauma-informed practice has profoundly shaped how we work. We routinely hear how impactful she has been in the lives of the many women she has supported.

"It has been an incredible journey for me, meeting such inspiring women and learning so much! I'm so glad that Tanya will be taking over from me and I hope to stay connected with this amazing work." - Denise Marshall

We are thrilled to announce that Tanya Tracey, our current Criminal Justice Services Manager, will be stepping into the Director of Services role from January 2026. More details about this transition will follow in the new year.

Thank you, Denise, for three decades of extraordinary service. You will be greatly missed by our team, and across the sector - though we know you won't be far away!



Birth Companions Ambassadors

This year we have welcomed three new Ambassadors to the Birth Companions family - [Annabel Sowemimo](#), [Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti](#) and [Leah Hazard](#). These three women work tirelessly to amplify women's voices, tackle inequalities, and improve care for those who need it most. They are inspiring partners for Birth Companions, and we can't wait to see what we can achieve together for women, birthing people and their babies.

Our support

HMP Eastwood Park

This year in April, we launched a brand new service in HMP Eastwood Park, offering specialist, relationship-led support to pregnant women, separated mothers of babies under two and women experiencing miscarriage, stillbirth or abortion. Our new Service Coordinator, Hannah, is working tirelessly to support women in both one-to-one and group settings, and advocating for their needs with health, social care and criminal justice professionals. She has done some impressive work supporting mothers who are separated to breastfeed, and supporting staff with transportation of breast milk. We have also supported several mothers around their transition back into the community through this new service, and are preparing to launch a perinatal peer supporter training programme in the prison next year.

Community birth support

In August, Fola joined the Birth Companions staff team, taking over coordination of our birth support for women in the community in London. In this role, Fola offers personalised care to women as they prepare for birth and during the early postnatal period, and coordinates our team of incredible volunteers who provide in-person support during labour, ensuring that no woman has to give birth alone. She has already coordinated support around several births, and has been doing an incredible job advocating for women with midwifery, children's social care, housing services and beyond.

New volunteers

This summer, we welcomed a new cohort onto our volunteer training programme. Twelve new volunteers have now completed our bespoke training course and joined our impressive team of birth companions delivering support to pregnant women and new mothers experiencing multiple disadvantage in the community in London. They are already bringing love, care and compassion to every interaction, and we are excited to see what 2026 holds in store for them.

Our impact

Each year we collect detailed feedback and data to make sure our services, our Lived Experience Programme, and our policy and influencing work, are making a positive difference.

Of the women who provided feedback for the year 2024/25...

100%

said our support helped improve their mental health and wellbeing

96%

said our support helped them to feel more confident as mothers

98%

said our support helped them to feel more supported and cared for

[Read the full report](#)

Our Lived Experience Programme

Trauma-informed engagement training

This year, we delivered our new trauma-informed engagement training course to two groups of professionals working across research, health, social care and the voluntary sector. This two and a half hour online interactive training - co-designed and co-facilitated with members of our Lived Experience Team - supports a in-depth exploration of the core values of a trauma-informed approach, reflects on Birth Companions' successful engagement model, and raises expectations for meaningful engagement work across the voluntary, public and academic sectors. Bookings are now open for our 2026 trainings.

[Find out more](#)

Lost Mothers Project award



We are over the moon that the [Lost Mothers Project](#) was recognised at the Criminal Justice Alliance Awards this month. This research really was groundbreaking. It was driven from the very outset and throughout by members of our Lived Experience Team with personal experience of maternal imprisonment and separation during the first 1001 days, and has produced vital insights into the harms of maternal separation in the CJS. It was a privilege and a pleasure to work alongside Professor Laura Abbott on this multifaceted project over the last few years, and brilliant to have all the hard work recognised with a CJA Research Excellence Award.

Stephen Lloyd Award for Giving HOPE

In further awards news, the [Giving HOPE](#) project recently came third place in the Stephen Lloyd Awards, recognising the team as "visionary changemakers with bold ideas". Birth Companions has been a proud partner of Giving HOPE since the project's inception, working closely alongside the mothers with lived experience of separation close to birth who advise on the project's direction.

[Find out more](#)

The Birth Companions Institute

Support from Impact on Urban Health and the Henry Smith Foundation

The Birth Companions Institute, our new centre of expertise founded earlier this year, has secured significant funding from [Impact on Urban Health](#) and the [Henry Smith Foundation](#). This funding will allow us to deepen and expand our work to achieve better care, equity and justice through research, public affairs, policy, campaigns, consultancy, the law and the media over the next three years.

[Read more](#)

Responding to the Chief Medical Officer's report on the health of prisoners

Last month, we welcomed the Chief Medical Officer's report on the health of people in custody, and its recognition of the unique and complex health needs of pregnant women and mothers of infants in prison and on probation.

[Read more](#)

Reflections on Clause 35 of the Sentencing Bill

Our Director of the Birth Companions Institute, Kirsty Kitchen, recently reflected on proposals in the Government's current Sentencing Bill to 'name and shame' those carrying out community sentences, arguing that these plans prioritise optics over outcomes and present a dangerous step backwards for women and children.

[Read more](#)



This message is from [Birth Companions](#)

Birth Companions is registered in England and Wales under charity number 1120934 at Birth Companions, Office 118, 372 Old Street, London, EC1V 9LT, United Kingdom.

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