
The mother behind the mask – Mothers In Mind’s holistic community support model

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Alex Corgier is Scheme Manager of Home-Start Stroud District and Quedgeley in Gloucestershire. In 2017 she ran a perinatal community support project called Mothers in Mind. The project aimed to explore what an ideal model of community support would look like for women experiencing perinatal anxiety and depression from pregnancy up to two years after birth. It addressed the issues of stigma and helped to develop better pathways between IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies) services and localised community support.

Key lessons from the Mothers In Mind project

Taking the time to collect both qualitative and quantitative feedback from local families with lived-experience gave us crucial insight into what works, what works less well, areas that need improvement and the kind of services that women felt needed to be developed or replicated.

It was particularly gratifying for us as an organisation to receive such heartfelt gratitude from families about the huge difference their volunteer’s home visiting support had on their wellbeing and ability to cope faced with the challenge of poor perinatal mental

health. We also learnt a huge amount about running groups for women affected by perinatal mental health and are now running two weekly drop-in ante-natal and post-natal groups thanks to funding from the Clinical Commissioning Group and the Peter Lang Trust.

Stigma and fear

90% of women who responded to our questionnaire agreed that it was important to address stigma around talking openly and honestly about mental health, but 77% of them admitted that they had put on a mask to hide their own level of perinatal mental health challenges. 50% admitted that they had never told a health professional how they were really feeling because they believed they might take away their baby. One mum told us: “Why I took so long to ask for help was the real fear that I would be deemed unfit to look after my children and labelled ‘mad’ or ‘crazy’.”

Wearing a mask



Over 70% of women we interviewed admitted to putting on a mask to hide their true feelings. One mother told us: “I am mindful of how people put a face on because I completely and utterly acted a part for so long and it was absolutely exhausting.”

We used making masks as an art activity in the first two Mothers In Mind Groups that we ran in the autumn term. It was a brilliant way for women to express their thoughts and feelings with other women going through similar things at an informal craft table. The masks they created were powerful and heartfelt. We now use them as a display to keep highlighting the stigma and prevalence of perinatal mental health issues both to professionals and the general public.

Building on the work

We are being funded by the Clinical Commissioning Group to look at ways of extending our current model of community voluntary sector support across the whole of Gloucestershire. This is a huge task but I really believe it will make a real difference to families affected by poor perinatal mental health in the county. I am motivated by the feedback we received from our project as to how crucial the voluntary sector support is to any local offer of perinatal support. Voluntary sector support helps women to understand and access mental health services, provides emotional and practical support to women during and after their treatment. It is also essential to establishing peer support groups and training home visiting volunteers who can spend time building relationships with women, providing a listening ear, building their confidence and ability to cope.

Our message

Don't underestimate the level of stigma and isolation that still exists for women affected by poor maternal mental health. Create every opportunity for them speak out about their mental health and make sure you know what support is available to them in their community.

The full copy of the report can be downloaded from [HomeStart](#).

Read more from the [Mums and Babies in Mind blog](#)

- [9.2.18 Physical and Mental Health in the Postnatal Period](#)
- [26.1.18 Strengthening parent-infant mental health in Warwickshire](#)
- [15.12.17 Just do it! Using the MABIM mapping tool to find gaps in services and improve women's experience](#)
- [23/11/17 Normalising paternal mental illness](#)
- [18/10/17 Supporting positive conversations about feeding choice and mental health in the perinatal period](#)
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