
Emma's story: Beyond Birth Trauma



By Emma Jane Sasaru

Emma Jane is a mother to two daughters and passionate about improving maternity and perinatal mental health services for women and their families. The [Mums and Babies in Mind](#) team invited Emma to tell her story about birth trauma, perinatal PTSD and how she is making a difference.

We sometimes go through things in life that completely change us.

For me this is certainly true. When I gave birth to my [first daughter](#) I suffered birth trauma and then went on to develop [perinatal post-traumatic stress disorder \(PTSD\)](#).

While I was separated from my daughter in the early days after she was born, expressing my milk while she was in the neonatal unit gave me the fight to survive and continue living. I could do nothing else for her, but I could provide her with my milk. It was my connection to her, my lifeline. When staff said that I would never produce enough milk due to my retained placenta and massive blood loss, I fought to prove them wrong. When doctors said I would never exclusively breastfeed her and that she probably wouldn't latch on when they removed her nasogastric tube, I fought to prove them wrong. Instead, for 15 months my traumatised, weak, wrecked body nourished and provided my baby with everything she needed.

The fight I went through to feed my baby with no support and then seeing others also struggling with no support, drove me to wonder why families were left with little help. It led me to discovering [The Breastfeeding Network](#), training with them, volunteering and then eventually working for the NHS as a paid infant feeding support worker. To do my job I had to overcome a lot. I had PTSD and I had to work on the same maternity ward and neonatal unit where I had had my trauma. Being able to give mums and babies the support I never had meant everything. Now, when I see the mums sat by their little ones' incubators I empathise with them and remember the feelings I had. A friendly face, kind word and someone to talk to is often just what is needed. It can make all the difference.

My birth trauma and subsequent struggle to get help for PTSD was a painful and hard fight for many years. When I reflect on this struggle I realise that it has been a fight that has given *to* me, as well as taken away. It has given me the determination to try to help others who have also had birth trauma and PTSD. It has driven me to want to help change things in maternity services and perinatal mental health. It has given me something special – a voice.

I am able to speak out about the need for things to change in the culture of birth and postnatal care but also the need for more support for perinatal mental health. I will always seek to use my voice to speak up for those that are unable to. I want to raise awareness of what birth trauma and PTSD is and about the importance of a proper diagnosis and support for those affected by it. Recently I have been able to do this as part of the [#Matexp campaign](#) and the NHS [Better Births National Maternity Review](#).

On Twitter I try to raise awareness of birth trauma and perinatal mental health and I also reach out to others who are struggling, including co-hosting [#BirthTraumaChat](#) on Mondays at 8pm. I feel privileged to speak at events and conferences, to help train health professionals and others on how they can improve their practice, support families and help reduce birth trauma.

I found that accessing information on birth trauma and PTSD was difficult so I set up the website [Unfold Your Wings](#) to provide information and hope. I also have a [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) page and run the [Perinatal Mental Health Network](#), which brings together information about support for perinatal mental health.

I've had the privilege of helping my local Trust to set up a multiagency perinatal mental health pathway. I will soon be setting up a birth reflection group to provide a safe space for families to share their birth experiences and find the information they need to assess support.

Helping others has helped me heal and aided my recovery. The effects of my experience still linger and I still struggle with the aftermath of PTSD but I have hope that by sharing my story and supporting others it will make a difference.

Sometimes bad things happen, but we can turn those experiences, even trauma, into opportunities to help others, change and improve things and give a voice to those that need support.

Are you a mum with a story to share about your experience of perinatal mental health services? If so, the [Mums and Babies in Mind](#) team would love to hear from you so we can include you in our work. Please email Sally Hogg at SHogg@mentalhealth.org.uk



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About Mums and Babies in Mind

[Mums and Babies in Mind](#) supports local leaders in four areas of England to improve care and quality of life for mums with mental health problems during pregnancy and the first year of life, and their babies. Mums and Babies in Mind is a [Maternal Mental Health Alliance](#) project, hosted by the [Mental Health Foundation](#) and funded by the [Big Lottery Fund](#).

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COMING SOON....we will be launching the Mums and Babies online hub in September 2016. This will be hosted on this website and will showcase our work and give local leaders access to tools for improving their perinatal mental health services.

- Email us at mabim@maternalmentalhealthalliance.org to subscribe to our blog and newsletter
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