



Impact report

1 April 2024 –
31 March 2025

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A note on language

We use the words 'woman' and 'mother' throughout this Impact Report. We recognise that not everyone who is pregnant or has recently given birth identifies as a woman or mother. Our services welcome, and our wider commentary includes, anyone who is pregnant or has recently given birth, whatever their gender identity or how they express this.

Our values

Birth Companions was founded in 1996 to support pregnant women and new mothers in the harsh environment of Holloway Prison.

Over the years since, we've become experts in working with women who experience pregnancy, birth and motherhood in some of the most challenging and unjust circumstances.

Birth Companions' values have shaped the organisation's approach from the outset. These values give us a guiding light to navigate the difficult contexts in which we work, and the uncertain times we live in.

Birth Companions is a women's organisation built on feminist principles, delivering woman-to-woman support

Experiences of trauma have shaped the lives of most of the women we support, and our trauma-informed way of working responds to the particular impact of trauma during pregnancy, birth and early motherhood. We uphold the six principles of trauma-informed practice: safety, trust, choice, collaboration, empowerment and cultural consideration.

Protecting women's rights is central to the way we work. We work with the reproductive justice framework that supports every woman's right to maintain her bodily autonomy; to have children; to not have children; and to raise her children in safe and sustainable communities.

Birth Companions strives to be an anti-racist, anti-oppressive organisation

We are committed to building an inclusive, diverse, culturally humble and anti-racist organisation that acknowledges and takes action against structural, institutional and interpersonal racism. We also stand against other forms of oppression that include sexism and misogyny, ableism, ageism, homophobia, religious discrimination and transphobia. We recognise this needs to be rooted in action within our organisation and in our external activities.

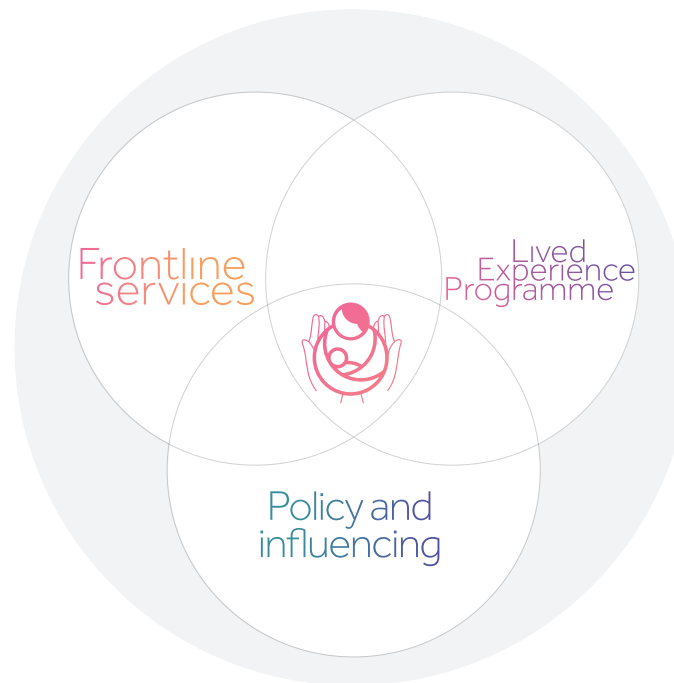
Birth Companions strives to be an environmentally sustainable organisation

We recognise we have a collective duty to act now to mitigate the impact of the climate and nature emergency on future generations. Our environmental policy sets out Birth Companions' practical response to the climate emergency through making choices that mean the charity has less impact on the environment. We act as a leader in our field by sharing information, policy and best practice in this area, and by encouraging other organisations to act with us.

We are on a journey

We will continue to learn and improve our practice to ensure these values are borne out through Birth Companions' work.

Birth Companions aims to improve the lives of women who experience severe disadvantage and inequity in pregnancy and early motherhood, and their babies.



Our approach is built on three pillars:

Our specialist support services provide support to women and babies, and help us understand what's happening on the ground.

Our Lived Experience Programme centres and develops the expertise and power of women who have faced severe disadvantage during pregnancy and motherhood.

Our policy and influencing work drives meaningful change for mothers and babies facing inequity and disadvantage through campaigns, research, thought-leadership and policy programmes, in collaboration with academics, politicians, policy-makers, journalists and legal partners.

Birth Companions' services, in prisons around England and in the community in London and the South East, support women through pregnancy, birth and in the first two years of their child's life.

We also support women through abortion, miscarriage, and stillbirth. Our services are aimed at women experiencing severe disadvantage and inequity. The women we work with often face incredibly challenging and complex issues such as homelessness, poverty, domestic abuse, trafficking and more; and many are in contact with the criminal justice, immigration, and/or children's social care systems.

Our support services are delivered by a small team of dedicated and specialist staff who bring a wealth of experience, knowledge and care to their roles.

Several of our staff have worked with us for many years, building up notable expertise in delivering trauma-informed, woman-centred, and non-judgemental support within highly complex systems and settings.

Our trained volunteers, peer supporters and sessional workers are also integral to our services, bringing an invaluable combination of lived and learned experience to the support they offer women.

We offer:

- **Emotional support**
- **Advocacy support**
- **Essential items for women and their babies**
- **Information and resources**
- **Referrals and introductions to other organisations**
- **Birth preparation and birth support**
- **Postnatal support**
- **Support before, during and after separation from a baby**
- **Breastfeeding and infant feeding support**
- **Pregnancy groups**
- **Mother and baby groups**
- **Peer support**

Women with lived experience of severe disadvantage and inequity during pregnancy, birth and early motherhood hold huge power to change their own and others women's lives.

Bringing their expertise together with the learned experience of volunteers, staff, partners and collaborators, we work to challenge, disrupt and remake the unequal power structures that act upon women, their families and their communities, in order to drive positive change.

This work is managed across every part of the organisation by our trauma-informed Lived Experience Programme.

Engaging with women in our services

Women using our services are supported to:

- **Shape the services they and others receive from Birth Companions**
- **Reflect on their experience of services provided by other agencies, such as maternity or social care, and communicate their concerns or share ideas for improvement with those in positions of power.**

Engaging with our Lived Experience Team

When women are no longer using our services, they can join our Lived Experience Team (LET) where they are supported to:

- **Drive improvements in external services, systems, strategy, policy and research through paid consultancy opportunities**
- **Shape Birth Companions' strategy and services**
- **Support Birth Companions' governance through advisory and trustee roles.**

Birth Companions' services are needed because deep-rooted issues such as poverty, discrimination, the housing crisis, 'hostile environment' immigration policies and social isolation create such significant inequities, and because there is a lack of holistic, statutory support for women and their families.

Our policy and influencing team draws together learning and expertise from our Lived Experience Programme, our services and our network of partners, to drive systemic and structural change to address these wider issues.

This flow of learning and development works both ways: we also use new learning from our policy and research to improve our services and our Lived Experience Programme.

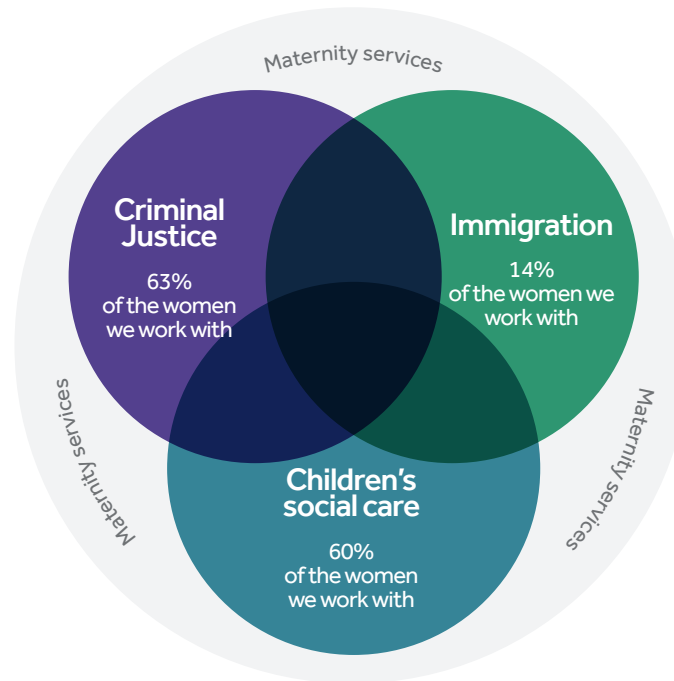
We drive positive changes for women and babies through:

- **Developing and contributing to policy**
- **Publishing guidance and resources for women and the professionals working with them**
- **Shaping and contributing to the work of the media**
- **Coordinated campaigns**
- **Publishing reports, articles, podcasts and contributions to books**
- **Shaping, undertaking and/or commissioning academic research**
- **Developing and contributing to training for professionals**
- **Working with legal professionals to improve access to justice in criminal, civil and family law**
- **Consultancy, including service co-design and co-production**
- **Hosting and speaking at networking events and conferences.**

We work with women and children living in very difficult, complex situations, which create significant risks to their health and wellbeing.

Mothers often have to navigate overstretched and underfunded maternity services, alongside involvement from the criminal justice, social care, and/or immigration systems. All too often, these systems do not work together around a woman to meet her needs during pregnancy and early motherhood.

In addition to offering individualised and woman-centred support, we focus on the ways these complex systems interact and impact on women's lives. This allows us to identify patterns, gaps, failings, and opportunities to drive change.



63% of the women we support have involvement with the criminal justice system

14% of the women we support have current or recent experience with the immigration system

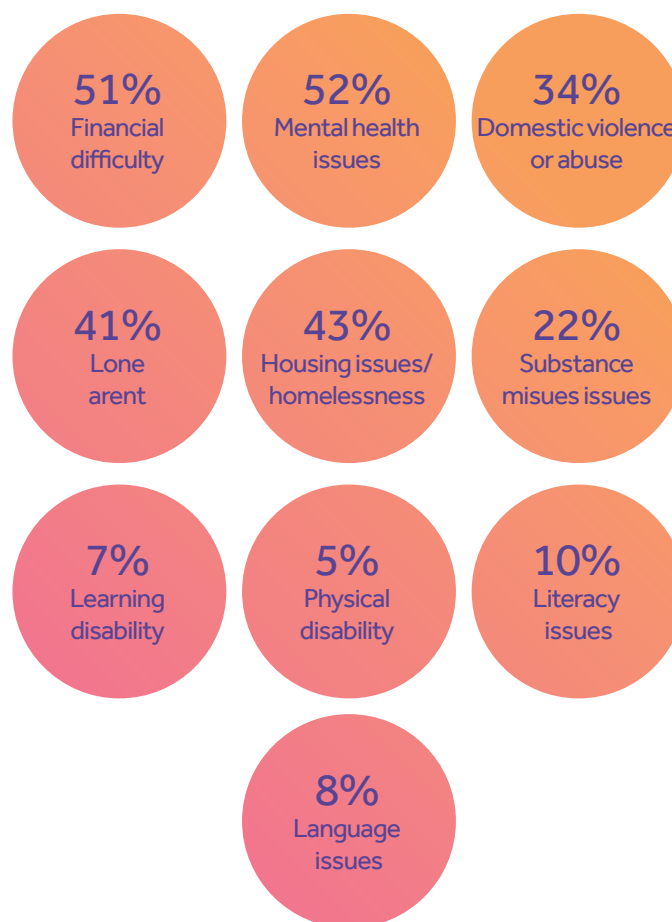
60% of the women we support have involvement from children's social care

The women we work with experience multiple, intersecting challenges during pregnancy, birth and early motherhood.

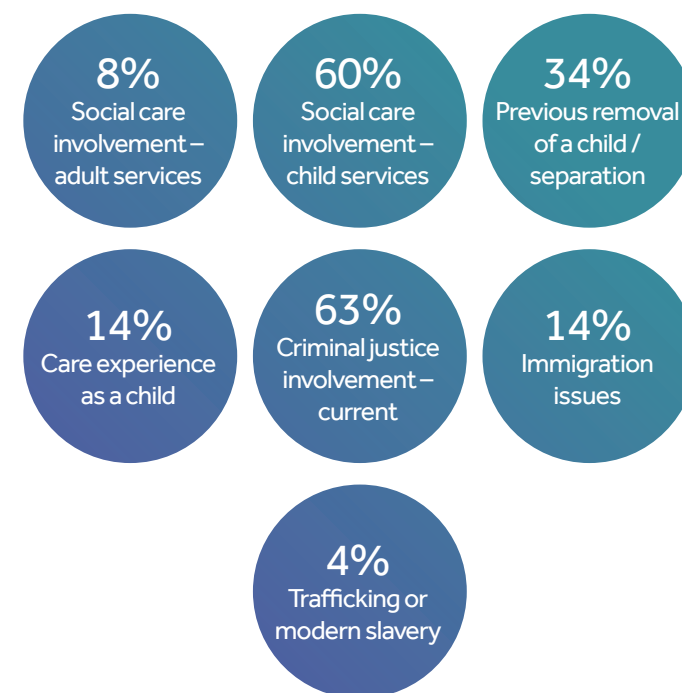
We take a holistic, woman-centred and trauma-informed approach to everything we do. We make sure women feel safe and supported; they experience no judgement or stigma in the spaces we create with them, and they choose how and when they engage with us.

Gathering quantitative data from women on the specifics of their situations in a prescriptive way can undermine relationships. For that reason, we avoid systematic data collection with the women we support; instead, our staff work to build trusting and strong relationships with women over time, and are led by each individual to the issues she wants to discuss. Women disclose what they want to disclose, when they want to disclose it. When specific experiences are shared with our staff and volunteers, they are recorded in order to build up a picture of needs and challenges among the women we support. This approach to mapping the needs of women across our services means that our data are non-comparative, and likely to under-represent the true extent of the disadvantage and inequity that women we work with experience. Nevertheless, we believe it is helpful to reflect on the needs we are able to map.

Health and social factors



Contact with systems



Declining public services and the skyrocketing cost of living have heaped harm on top of harm for pregnant women and mothers facing severe disadvantage and inequity in recent years.

While we see some positive moves from the government, including the commitment to reducing women's imprisonment, and to keeping families together, we are also aware of growing threats to the women and babies we support in our services and across the country.

We are particularly concerned for mothers affected by the immigration system, and the potential for far-right politics to target vulnerable groups and impact policy and spending priorities that have direct influence on all areas of our work.

Birth Companions continues to work tirelessly to support women, and call attention to the systemic and structural inequities that make their lives, and the lives of their children so much harder than they should be.

- Deep inequalities persist in maternal and neonatal outcomes. Mothers who are Black or Asian, those who are living in deprived areas, and those who are in contact with social care are more likely to die in pregnancy, labour, or the year after birth. Black babies living in the most deprived areas are almost three times as likely to be stillborn than white babies from the least deprived areas¹.

- The prison system is broken, yet the number of pregnant women and mothers of infants in custody remains high, and more than a third are held on remand². These women and babies are being put at risk, their access to essential healthcare and services severely restricted, often without being found guilty or sentenced.

In 2024/25 (the latest HMPPS reporting period), 196 pregnant women were held in prisons in England, and 42 women gave birth to babies while held in custody³. An unknown number of mothers are separated from their babies by imprisonment each year. The NHS categorises every pregnancy in prison as high risk because of the nature of the environment⁴. Research shows high levels of missed midwifery and obstetric appointments⁵, increased rates of premature birth, low birth weight, stillbirth and neonatal unit admissions⁶ among women in custody compared to those in the community. Three babies born to women in custody in recent years have died during or shortly after birth⁷.

A severe lack of support also persists across the wider criminal justice system. Pregnant women and mothers of infants who are under probation supervision after release from prison, and those who are serving sentences or awaiting sentencing in the community, are all too often unable to access vital support to address the root causes of offending⁸ – poverty, unmet mental health needs, and experiences of trauma and abuse. Instead, services continue to criminalise and condemn women and girls facing some of the most challenging circumstances⁹.

- Tens of thousands of women have contact with the children's social care system during pregnancy and early motherhood each year. The rate of newborn babies subject to care proceedings continues to rise¹⁰, as do the numbers of short notice, and even same-day care hearings¹¹. Thousands of mothers have their baby removed from their care by the family courts: 5,210 infants under the age of one began being 'looked after' by the State in 2024¹².

The vast majority of children subject to s31 care proceedings in England and Wales are infants under the age of one¹³, with more than half being newborn babies less than two weeks old¹⁴. Short notice, including same day hearings, are the norm in many areas.

Many mothers who have social care involvement for their baby have poor health, have experienced significant trauma and abuse, and receive little support. Systems and services often treat them unfairly.

Recent work from Birth Companions, King's College London and the National Perinatal Epidemiology Unit (NPEU) at Oxford University¹⁵, using MBRRACE-UK maternal mortality data, has found that a third of women who died during or in the year after pregnancy between 2014 and 2022 were known to children's social care – much higher than previously reported¹⁶.

- Refugee, asylum seeking and undocumented women who arrive in this country seeking safety and protection continue to be subject to many 'hostile environment' policies, as well as prejudice and violence fuelled by anti-migrant rhetoric in media and politics¹⁷, with their specific needs and experiences often overlooked within national policies and guidance.

Pregnant women and mothers of infants with insecure immigration status face the threat of huge charges for accessing maternity care¹⁸, and experience poor quality and unsafe housing both during pregnancy and after giving birth¹⁹; frequent relocation at short notice²⁰; significant language and literacy barriers²¹; and extreme social isolation²².

We know that things do not have to be this way; that change is possible.

In addition to offering support directly to individual women, Birth Companions has been working hard for nearly 30 years to drive improvements in the care women receive across services; and in the policies that shape how that care is organised, funded and delivered.

Campaigning to achieve better care, equity and justice for women and girls is a fundamental focus of our work. In the coming years, as Birth Companions' services, engagement, and policy and influencing work continues to grow, we will maintain our efforts to call attention to the ways in which structural inequity and severe disadvantage impact pregnant women, mothers and infants, and we will continue to hold the Government and all systems and services to account.

As you will read further on in this Impact Report, our policy and campaigns work has helped drive some significant changes over the past year, that will make a tangible difference to the lives of women and babies.

From 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025, we supported a total of 211 women and birthing people:



We provided support to pregnant women, mothers on Mother and Baby Units, and separated mothers through peer support, one-to-one and group-based services across HMP Bronzefield and HMP Foston Hall.

In March 2025, we launched our new support service for pregnant women and mothers of infants in HMP Eastwood Park. Figures relating to the support provided through this new service will be included in next year's Impact Report.

In May 2024 we launched the Izzy Project, our new Hackney-based service for mothers at risk of separation from their babies by children's social care. This service was co-designed in 2022/23 with a team of women with personal experience of social care involvement and/or separation during the first 1001 days, and over 40 professional stakeholders from across the Borough of Hackney. We recently hosted a webinar about some of the early insights coming out of this innovative new service²³.



Our support service for women in contact with the criminal justice system in the community, delivered in partnership with Advance, continues to go from strength to strength. This service has allowed us to offer several women leaving HMP Bronzefield continuity of support through their return to the community. We recently co-hosted a webinar about this specialist support²⁴, and the value of voluntary sector partnerships.



Key themes in 2024/25

Children's social care

Involvement from children's social care has remained a dominant theme underpinning the needs and concerns of many women we supported throughout 2024/25, both in prisons and in the community. We supported 43 women during separation from their baby this year, and many more through casework and advocacy with children's social care and other relevant services.

Cost of living

The cost of living crisis, and deepening levels of financial precarity, poverty and destitution, means that our practical support is more needed than ever. We provided support in the form of practical items to a total of 108 women across our services. This included taxis for travelling to or from hospital, phone credit, nursing bras and other essential personal items, and wellbeing packs. It also included supplying 30 women with baby boxes containing everything a woman needs for her baby in the first two weeks after birth, via our partner charity PramDepot.

Remand, recall and early release

In the prisons we work in, we have supported many women who are in custody on remand ahead of being sentenced; many who have been recalled to prison after release; and many who have been impacted by various rounds of early releases. In all of these situations, our staff have worked to support women through high levels of uncertainty and disruption, and have attempted to support pre- and post-release planning where possible.

Housing

Housing issues continue to be a significant concern for women we support in the community, and those leaving prison. Our service coordinators have undertaken a significant amount of advocacy and referrals work in relation to housing this year. Several women we supported in prisons have reported being homeless upon release. In some cases, this has been a significant factor leading to their recall to prison.

Volunteering

Volunteers play a key role in the delivery of our birth support and mother and baby groups in London. This includes one-to-one support for women during labour and birth, practical and emotional support after their babies are born, and support with breast and bottle feeding, infant weaning, sleep safety and baby massage. In 2025/26, we will be recruiting and training a new cohort of Birth Companions volunteers.

100%

of the women who provided feedback this year said our support helped improve their mental health and wellbeing

98%

said our support helped them to feel less worried or stressed

100%

said our support helped them to feel more valued and respected

98%

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

93%

said our support helped them to feel better able to look after their mental and physical health and wellbeing

“ The group helped me hugely with my confidence, self-esteem and my self-worth. It helped me to remember my inner strength and to know that I am important. ”

“ Without the help from Birth Companions, I'd still be finding my journey difficult. I'm a better person for this today. ”

“ The support I have received has changed my whole experience and gave me the strength to carry on. ”

“ I feel like you actually listen to me and do something to help. I really like working with you and want to continue. You don't feel like a professional, more like a friend. ”

“ I love coming to group, it really helps my mental health and makes me feel like I have a purpose. ”

100%

of the women who
provided feedback this year
said our work helped
reduce their isolation

96%

said we had helped them to
feel less isolated

89%

said our support had
helped them to feel more
confident about contacting
other services and
groups

89%

said they felt more
connected to other women

“ When I first came into this place I felt so alone and, without a doubt, lost. I was then invited to this group and honestly I had no idea what I was stepping into but I am so glad and thankful that I did. The girls were all so lovely and welcoming. Every time they then saw me they always made sure to say hello and have a chat. We all became a little unit. ”

“ I really appreciate you. Now I feel I have family. ”

“ Today we all opened up about our personal experiences. It was good to talk. ”

“ It’s good to see how different parents parent in different ways, and how babies develop at different stages and ages. It’s got me out of my shell a bit and helped to let my baby be around other people. ”

“ The Birth Companions angels made me feel less alone in my journey of being a first time mum without any support. ”

The impact of our support services

Enabling women to give their babies the best possible start in life

100%

women of the women who provided feedback this year said we helped them give their babies the best start in life

96%

said we helped them to feel more confident as mothers

96%

said our services helped them feel more confident in making decisions for themselves and their babies

94%

said we helped them know more about pregnancy, birth and the choices they could make about their care

97%

said we helped them to understand more about looking after themselves and their babies

“ I felt so much more comfortable and relaxed with your support being a first time mum. Honestly, you have really helped me out with certain situations, and supporting me in getting little things for baby, also for getting me into antenatal classes, classes for feeding baby, and so much more. I’m definitely going to be the best mum I can be knowing I’ve received the best support from you guys. ”

“ Absolutely amazing, the support I have received from the team. Without them I couldn’t have the confidence to give birth. I am so grateful that there is a service that offers women a voice and support. ”

“ The birth of twins was daunting being a new, first time mum, but Birth Companions made it easy for me. Whenever and whichever way I needed them, they were always there to offer support. I couldn’t have coped the initial stages of being a mum without them. I will always be grateful for all they did for me and my twins. ”

The quality of our services

96%

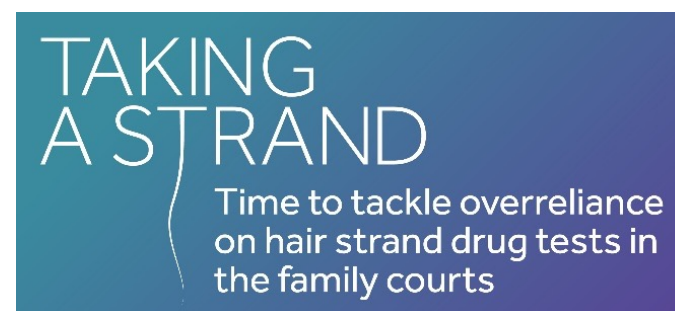
said they were very satisfied with the support they received from Birth Companions

In 2024/25, Birth Companions' efforts to change systems and improve policy and practice included:

Children's social care

- Since the publication of our Birth Charter for women with involvement from children's social care in July 2023²⁵, and the launch of our new Izzy Project service in May 2024, we have undertaken a significant programme of work to ensure the principles and learning can be embedded, and used to assess and improve provision, in other areas around the country. This has involved working with civil servants, ICBs, Safeguarding Children Partnerships and maternity networks, to help them understand and embed the principles in their own areas. In November 2024, we organised a major policy roundtable, bringing together policy team leads from across the Department for Education, Department of Health and Social Care, Ministry of Justice and others, to establish opportunities for national policy development in this area.

In September 2024, we hosted an Izzy Project early insights session for the Chief Social Worker, Chief Midwife, and key local and national stakeholders from across health and social care. In February 2025, we hosted a second early insights session for a wider audience online²⁶.



- In October 2024, Birth Companions, MSB Solicitors and barristers from 4PB launched our Taking a Strand campaign, focussed on engaging with legal, academic and voluntary sector specialists on the need to tackle overreliance on hair strand drug tests in the family courts. On 5th November 2024, we sent our open letter to the Family Division and the Family Justice Board, calling on them to undertake an urgent review of hair strand drug testing in the family courts. The letter attracted over 120 co-signatories, including barristers and King's Counsels from a number of chambers, solicitors, academics and voluntary sector specialists, and the campaign has received significant media coverage²⁷.

In February 2025, prompted by our open letter, President of the Family Division Sir Andrew McFarlane established a Family Justice Council working group to explore the issues raised. In March 2025, we co-hosted a webinar with our Taking a Strand campaign partners²⁸, setting out the scientific basis of the concerns related to hair strand testing, and the real-world impacts that their misuse can have for parents in contact with the family justice system.

- In 2024/25, we continued our long-running contribution to the lay summary of MBRRACE-UK's annual report on maternal deaths²⁹, ensuring a continued focus on women facing inequality and disadvantage. Following publication of this year's report in November 2024, we hosted webinar to reflect in-depth on one of the key inequities highlighted; the care of pregnant and postnatal women who have social services' involvement³⁰.

This year, we also partnered with King's College London and University of Oxford on a study aimed at better understanding the experiences of women who died in pregnancy or the year after, while known to children's social care. Through this work, we found that between 2014 and 2022, a third of women who died during or in the year after pregnancy were known to children's social care – a much higher figure than previously understood. The resulting publications³¹ received significant media coverage in July 2025^{32,33}.

Criminal justice system

- In 2024/25, we successfully secured a specific mitigating factor on pregnancy and the postnatal period in Sentencing Council guidelines³⁴, and submitted a detailed response to the Government's Sentencing Review, foregrounding the specific risks and concerns relating to women's contact with the criminal justice system in the first 1001 days from conception to a child's second birthday, in order to ensure these women are kept out of prison wherever possible.

- This year, our calls for a Women's Justice Board, first made with the National Women's Justice Coalition³⁵, came to fruition. In September 2024, the government announced the creation of their new Women's Justice Board³⁶, and in March 2025, our Director Naomi Delap was appointed to the Board's Partnership Delivery Group, as the specialist on pregnant women and mothers with young children in the criminal justice system³⁷.

1001 days in the CJS



A better approach to pregnancy and early motherhood in criminal justice

- In February 2025, we launched a major campaign, 1001 days in the CJS, calling for an ambitious new approach to pregnancy, birth and early motherhood across the whole criminal justice system. Evidence shows that what happens in the first 1001 days from conception to a child's second birthday lays the foundations for their long-term physical and mental health and wellbeing. Yet the criminal justice system – policing, courts, prison and probation – is ill-equipped to deal with this critical period in the lives of mothers and their babies. This is creating huge risks to women, and the life chances of

their children. That's why we're calling for a radically different approach to the 1001 days across the criminal justice system, through significant changes to policy and practice.

The 1001 days in the CJS campaign calls for:

- An end to the imprisonment of women during the 1001 days, in all but the most exceptional of circumstances, including through remand and recall.
- Increased use of community, deferred and suspended sentencing for women during the 1001 days.
- Mandatory 1001 days impact assessments to inform sentencing decisions, license conditions and community orders.
- New policy to guide police, prosecution and probation services in their work with women during the 1001 days.
- Increased funding and support for community alternatives to custody to support women during the 1001 days, including investment in women's centres and specialist services.
- Improved recognition of, and responsiveness to, the needs of women who have CJS contact in the 1001 days across wider systems and services, including health, children's social care, and housing.

These changes would allow us to embed a trauma-informed and compassionate response to pregnancy and early motherhood throughout and beyond this system, improving outcomes for mothers and children, and breaking intergenerational cycles of harm and disadvantage.

In 2024/25, Birth Companions' engagement activities had significant impact on research, policy and practice. Members of our Lived Experience Team (LET) took part in a big range of projects this year, including:

Lost Mothers Project

Members of our LET have worked as advisors on the Lost Mothers project, exploring the experiences of women separated from their babies while in prison, since its inception in 2022. This year, members attended various events and conferences to support the dissemination of research findings; and collaborated with Clean Break Theatre Company and playwright Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti to create Scenes from Lost Mothers, a play based on the research findings and women's personal experiences³⁸. The play is now touring nationally, reaching students, professionals and policymakers, and has been praised for powerfully bringing to life the realities of pregnancy, birth and maternal separation within prison. The final Lost Mothers project reports³⁹ were launched at a major event at the British Library in May 2025, setting out clear policy priorities for mothers and babies in contact with the criminal justice system during the 1001 days.

BEAMS Project (Better Outcomes Postnatally for Women) with Oxford University

LET members worked with Oxford University on an important project to improve postnatal health outcomes for women⁴⁰. Leaflets and posters have now been created to support better care and are being shared and used across the NHS. At a final event in January, a member of the LET performed in a drama piece to highlight key issues affecting postnatal women to a wide audience.

The Izzy Project

The LET advisory group who co-designed the Izzy Project in 2022/23 continue to shape the delivery and development of this groundbreaking service. The team have co-produced a meaningful and trauma-informed package to welcome women being supported through the service, including a gift, a written letter from the team to women being supported, and a booklet explaining how the service works.

Giving HOPE

As part of the Giving HOPE project, the HOPE Mothers advisory groups in London and Stockport continue to meet bi-monthly. This incredible team of mothers co-designed support packages for women experiencing separation from their babies, known as HOPE Boxes, as well as a training package for professionals working with women during this difficult time. The HOPE Boxes are now being used in over 40 hospital trusts.

MASH Project with University College London and Newcastle University

Our LET members joined this project aimed at understanding how and why Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) could better meet the needs of the children, young people and families with whom they have contact, and improve outcomes. Members have advised researchers on key issues, and reviewed findings from interviews with social workers, police, healthcare professionals and teachers working in MASH. This important piece of work will inform principles of best practice and feed into the Government's updated guidance on 'Working Together to safeguard children' in 2025⁴¹.

Support service improvement project with Rape Crisis England and Wales

Members of our LET worked with the charity Rape Crisis England and Wales to make their 24/7 Support Line more accessible, and to think together about how to identify and remove barriers that could prevent women from using their service. It was brilliant to see our members shaping the design and improving the delivery of this vital service that women might need to access during pregnancy, motherhood and beyond.

“ Birth Companions was a vital source of support for me during one of the most challenging times in my life. The help I received 7 years ago was unexpected but invaluable as it gave me a safe place to recalibrate whilst I rebuilt my life with a newborn. I joined the Lived Experience Team so that my own difficult experiences could be used to help others, through the very same charity that stood beside me when I needed it most. Being involved has been both empowering and healing, giving my personal experiences a purpose. ”

Member of the Birth Companions Lived Experience Team

Lived Experience Team wellbeing

Our incredible, 30-strong Lived Experience Team generously and enthusiastically contributes their knowledge, experience and expertise to many important projects, creating real impact for the lives of women and babies facing inequality and disadvantage. While members tell us that being part of the LET is a rewarding experience, we also know that lived experience engagement work can be difficult at times. It can mean revisiting our own difficult experiences, and hearing about the difficult things that others face. The wellbeing of everyone who takes part in engagement work with Birth Companions is the most important thing to us. That is why we have developed a rigorous trauma-informed engagement model, and why we will always work with each member to make sure each piece of work feels as comfortable as possible for them as an individual.

To further support our LET members' wellbeing this year we also offered four Wellbeing Workshops and individual follow up sessions led by coach Rose Mahon, and sent every member a personal box filled with items aimed at supporting their wellbeing.

Trauma informed engagement training

This year, 15 members of our Lived Experience Team also worked with our Head of Engagement to co-design a new training course, aimed at supporting other organisations and researchers to make their lived experience engagement work safe, trauma-informed and meaningful.

Our two-hour interactive online trauma informed engagement training course launched in April, co-facilitated by Birth Companions' staff and members of our Lived Experience Team. It covers the theoretical context for engagement work; insights from LET members; and practical considerations for engagement work including planning, risk assessment, payment, trauma-informed walk-throughs, briefings and debriefs.

Birth Companions' trauma informed engagement training will be delivered bi-annually. For more information, please contact Kate Chivers, Head of Engagement: kate@birthcompanions.org.uk.

In the Spring of 2024, Birth Companions began a Strategic Review, in which all members of the Birth Companions family – staff, Lived Experience Team members, trustees, volunteers – worked together to co-produce a vision for the next 5 years.

Birth Companions 2030, our resulting new 5-year strategy, will be published this autumn.

This autumn, we will also be launching the Birth Companions Institute.

One of the key developments to come out of our new strategy, the Birth Companions Institute will be a new home for all of the work we do to achieve Birth Companions aims of care, equity and justice in pregnancy and early motherhood through research, public affairs, policy, campaigns, consultancy, the law and the media.

The work of the Birth Companions Institute will be shaped and informed by insights from our support services, and delivered in close partnership with the women in our Lived Experience Programme.



A B Charitable Trust
Advance Charity
Balcombe Trust
Bromley Trust
Central and North West London NHS
Foundation Trust
City Bridge Foundation
Crucible Foundation
Esmee Fairbairn
Evan Cornish Foundation
Firebird Collective
Impact on Urban Health

London Borough of Hackney
London Catalyst
Ministry of Justice
National Lottery
NHS North East London ICB
Northwick Family Trust
Oxford University
Practice Plus Group Health and Rehabilitation
Rayne Foundation
Segelman Trust
Sharegift
Sodexo
The Rayne Foundation

And thank you to the large number of generous individuals who supported our work through donations and by taking part in fundraising events.

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