



# Improving Maternal Mental Health

VCSE Small Grants Programme Report

July 2022



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**Voluntary  
Sector  
North West**



**VS6**

**Cheshire & Warrington  
Infrastructure Partnership**

# Introduction

As part of the Cheshire & Merseyside Women & Children's Services Partnership, funding was secured to further develop and enhance the work of grass roots voluntary and community groups on women's perinatal mental health. The funding enabled the provision of local activity to support women and their families who were expecting a child or had recently given birth. The maternal mental health grants also supported those who may have been affected by social isolation due to Covid-19.

Perinatal mental health problems affect between 10 to 20% of women during pregnancy and the first year after having a baby. Historically there has been a lack of integrated physical and mental health care for women during pregnancy and in the weeks and months following birth, and a lack of specialist perinatal mental health services to support women who become unwell.

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The aim of the funding was to enable Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise (VCSE) groups to develop and deliver a range of projects that support the ambitions and priorities of the Improving Me Partnership across Cheshire and Merseyside and help address perinatal mental health issues.

Coordinated through Voluntary Sector North West, the CVS network across Cheshire & Merseyside managed a small grants programme in their respective Place.

The network established a Community of Practice to bring together the VCSE funded organisations to share best practice and look at ways in which organisations can work together to make a real difference within local communities.



# Allocation Process



In total £180,000 was allocated across Cheshire and Merseyside, inviting VCSE organisations to apply for small grants to deliver perinatal support work in the community.

The Project funding amounted to **£170,293** with £9,700 allocated across the CVS network for the coordination, assessment and monitoring of the grant process.

Details of each CVS are outlined below:

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**CVS Cheshire East**

**Cheshire West Voluntary Action**

**Community Action Wirral**

**Halton & St Helens VCA**

**Liverpool CVS**

**One Knowsley**

**Sefton CVS**

**Warrington Voluntary Action**

**VSNW**

# The Projects

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Some organisations hosted projects across more than one place. **In total 24 VCSE organisations were funded to deliver 38 perinatal support projects across Cheshire and Merseyside.**

Successful projects supported some or all of the elements below:

- Mental health / wellbeing peer support for women
- Mental health / wellbeing peer support for partners
- Improved well-being by offering knowledge, advice and understanding of mental health
- Signposting and supported navigation into services
- Expansion of social networks to increase well being



In total **3286** people were directly supported through the projects.

More than **10,000** family members benefitted indirectly from the support; improving mental health and wellbeing across the family unit.

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# Project Activity

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## **SWANS 'Supporting Well Being and Nurturing Strength'**

A support group for mums, or female carers, who had had a baby within the last 12 months or who were 1st time mothers. This project focused on mindful interactions between parent and child. A counsellor introduced ideas of bonding and attachment within the groups and provided opportunities for mums to discuss any concerns or anxieties that they had about parenting. They helped mums to address and manage their low mood and anxiety, helping them to rebuild their emotional resilience following the pandemic and improve their self-confidence and self-esteem. Mums reported feeling valued and cared for which they had missed due to the Covid restrictions with regards to midwife and health visitor visits, hospital or GP appointments. The sessions helped mums have their voices heard and better understood.

## **Netherton Feelgood Factory**

Launched a support group for mums in the antenatal and postnatal period in partnership with Panda (PND Awareness and Support Sefton). They felt working in partnership would enable them to meet more positive outcomes and signpost for additional support. They trained 14 volunteers in perinatal health and 8 in birth trauma. All their volunteers have access to a Padlet that gives information and links for sign posting. All the women have commented that being able to talk about their feeling have help reduce their anxiety and feel more positive.

## **Home Start Southport & Formby**

Parents are referred to Home-Start because they are socially isolated and are experiencing anxiety, post-natal depression or poor mental health. The funding went towards employing a new worker to coordinate a programme of summer holiday activities, a tiddlers baby groups and weekly pram walks. The project also enabled them to increase the number of Home-Start volunteers, to offer encouragement and reassurance which builds parents' strengths and confidence. Volunteers focus on building bonds and attachment between parent and child, promoting positive mental health, which means that parents are in a good position to give their children a better start in life

# Project Activity

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## **Parenting 2000**

Established Baby Talk a weekly one morning a week perinatal group for expecting & parents of children under 1 year old. It is beneficiary led and facilitated by a qualified therapist.

The group was a drop in for parents to relax and socialise with other parents and enjoy themselves from a young mum aged 17 and the oldest a guardian grandparent aged 73. The group chose some evidenced bases health and wellbeing support activities and Parenting 2000 arranged specialists to come in and deliver mindfulness activities & creative art.

## **Venus**

Venus improved mental health and emotional wellbeing by facilitating group sessions for mums who attend their centre. By early intervention and identification of issues new mums can face, they have been able to support women to access counselling where appropriate. This has complimented their medical care by addressing their mental wellbeing needs in a non-judgemental and positive environment.

Increasing confidence by guided play with children, this flows to the mum's home life as it helps them to understand that time spent with the children is more important for the child's development than creating a masterpiece, or 'doing it wrong'. The project has encouraged people having fun creating together, mums have benefitted from things not being 'perfect'.

## **Saints Community Development Foundation**

The project delivered a number of physical activities, a fitness course suitable for women who have experienced childbirth, walk and talk sessions, pram pack exercise session, which is exercising outside with the prams, as well as mental health resilience workshops and sessions. The project also supported with mood disorders such as anxiety and depression.

The walk and talk sessions along with the coffee mornings have been a success with participants engaging, communicating, and making the most of these sessions. Friendship groups have been created on the back of this.

# Project Activity

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## **My Birth Support CIC**

This organisation provided a bank of online podcast and video resources on topics such as preparing for birth and trauma recovery.

Qualitative feedback from participants outlined that they found the sessions nourishing to their whole being and that it was helpful to take time for themselves, without having to find childcare. That they felt really encouraged, inspired, uplifted and refreshed and that they were given time to focus on themselves and their own recovery which in turn helped the whole family.

## **Hope Centre – Baby Basics**

The prime aim of Baby Basics is to remove some of the worry of the financial burden of a family being able to welcome baby home. The project ensured that the basics were being provided to help with the cost of living whilst looking after a new born baby, alleviating some of the anxiety and stress for the family as they know they have all the basics are in place for their baby.

## **Elsie's Moon**

The 'Rainbow Journey Project' worked closely with hospitals across the North, working with the bereavement midwives to develop a Rainbow pathway and provide the specialist care needed for families during pregnancy after loss.

Rainbow pregnancies always provoke a lot of anxiety and often lead to parents becoming isolated and not attending sessions aimed to support pregnancy.

The project has improved wellbeing by offering knowledge, advice and understanding of mental health, through specialist practitioners as well as through those with lived experience. The project has developed relationships, signposted and supported navigation into services, and has worked with partners to provide specialist support for pregnancy and parenting after loss

## **L6 Centre**

Supporting pregnant and new mums with the anxieties related to household poverty whilst becoming a new mum, providing practical support and resources for the health and wellbeing of mothers and babies up to 3 years old.



# Case Study

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## Baby Talk Perinatal Drop In Group. Mum finds a much needed bit of self –cure

Seamus was born by caesarean section in July 2021 and he was 7 weeks premature. Mum spent three weeks in the SCUBU with Seamus on breathing apparatus and feeding tubes. They were in hospital and for a few weeks when they came out there were still COVID restrictions in place so they couldn't have visitors or go to groups. Also mum was suffering with her C-section scar and struggled to get out for walks etc. This took a toll on her Mental Health as she was feeling isolated and lonely.



Mum found out about Baby Talk through social media and in September 2021 she joined the group to alleviate these feelings of isolation and loneliness she was experiencing. She was keen to make other mum friends and to talk to people in the same situation as herself. During the group mum was able to access free nappies, food and baby clothes and have enjoyed the pamper session which she described as 'A MUCH NEEDED bit of self-cure'

Since joining Baby Talk mum has reported to have felt so much better. She looks forward to Tuesday mornings. Mum said 'It has been brilliant to share experiences and tips with other parents and getting out of the house has improved my mental and physical health. I hope to see the group continue, so it can benefit other new parents as it has benefitted me.'

# Project Activity

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## **Koala North West**

Trained 29 Koala North West volunteers around perinatal mental health and the parent infant relationship. As a result of the training these volunteers were then able to support families in the home, providing emotional and practical support. The training also supported volunteers to be more aware of services in the community that they could support families to access to increase their social network. Providing families with peer support face to face and virtually meant they felt supported at a time when things felt difficult. Families having someone to turn to and discuss worries about their baby or life in general meant that parents were less stressed, anxious or low in mood. The wider impact is that this also improved their parent infant relationship, improving outcomes for their child also and taking the strain off some of our clinical partners too.

Koala NW worked with Milestone Mums to run a range of group activities. A wide range of support was offered through WhatsApp, home visits, weekly wellbeing walks, weekly group support and a closed Facebook page. The project improved wellbeing by offering knowledge, advice and understanding of mental health. Families were also supported to access other services.

## **Movement and Bloom**

This project delivered an expanse of social walks across Wirral delivered through a dedicated team of 8 volunteers. Over 1200 parents (mainly women) have attend the walks and from questionnaires the feedback has been extremely positive. The project encouraged women to access exercise and form a network of support in a time that can be vulnerable for some parents.

## **WEB - Women's Enterprising Breakthrough – Merseyside**

The 'reading womb' has supported increased and improved mental health and wellbeing for mums as well as providing a safe space and opportunity for peer support, therefore expanding attendees social network. More important than the literature shared, was the weekly 'check in' of feelings that allowed the mums the opportunity to talk, connect, discuss feelings, fears and experiences. The difference this support made to mums, was that they felt less anxious and alone, knowing that other mums had similar feelings of anxiety during pregnancy, especially as their fears had massively increased during Covid. The women said this support was vital to them during this time, friendships have been built and sustained beyond the programme.

# Project Activity

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## Home Start Knowsley

This project provided support from qualified and trained staff and ensured mums received support that was tailored around their needs and addressed issues as they arose. The Time for Me course provided the opportunity for people to learn strategies to recognise triggers of stress and techniques to cope better and manage their anxieties in a positive way. Mums said that family relationships have improved as they are better able to cope and not be so stressed over the simplest of tasks. The 5 Ways to Wellbeing approach ensured Mums learned new skills like cooking healthy meals from scratch and the taster sessions led to new hobbies and activities like gentle yoga, aromatherapy, and joining pram walking groups.

## 12 Million Minds

This project offered perinatal classes, providing women with the tools and techniques that helped them to soothe, process or be aware when certain emotions were present and having a negative effect on their moods, moments or days. Using emotional health coaching to enable women to gain an understanding of the behaviours they are experiencing and empower them to move forward in their lives.

## One Knowsley

Delivery of a 7-week perinatal course, exercise and fitness sessions. During the pandemic mums were struggling to cope and manage, in particular single parent mums. The project also offered 1-2-1 therapy for a number of women who were struggling with this aspect of parenthood not to mention who have experienced trauma, some have some negative attachments, drug and alcohol issues so the project supported these individuals not only in a group setting but as individuals if they needed that extra support. The project highlighted the importance of self-care and exercise and fitness and how this benefits the body. The course made a massive difference to all individuals who attended as well as accessing individual therapy that equipped them with the skills to cope and manage themselves and baby better.

**“I was diagnosed with Postnatal depression after the birth of my daughter. I got speaking to another mum who mentioned she was going to the walks and encouraged me to join – I've not looked back! We meet up for a walk, talk and a cuppa and it's been a lifeline during my maternity leave”.**

# Quotes

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"I wanted to say thank you for the opportunity to have been part of the Thursday mother and baby group. Prior to joining, I told my doctor that I was anxious and low in mood, not knowing anyone else in my situation. I thought it was like this with being a first-time mum at nearly 40. I attended the group the same morning and can honestly say it's the best thing that's happened for me and my baby. My overall self-esteem has improved and I've gained the confidence to go out, and even breast feed in public."

" My baby has gained lots of new experiences and has a happier mum".

"The session most definitely helped me raise my awareness, I would go as far as to say there were a lot of factors I had not even considered within this subject. For example, the different types of attachment, and the differing infant states and the cues with these."



# Project Activity

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## **Singing Mamas**

This project provided a 6-week Singing Mamas on Prescription Programme. The programme has meant that new mums have been able to engage directly with each other and share their stories with one another and feel supported in return. The mums have learnt a bank of songs as a tool kit to use to support in bonding and attachment with their babies, as well as songs that they can sing to support their own mood when needed.

## **Home Start Warrington**

Dads can often feel isolated or helpless when partners are pregnant or bonding with a new baby. Home Start Warrington established a peer-to-peer support group for dads in the form of regular walks and talks in the park, alongside group sessions with Directions for Men - a local male mental health charity. The project also involved free online antenatal groups especially for Dads. The project has been a real success and provided much needed support for the wider family unit.

## **Baby Bump Fitness CIC**

Baby Bump provided specialist support sessions, covering a range of topics such as confidence, physical activity, nutrition, self-esteem and mental health. The funding was able to provide specialist support from a Mental Health First Aid tutor who worked with mums to develop a 'toolkit' to help them to recognise, manage/monitor their own mental health triggers. The toolkit also included information on local support services, free physical activity sessions to help mums develop a support network and become more physically active, opportunities to discuss nutrition, diet and the importance of hydration.

## **L6 Centre**

Supporting pregnant and new mums with the anxieties related to household poverty whilst becoming a new mum, providing practical support and resources for the health and wellbeing of mothers and babies up to 3 years old.

**“I love the social walks so much. They have given me time with other parents where you will find real advice and empathy from others going through the same as you. I was on the walks and when my maternity leave ended, I decided to volunteer to give something back, I am so passionate about the positive impact it provides”.**

# Case Study

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## Dad Matters. It's not just for Mums....

### Overview

A lot of Dads felt 'shut out' during the birth of their child during Covid due to hospital policies. A walk and talk and wellbeing group has given dads the opportunity to voice their concerns in a non-judgemental forum. They have received support from the beginning of their parenting journey, this has really helped them to understand the importance of parent infant bonding and their crucial role as a father. Many Dads felt isolated and sometimes felt like they were in the way, leaving them feeling anxious and affecting their mental health and consequently impacting on mum and the wider family.

### Outcomes

At the project we quickly learnt that our Dad's preferred short, snappy information and that social media was a great way to communicate and engage with men to join the group.

### Feedback from one of the Dads

I was introduced to Dads Matter and have never looked back. It's been fantastic for advice, support and counsel for my mental health issues. I'm not sure I would have coped during Covid with a new baby. It's helped me to feel mentally emotionally and physically supported.

By having someone that I can trust to talk to has helped me to maintain my mental health, keep stress to a minimum and therefore be a more mindful and present parent.



# Project Activity

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## **NCT**

The Parents in Mind project increased NCTs cohort of peer support volunteers, they have provided mothers across Warrington (pregnant or have a child under 2 years) with both group and 1:1 support, delivered by accredited peer supporters. The success of the Warrington roll out has secured Parents in Mind funding from Warrington CCG for the next financial year to continue vital work.

The funding has allowed NCT to recruit more local volunteers and provide them with accredited mental health training which will benefit them and enhance conversations about wellbeing within their community. Parents in Mind has been able to significantly expand its online offer across Halton, and find a physical home in Warrington so that flexible inclusive support options are now available to all local parents. Having a dedicated team leader for the Halton and Warrington services has created a more robust safeguarding presence amongst the staff team when managing the needs of the service users, and also when offering pastoral support to the peer support volunteers.

## **PCC of Holy Trinity Church,**

At the heart of this project Blacon Baby Buddies, the aim was to create a safe, supportive and non-judgemental space for mums to come and be with their babies and meet other new mums to support emotional well-being. The project provided a range of sensory toys to support attachment and sensory play for each of the mums, this helped to stimulate conversations as the mums began to explore and enjoy the toys with their babies. The project enabled sharing experiences of the joys and challenges of being a mum and developing friendships with other mums.

## **Chester Pride**

The activity has provided mental health and wellbeing support for LGBT+ people during the perinatal period, providing targeted, individual support. Support offered consists of a mix of direct support from a case worker for mental health issues, signposting to appropriate services, providing additional support that sits alongside this external provision.

**"Taking away the added pressure and guilt has meant that I can focus on developing a loving, trusting and nurturing relationship with my children".**

# Project Activity

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## **Motherwell Cheshire**

Delivered a range of peer support projects to help women gain support from each other and work on coping strategies to help support acceptance and recovery. The work was delivered around a range of themes such as Infant loss support, menopause cafes, birth trauma peer support group and mental health support for dads. For this project they have worked closely with Health Visitors, GPs, Social Workers and Midwives. This has then helped with a more joined up approach to partnership working in the aftermath of covid

This project also provided mental health and wellbeing peer support for women and new parents in rural locations through regular online sessions, led by a wellbeing coach and additional 1:1 telephone/email support.

Motherwell linked in with other maternal mental health services which has been beneficial. The impact of this project on the individuals has been increased sense of wellbeing, a reduced sense of isolation and loneliness and enhanced relationships with family and friends.

## **Chapter (West Cheshire) Ltd**

This organisation set up a women's mental health support group 400 BUMP, providing maternity wellbeing packs that were distributed through local groups, library networks and charities. The packs included a range of wellbeing items for parent and baby alongside information about maternal/paternal mental health initiatives. The women felt that the sessions had a positive impact on their mental health, they also felt more comfortable asking for additional help with their wellbeing and several participants have now signed up to take part in other Chapter activities such as wellbeing walks and one to one support.

## **Sanctuary Family Support**

Providing a much needed service to support mums and their families from Muslim communities

## **The Brain Charity**

Working in Liverpool Women's Hospital to provide essential information and advice packs to support positive mental health and wellbeing.

**“Thank you so much, you have made my post birth journey much more bearable.”**



# Project Activity

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## **Smile Group**

This group provided families with online and face to face support as people felt more comfortable to be outside than in the centres and were happy to attend as it helped them from feeling isolated. The project has also seen more fathers accessing support from Smile.

They supported families with a range of different services to meet evolving demands, offering group peer to peer sessions and one to one as well as person-centred talk therapy. Women they have supported feel less isolated, knowing that they are not alone in their experiences of perinatal mental health challenges.

## **Beautiful New Beginnings CIC**

Projects worked closely with social prescribers in the area and women were also able to self-refer into the service. Women completed 6 weeks or more of CBT based counselling dependent on need for PTSD, trauma, postnatal anxiety and postnatal depression. The project provided spaces for women to talk and to receive counselling allowed women to then come and access our services within the community which reduced their social isolation and gave them the confidence to start taking positive steps of their own to improve mental health and wellbeing knowing that the professionals that supported them may be there at the sessions too. The difference it has made to women in the area who would have been on waiting lists otherwise has been immense and the individual impact cannot be overlooked.

## **Ruby's Fund**

This project provided a range of sessions to provide peer support to parents, this included yoga and massage sessions, helping parents to learn techniques to support themselves for relaxation as well as physical exercise), and for their babies with bonding, techniques for soothing and winding. All the parents felt an improvement in mental wellbeing and many have made new friendship's.

## **WHISC**

The Women's Health Information & Support Centre is dedicated to improving the health and wellbeing of women and their families throughout Liverpool and the surrounding areas. They supported women living with anxiety, depression stress-related illness and feeling isolated or simply in need of a Listening Ear.

# Impact & Wider Benefits

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Many projects integrated physical and mental health care for women during pregnancy and in the weeks and months following birth, through a range of activities and services both face to face and online.

Almost all the projects highlighted that parent had developed friendships and wider support outside of a group setting, providing a lasting legacy to the funding activities.

A significant number of parents stated they now had the knowledge and the confidence to access other community services for support.

The project activities had a ripple effect on the wider family unit from other siblings to grandparents providing them with information, advice and emotional and physical support.

All the projects raised the profile of perinatal support and the need for family support during pregnancy and after a birth.

Some projects levered in match funding from other health providers to expand their work, whilst some of the larger organistaions delivered activities across more than one place allowing for cost efficiencies.

Some of the VCSE organisations have been able to demonstrate the value and impact of their project to secure additional funding to continue their activities.

## Community of Practice

As a condition of the funding each Place worked to establish a Perinatal Community of Practice, to meet as a group either online or face to face to share ideas, good practice, opportunities and any issues. This model also provided opportunities to invite partners and other organisations across the VCSE, Health and Statutory partners to offer support with the many wider determinates of perinatal mental health

**SEFTON**  
**PERINATAL  
COMMUNITY OF  
PRACTICE**

An opportunity for professionals across the Sefton Partnership working with families (0-2 Years) to share good practice, identify barriers and find solutions.  
Meetings are held bi-monthly via zoom on Friday's 2.00pm - 3.30pm.

**Dates:**  
18 Mar  
20 May  
22 Jul  
23 Sep  
18 Nov

# Lesson Learnt

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## **Lessons learnt to support any future programme delivery:**

The power of utilising the CVS network to engage with a broad spectrum of VCSE organisations to encourage diversity and equity of access across communities.

Understanding of Covid hesitancy on pregnancy and the massive impact the pandemic had on parents feeling anxious, isolated and unable to access health services.

The need for projects to start late or having to be flexible due to environmental changes, mainly due to the pandemic, but also staffing and volunteers and the coordination of wider partnerships.

Many projects had an online presence which worked well and enabled people to participate in activities on a more flexible basis. However, this didn't address digital inequalities within our communities.



# Quotes

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"I have been welcomed into a group where I knew nobody and now have a strong network of friends"

"Thank you for a wonderful session everyone. I don't think there's any other activity I do where I cry and smile so much within one hour"

"The support I have received has lifted a massive weight off my shoulders thank you"

"The difference in my confidence to get out is amazing. Without my volunteer helping me to get out I don't think I would have felt able to take the children out alone"

"It is nice to talk to someone about anything other than my mental health"

"The project has been so good; it has restored my faith in professionals. Without their whole family support, I don't know where our family would be now"

"It's what I look forward to every week. Spending time with other mums, learning new things and just sharing experiences has been a game changer for me. I've met some incredible mums who are now my friends. What a gift!"

"No word of a lie, the group has been a godsend. My mental health has been terrible in parts since having E and to be with a group of women who just get it, no judgement, loads of shared experiences, has been amazing. I've based my whole week around our Thursday mornings".

