



Birth Companions 2030

Better care, equity
and justice for
pregnant women,
mothers and babies

Contents

01	Birth Companions 2030 Better care, equity and justice for pregnant women, mothers and babies
02	Introducing Birth Companions
03	Our values
04	Why Birth Companions is needed
06	What we've achieved
08	Our strategic aims
10	Achieving our strategic aims – Frontline Services – The Birth Companions Institute – Lived Experience Programme
14	Building a strong and sustainable organisation
16	Partnerships
17	Thanks

A note on language

We will use the words 'woman' and 'mother' throughout this document, but we recognise that not everyone who is pregnant or has recently given birth identifies as a woman or mother. Our services, publications and commentary include anyone who is pregnant or has recently given birth, whatever their gender identity or how they express their gender. Please amend your copy of this document to incorporate your preferred language.

Increasing numbers of pregnant women, mothers and babies experience severe disadvantage in the UK today. Birth Companions is the only national charity dedicated to improving these women's lives, protecting their rights, and driving better care for them and their children.

Evidence shows that what happens in the first 1001 days, from conception to a child's second birthday, lays the foundations for the rest of their life. For thousands of mothers in the UK, the challenges they face during this period create huge risks to their own health and wellbeing, and the life chances of their babies.

Birth Companions' mission is to achieve equity and justice for these pregnant women, mothers and babies. This requires a radical transformation in their care.

We'll know we have achieved equity and justice when:

From our successes so far, we know this transformation is possible if we're courageous, compassionate, angry, hopeful and clever. In the next phase of our mission journey, we will build on what we've learnt, with some significant new developments.

Birth Companions 2030 describes what we aim to accomplish over the next five years, and how. During this time, we will work closely with partners, collaborators and supporters. Together, we'll create hope for every mother and baby, whatever their circumstances.

All women
have the best
possible experience
of pregnancy, birth and
motherhood,
whatever their
circumstances

Each woman attains
the best possible
health and wellbeing
outcomes for herself
and her children

Law, policy,
systems, services and
guidance meet the
needs of every woman
and baby

Birth Companions is a national charity supporting women having their babies in very difficult and complex situations.

These include mothers in prison; mothers with insecure immigration status; and mothers who have involvement from children's social care. Their lives are often shaped by deep-rooted, structural factors such as sexism, racism and poverty. These women and their children experience enormous challenges, but often they are not given the support they need, and are treated unfairly. This results in poor outcomes for mothers, and long-term problems for their children.

At Birth Companions, we deliver specialist services to improve women's lives in the here and now. We make sure there's evidence of what's going wrong and how to make things right. We work with partners to shape national law, policy and guidance, improve the care given by statutory services and systems, and ensure women's rights are upheld.

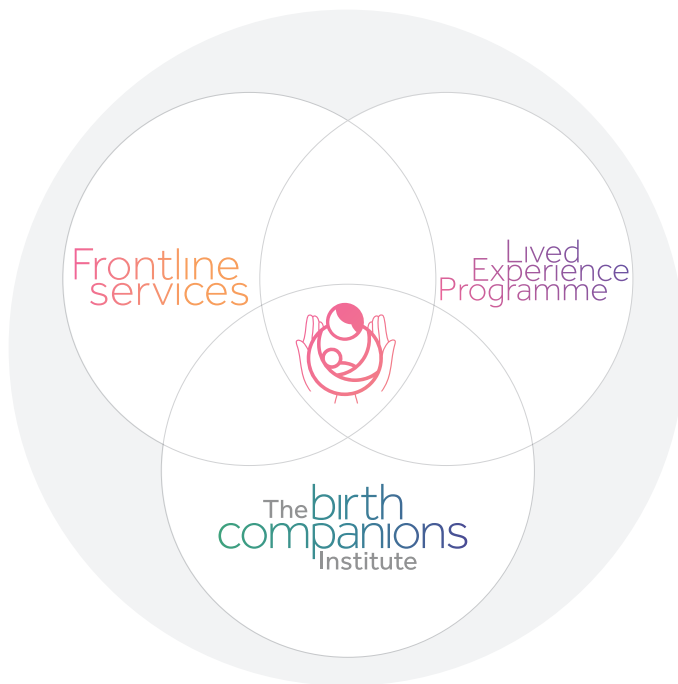
We do this through Birth Companions' three interlinked areas of work:

Our specialist 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 Birth Companions Institute holds our work with academics, politicians, policy-makers, journalists and legal partners, and coordinates our campaigns, research, thought-leadership and policy programmes.

Over the years to 2030, Birth Companions will develop these three areas of our work and improve the capacity, strength and financial sustainability of our organisation.



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.

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 failing 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. We focus on the ways these systems impact women's lives, and identify gaps, failings, and opportunities to drive change.

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

The number of babies and infants subject to care proceedings is growing¹, while outcomes for mothers with social care involvement are getting worse. The health of many mothers in these situations is poor, and their treatment is often unfair. MBRRACE-UK's latest maternal mortality report² found that 22% of the women who died in pregnancy, birth or the year after birth were known to social care, up from 12% in 2012-14. 11% of those who died by suicide and 59% of those whose deaths related to substance use had had an infant removed into care and/ or ongoing care proceedings.

63% of the women we support are caught up in the criminal justice system

In 2024/25, 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 environment. Research shows high levels of missed midwifery and obstetric appointments, increased rates of premature birth, low birth weight, stillbirth and neonatal unit admissions among women in custody compared to those in the community⁴. Three babies born to women in custody in recent years have died during or shortly after birth⁵.

14% of the women we support have contact with the immigration system

Refugee and asylum-seeking women, and those who are undocumented or have insecure immigration status, continue to be subject to many 'hostile environment' policies across systems and services. They face the threat of huge charges for accessing maternity care⁶, and experience poor quality and unsafe housing both during pregnancy and after giving birth⁷; frequent relocation at short notice⁸; significant language and literacy barriers⁹; and extreme social isolation¹⁰.

Context

Years of austerity, the COVID-19 pandemic, cruel immigration policy, a cost of living crisis, and the accelerating impact of the climate emergency have heaped harm on top of harm for pregnant women and new mothers facing severe disadvantage and inequity. Birth Companions has worked tirelessly throughout this time to support women, and call attention to the systemic and structural inequalities 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 birth¹¹. Black babies living in the most deprived areas are significantly more likely to be stillborn than white babies from the least deprived areas¹².

The prison system is broken, yet the number of women in prisons continues to rise, and remand and recall figures are at an all-time high¹³. As a result, pregnant women and mothers of infants are being put at greater and greater risk, locked in their cells for “far too long” each day¹⁴, with their access to essential healthcare and services severely restricted^{16, 17}. More than a third of pregnant women in prisons are held there on remand. A severe lack of support also persists across the wider criminal justice system^{18, 19}.

Tens of thousands of women have contact with the children’s social care system during pregnancy and early motherhood each year, and the rates of newborn babies subject to care proceedings continues to rise²⁰. 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 2024²¹.

A recent study, led by Birth Companions, Kings College London and Oxford University, 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. Most of these deaths were due to suicide (20%), other psychiatric causes including drug related deaths (30%), and homicide (5%)²².

The 2024 MBRRACE report Saving Lives, Improving Mothers’ Care shines a spotlight on the care of women who have recently migrated to the UK and who have English language difficulties, finding huge gaps in the provision of safe and appropriate interpretation services. In 61% of cases examined, women who required interpretation had to have this done by a family member, because alternatives were not available, or they were not made use of²³.

The lifetime of this strategic plan will see unprecedented societal, political, technological and environmental change. The Labour government’s agendas on health, social care, criminal justice and immigration will shape the outcomes of women and babies over the next parliamentary term. The rise of populist narratives, policies and political power could reshape the landscape further, and risk undermining much of our progress. Artificial Intelligence will have a huge impact on how we do our work, for good and ill. The impact of the climate emergency will develop and worsen, affecting the poorest and most marginalised communities most severely.

The Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector faces significant challenges in responding to the vastly increased need of people using charities amidst the underfunding of state services. Birth Companions’ integrity, entrepreneurialism ambition, partnerships and track-record will equip us to meet these challenges and thrive in the years to 2030.

We know we have power and influence. We know we can change things. We've seen some real progress in spaces that are difficult to shift.

The Criminal Justice System

Our Birth Charter for Women in Prison²⁴, published in 2016, highlighted the largely ignored needs and experiences of pregnant women and new mothers incarcerated in England, and called for mandatory standards of care. The principles set out in our Charter led to the creation of His Majesty's Prisons and Probation Services' Policy Framework covering pregnancy, birth, Mother and Baby Units and maternal separation from a child up to the age of two years old. It also helped drive £5 million of investment in perinatal mental health pathways, greater focus on pregnancy and early motherhood in prison inspections, and a new NHS National Service Specification for maternity care in detained settings. In 2021 we highlighted the risks of prison custody for pregnant and postnatal women with the Sentencing Council, leading to the creation of a specific mitigating factor in sentencing guidelines. This factor came into force in April 2024, and emphasises the need for magistrates and judges to give full consideration of the impact a prison sentence can have on pregnant women, new mothers, and their babies.

Children's Social Care

In 2025 we published, with partners at King's College London and Oxford University, a major study of the national surveillance data on women with children's social care involvement who died during pregnancy and the first year after birth from 2014 to 2022, which explored how the women died and the quality of the care they received²⁵. This research highlights the acute need for better care for women with Children's Social Care involvement, and the significant barriers that get in

the way of providing that care. Our second Birth Charter²⁶ (2023) focuses on the needs and experiences of women who have involvement from children's social care during the first 1001 days. The principles set out in this Charter argue for greater support and coordination across health, social care, and the family justice system; and national policy to address the huge inconsistencies and shortfalls in care. In 2025 we received funding to lead the development of a national health and social care pathway for this group of women and babies.

As well as driving policy in health and social care, we've also been leading the development of new practice. The Izzy Project began working with women in Hackney, East London in May 2024 after a co-design process with women with lived experience and over 40 local stakeholders. This service is the first of its kind; a specialist, independent service focused on supporting women at risk of separation or separated from their babies soon after birth. Our coordinators navigate the journey alongside women throughout pregnancy and the first year after their child is born, ensuring all the services around them – maternity, social care, the family courts, housing, mental health, public health and more – are able to provide the best possible care and support. This four-year pilot will act as a live learning and development site, through which we can identify issues to be addressed and opportunities for improvement. This will shape better care at a local, regional and national level.

Immigration

The 72-hour time limit on the detention of pregnant women was introduced in 2016, in direct response to evidence of the huge risks and impacts of detaining pregnant women, and thanks to campaigning by Birth Companions, Women for Refugee Women, and many others.

In the spring of 2023, Women for Refugee Women, Birth Companions, Medical Justice, Royal College of Midwives, Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the British Medical Association, and Maternity Action again launched a joint campaign against cruel and extremely dangerous proposals in the then-Government's so-called 'Illegal' Migration Bill to remove the vital 72-hour protection introduced in 2016 and permit the indefinite detention of pregnant women seeking asylum.

Our joint briefing²⁷ and 'Write to your MP' campaign²⁸ gained significant media attention. Baroness Lister tabled an amendment in the House of Lords to maintain the 72-hour limit, for which the Lords voted resoundingly in favour. In July 2023, the then-Government finally agreed to maintain the 72-hour time limit on the detention of pregnant women seeking sanctuary in the UK. This small but vital amendment to the Bill protects pregnant women and their unborn babies from the harms of indefinite detention²⁹.

Climate justice

In 2024, we published our joint policy paper³⁰ with Wen (Women's Environmental Network), looking at the implications of the climate emergency for reproductive justice in the UK. In the paper, we interrogate specific challenges brought about by the climate emergency, and demonstrate the myriad ways in which the climate emergency undermines our human rights in the UK today. This paper formed part of Wen's Feminist Green New Deal (FGND) policy paper series, and features a foreword by Dr Ranee Thakar, President of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists.

We know there is a way to go in mobilising the environmental and women's sectors on the issues relating to reproductive justice and the climate emergency, but we are proud to be leading the way on these vital and urgent conversations with our partners at Wen.



We have achieved a huge amount, but there is so much to do to deliver equity and justice for pregnant women, mothers and babies.

We know how hard it is to make change happen, and how unpredictable that change can sometimes be, so we will continue to work flexibly and creatively, on our own and with our partners, in order to direct our efforts where they can have most impact. In order to give the very best chance of success, we will focus both on specific aims and broader 'directions of travel', remaining alert to new opportunities to achieve our goals, particularly in contributing to wider systemic change.

Criminal Justice System (CJS)

- Birth Companions will run national specialist support services for pregnant women and new mothers with CJS involvement across England and Wales.

Our work will contribute to wider systemic change that includes:

- The government's new Women's Justice Board and strategy on women's justice will be shaped by significant input from the voluntary sector, and will include representation from women's specialist services and women with lived experience.
- Pregnant women or mothers of babies and infants in England and Wales will only be held in prison in the most exceptional circumstances. Instead, women and their babies will be supported effectively by a gender-informed probation service and specialist women's services in the community.
- All pregnant women and mothers of infants with CJS involvement in England will receive equitable healthcare and fair treatment in all services.
- The role of poverty, trauma, abuse and unmet mental health needs in driving the criminalisation of pregnant women and mothers of infants will be better understood and responded to. Wherever possible, pregnant women and mothers of infants will be diverted from the CJS to specialist services, including support from Birth Companions.
- There will be a significant reduction in the number of women in prison, and in the CJS
- Support for women who remain in custody and in the CJS will be significantly improved from current levels.

Children's Social Care System (CSC)

- Birth Companions will run exemplar specialist support services for women with CSC involvement.
- The care of pregnant women and new mothers with involvement from CSC in England will be governed by a joint national health and social care framework, with services held accountable for failures to deliver appropriate support.
- Birth Companions will support several local and regional systems to develop and deliver specific, multi-agency pathways for pregnant women and new mothers with CSC involvement, including health, social care, and the CJS.

Our work will contribute to wider systemic change that includes:

- Women with CSC involvement in the first 1001 days will receive appropriate, trauma-informed services whenever they need them, for as long as they need them.
- Women will feel supported and understood by services, rather than stigmatised or ignored. They will receive equitable care and fair treatment, including specialist advocacy support to navigate services, specialist perinatal mental health support and effective legal support.
- A reduction in the numbers of infants removed into care.
- A reduction in the number of women who die during pregnancy and the year after giving birth who are experiencing severe disadvantage and/or involvement with children's social care.

Climate justice

- Practical and gender-specific advice and resources about mitigating the impact of heat, flooding, pandemics and other climate-related threats will be available for women.

Our work will contribute to wider systemic change that includes:

- The specific impacts of the climate emergency on pregnant women, new mothers and their children are considered in housing and health policy and guidance in England and Wales, alongside the compounding impact of disadvantage.
- The specific needs of pregnant women, new mothers, babies and infants are considered in climate emergency-related government and local authority policy, including mitigation and disaster planning.
- The specific impacts of the climate emergency on pregnant women, new mothers, babies and infants are included in climate justice litigation to support action to reduce carbon emissions, address the use of harmful chemicals, restore nature and improve people's lives.

Immigration System

We will build on the work we have already done to develop a new programme to explore and work towards equity and justice for women with involvement with the immigration system, including the publication of a third Birth Charter in partnership with relevant experts.

Developing new work

In addition to the work outlined above, we will explore potential new programme areas by developing position statements on the impact of factors such as housing and healthy environments, disability, mental ill-health and distress, domestic abuse and neurodivergence on the experiences and outcomes of pregnant women, mothers, babies and infants.

We will also continue to build our leadership on issues such as women in the criminal justice system, trauma-informed engagement and a gendered response to the climate emergency.

In order to achieve our aims, we will develop the three areas of our work, and build a stronger and more sustainable organisation in the following ways:



Birth Companions' specialist 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. We focus on women experiencing severe disadvantage and inequity, particularly those in contact with the criminal justice, immigration, and children's social care systems.

Our services are delivered by a small team of dedicated, highly experienced 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 volunteers, peer supporters and sessional workers are also essential to our service delivery, bringing an invaluable combination of lived and learned experience to the support they offer women.

We are committed to supporting as many women as possible through Birth Companions' services, while maintaining their quality and sustainability. Our new services over the next five years will:

- Be co-designed with women and professionals with lived and learned experience
- Deliver high-quality care to women and babies
- Provide women with opportunities to engage with and influence policy and practice, through feedback sessions, consultation projects, and work as peer supporters
- Influence professionals to work in a better way by modelling and supporting good, trauma-informed practice and joined-up approaches
- Gather live intelligence to support the work of our Institute
- Influence improvement and change in local/regional/national systems through co-design, feedback and audit
- Recruit future Lived Experience Team members.

We expect to experience significant volatility in the landscape in which our services operate, particularly CJS and prisons in the years to 2030. We will navigate this situation with flexibility, creativity and pragmatism, responding to new opportunities and creating our own, in order to remain in and move into the spaces in which we can bring most benefit to women and babies.

We will:

- Work with NWJC partners to survey the needs of CJS-involved women and babies in 2025/26
- Develop a national service or suite of services that work across custodial and community settings in 2025/6
- Continue to respond to the needs of women in prisons in line with the government's new strategy on women's justice
- Develop other community services as opportunities arise, particularly in relation to probation and children's social care from 2025 onwards.



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

Our policy and influencing team draw 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.

Our Birth Companions Institute is a new development; a place to house all of the work we do to achieve our aims through research, public affairs, policy, campaigns, consultancy, the law and the media. This work is shaped and informed by insights from our services, and delivered in close partnership with the women in our Lived Experience programme. We will launch the new BC Institute in 2025. In the years to 2030 we will develop the work of the BC Institute in several key areas:

Policy and public affairs

- Run a sustained programme of engagement with government officials, ministers, shadow ministers and other parliamentarians across all relevant
- Work with policymakers to shape and design effective policy and legislation

Campaigning and communications

- Significantly increase the visibility of our work and our priority programmes through strategic campaigns and an enhanced communications programme. This will focus on achieving our aims and supporting the sustainability of our work by attracting funding
- Run a comprehensive thought-leadership programme to foreground Birth Companions' position on, and expertise in, our priority areas

Research

- Work with our network of academic partners to build the evidence base to support our aims
- Expand our network to include academics working on our new programmes, including housing, disability, and climate justice
- Lead on embedding trauma-informed engagement in research
- Find and create opportunities for women with lived experience to move into academia or take on formal research positions

Co-design of systems and services

- Identify and create opportunities for people with lived, learned and professional experience to work together to design new, improved ways of working, supported by policy and evidence
- Share learning from individual services and good practice in systems, to lead improvement at regional and national levels
- Act as consultants, alongside women with lived experience, to guide commissioners and leaders on system-based solutions to inequity and injustice

The law

- Work with solicitors, barristers and law academics to use key cases to further our aims and challenge injustice
- Reshape legal structures and practices to tackle inequity and injustice in criminal, family and civil law

Media

- Work with media platforms and key journalists and producers to change the narratives around women facing severe disadvantage and inequity; and inform and motivate the general public and professional audiences
- Use media coverage and social media platforms to build the profile of our work and our impact, in order to attract funding and increase engagement with our aims.

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

We combine this expertise with learned and professional forms of experience from across the organisation and our collaborators. Together we work to challenge, disrupt and remake the unequal power structures that act upon women, their families and their communities, in order to deliver positive changes. This work is managed in every part of the organisation through our trauma-informed Lived Experience Programme.

Lived experience in our services

While they are accessing our services, women are supported to shape the form and direction of those services, feeding back on their experiences of statutory services to those with the power to address the challenges they highlight. Our peer supporters also do vital work with women in prisons.

Lived Experience Team

When women end their use of our direct services, they can join our Lived Experience Team (LET) where they draw on their personal experiences in a safe, structured and supported way to drive improvements in external services, systems, strategy, policy and research through paid consultancy opportunities. This team also shapes Birth Companions' strategy and services and supports Birth Companions' governance through advisory and trustee roles.

Our new co-designed training and development offer will launch in 2025. This will prepare women for work with our Lived Experience Team through:

- core training components in line with Birth Companions' model and values
- individualised development plans for each member

Graduates of the training can join the Lived Experience Team and will be offered:

- paid opportunities to shape Birth Companions' services and organisation
- paid opportunities to contribute to the work of the Birth Companions Institute and the work of our academic and legal partners

- consultancy profiles on our website
- ongoing training, professional development and therapeutic support
- regular meetings through which to develop a community of strength
- access to mentoring and the opportunity to mentor others.

Developing our Lived Experience Programme

In the years to 2030, we will further develop the work of our Lived Experience Programme and progression routes for members of our Lived Experience Team, exploring together:

- advocacy for properly paid work, representation and leadership roles for women with lived experience across the statutory, academic and third sectors at every level.
- a Birth Companions Academy through which to share our unique model of trauma-informed engagement practice; through training, thought-leadership and collaboration
- an innovation hub which will support LET members financially to develop their own projects, in line with our key organisational aims.

To deliver this ambitious strategic plan, we will strengthen our organisation to ensure we have the capacity, resilience, funding and tools we need to do this challenging work in difficult times.

People

Birth Companions' success is achieved through the extraordinary work of its members: staff, Lived Experience team, volunteers, sessional workers and trustees. Our team is our greatest and most important resource. In order to sustain and develop all our people, we need to:

- Support each birth companion's individual journey through the organisation, paying attention to their training, development, progression, wellbeing and deployment of their many skills.
- Increase diversity across the organisation, particularly amongst our trustee and volunteer groups; and develop further our culture of active inclusion
- Facilitate greater mixing, support and cross-fertilisation between different teams and groups in the organisation.

To do this work, we will:

- Centre and deploy the learned and professional experience built up within our staff team by integrating services insights in influencing programmes even more effectively
- Improve our volunteers' journey and representation within the organisation
- Recruit more volunteers and increase the diversity of the volunteer team

- Continue our journey of learning how to be anti-racist and culturally humble through regular training, reflection, the development of policy and learning from other organisations
- Continue to develop our wellbeing support and encourage cohesion across the whole organisation
- Develop ways to better monitor and hold ourselves accountable to our organisational commitments and aspirations.

We are committed to increasing lived experience representation and power in Birth Companions so that by 2030:

- 50% of our board members will have lived experience of severe disadvantage during pregnancy and early motherhood
- We will have a Co-Chair and Deputy Co-Chair with lived experience
- A lived experience advisory board will help shape Birth Companions' work from 2025. This will be a route through which to recruit new lived experience members of Birth Companions' board of trustees; support the trustee board to welcome lived experience members more effectively; co-design the new lived experience programme; shape the Birth Companions Academy; and to continue to develop Birth Companions' strategy ongoing.

BC Institute

To ensure our new BC Institute is equipped to achieve our aims, we will:

- Increase our team's capacity to work across all our programmes
- Strengthen our communications and campaigning work to support our programmes, build the profile of the organisation, demonstrate our impact and attract funding
- Build a new brand identity and Birth Companions website to house our services, the Lived Experience Programme and the Institute
- Improve our library of publications, resources and media tools.

Funding

In order to strengthen the financial sustainability of our organisation, we will:

- Build the capacity and reach of our fundraising work
- Situate our individual giving campaigns in our Birth Companions Institute and maximise the fundraising potential of our communications, campaigning and media work
- Continue to develop relationships with a range of charitable trusts and foundations and high net-worth individuals
- Explore the potential role of Birth Companions' patrons and ambassadors in helping us identify new funding avenues.

Impact

We need robust monitoring and evaluation data to understand the impact our work is having and to track how Birth Companions performs against the aims in our new strategy. To support this, we will:

- Carry out a review of our internal monitoring and evaluation systems in relation to our new theory of change, to ensure we are capturing the right outcomes to demonstrate our impact
- Work with a range of academic partners to evaluate the impact of key areas of Birth Companions 2030.

Achieving our strategic aims will not be possible without our extraordinary partners. These are organisations and individuals with whom we have built strong and trusting relationships, and have worked closely together to achieve impressive results.

Our current partners include:

- The midwives and other professionals who support our work in prisons and the community.
- **Prison Plus Group (PPG)**. Providing healthcare to women in Foston Hall and Eastwood Park prisons.
- **PramDepot** Providing a range of practical items for mother and baby to ensure they are fully prepared for birth and the early weeks and months.
- **Advance Charity** A women's organisation, delivering systems change and trauma and gender-informed community-based support for women and girls affected by domestic abuse, including those in contact with the criminal justice system.
- **National Women's Justice Coalition** Leading a coordinated, ambitious approach to reforming the criminal justice system for women, with a network of specialist service providers and a National Voice and Advisory Panel of women with lived experience.
- **Happy Baby Community** Working together to provide direct support to women with insecure immigration status and their babies, and shaping policy and practice through close engagement with lived experience.
- **Women for Refugee Women** Protecting the rights of asylum-seeking and refugee women during pregnancy and early motherhood, through shared campaigns and mutual support.
- **Prebirth and Infant Care Network** A collaboration with Lancaster University, Nuffield Family Justice Observatory, Research in Practice and Family Rights Group to shape national policy and practice relating to infant care proceedings.
- **Women's Environmental Network** Working together to highlight and address the reproductive justice impacts of the climate emergency.
- **Giving HOPE** Delivering a care pathway for women at risk of separation or separated from their baby soon after birth, including through provision of HOPE Boxes.
- **Lancaster University** Work across a number of projects including sexual and reproductive health and wellbeing, infant care proceedings, and large data studies on dual contact with the criminal and family justice systems.
- **University of Hertfordshire** Our partners on the Lost Mothers project, exploring experiences of enforced separation during time in prison custody.
- **National Perinatal Epidemiology Unit, University of Oxford** Working together to explore data on maternal and neonatal deaths and inequalities in maternity outcomes.
- **Maternal and Perinatal Systems and Policy Research Group, Kings College London** Centring the needs of women facing severe disadvantage within a collective of prominent research projects including work on women's mental health during care proceedings and maternity outcomes for women with No Recourse to Public Funds.
- **End Remand for Women Collective** A group of women-led and justice organisations committed to ending the unjust and unsafe imprisonment of women before they are sentenced tried in the UK.

We are always looking for and developing new partnerships.

We are extremely grateful to all our funders and supporters who show such enthusiasm and support for Birth Companions' work and mission, now and for the future.

Particular thanks to the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, who funded the co-designed strategic review that enabled Birth Companions to create this strategic plan; Kiran Chauhan at the King's Fund, who helped us plan for likely scenarios in the years to 2030; and Sally Cupitt, who guided us through the development of a new Theory of Change. Our Birth Companions' strategic plan steering group (Sam, Tuesdae, Klare, Jenny, Sarah, Vero, Kate and Anna) provided invaluable leadership on the process, and insight into the findings.

Finally, huge thanks to our staff, volunteers, Lived Experience Team and trustees, who put so much time, thought and passion into shaping the next phase of our journey at Birth Companions.



- 1 Broadhurst, K., Alrouh, B. et al. (2018) Born into Care: Newborns in care proceedings in England, Nuffield Family Justice Observatory.
- 2 MBRRACE-UK (2024) Saving Lives, Improving Mothers' Care - Lessons learned to inform maternity care from the UK and Ireland. Confidential Enquiries into Maternal Deaths and Morbidity 2020-22, Oxford: National Perinatal Epidemiology Unit.
- 3 Ministry of Justice (2025) HMPPS Annual Digest 2024/25
- 4 Nuffield Trust (2022) Inequality on the inside.
- 5 Inside Time (15 July 2024) Another baby dies in an English prison.
- 6 <https://maternityaction.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Access-guide-2024-FINAL.pdf>
- 7 Women for Refugee Women (2024) Coercion and Control: The treatment of women seeking asylum in hotel
- 8 RCOG Position Statement: Equitable access to maternity care for refugee, asylum seeking and undocumented migrant women
- 9 RCOG Position Statement: Equitable access to maternity care for refugee, asylum seeking and undocumented migrant women
- 10 RCOG Position Statement: Equitable access to maternity care for refugee, asylum seeking and undocumented migrant women
- 11 MBRRACE-UK (2024) Saving Lives, Improving Mothers' Care
- 12 MBRRACE-UK (2024). MBRRACE-UK perinatal mortality surveillance - UK perinatal deaths of babies born in 2022. State of the nation report
- 13 MoJ. (2024). Offender management statistics quarterly.
- 14 HM Inspectorate of Prisons. (2023). HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales: Annual Report 2022-23.
- 15 HM Inspectorate of Prisons. (2025). HMP/YOI Styal.
- 16 Davies, M., et al. (2022). Inequality on the inside: Using hospital data to understand the key health care issues for women in prison.
- 17 Summers, H. (2023). Revealed: one in three jailed pregnant women in England and Wales still to face trial. The Observer.
- 18 Delap, N. and Hogarth, L. (2025). Breaking out of the Justice Loop. Centre for Crime and Justice Studies.
- 19 HM Inspectorate of Probation. (2025). Annual report 2024: inspection of probation services.
- 20 Edney, C. and Ryan, M. (2025). Newborn babies in urgent care proceedings in England and Wales. NFJO.
- 21 DfE. (2024). Children looked after in England including adoptions: Reporting year 2024.
- 22 Birth Companions (2025) Spotlight: Understanding the circumstances, experiences and outcomes of women with children's social care involvement who died during or in the year after pregnancy
- 23 Birth Companions (2025) Spotlight: Understanding the circumstances, experiences and outcomes of women with children's social care involvement who died during or in the year after pregnancy
- 24 Birth Companions (2016) The Birth Charter for women in prison.
- 25 Birth Companions (2025) Spotlight: Understanding the circumstances, experiences and outcomes of women with children's social care involvement who died during or in the year after pregnancy.
- 26 Birth Companions (2023) The Birth Charter for women with involvement from children's social care.
- 27 Birth Companions, Women for Refugee Women, Royal College of Midwives, Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, Medical Justice and Maternity Action. (2023). 'Illegal Migration Bill': Take action against the proposed new powers to detain pregnant women indefinitely.
- 28 Birth Companions. (2023). Write to your MP to stand up and speak out against cruel 'Illegal Migration Bill' plans.
- 29 Birth Companions. (2023). 'Illegal' Migration Bill: The 72-hour time limit on the detention of pregnant women is maintained.
- 30 Birth Companions and Wen. (2024). Reproductive justice and the climate emergency in the UK

