



THE BABY MAKERS - A REPORT DECEMBER 2019

A pilot series of 6 making sessions for women in pregnancy.

Presented by an artist-midwife team in Stonehouse, Gloucestershire in October-November 2019.

Free to attend, women were invited to make something whilst their body is making a baby.

Participants said:

“I feel like I've rediscovered a missing part of me - a part that is huge in my self-identity”

“I'm really thankful that I could be part of this group”

“Having a midwife to answer questions and give input was a fantastic element”

With thanks to the **Midcounties Co-operative** for a grant of £2000 to cover development, expenses, artists fees, and midwife attendance. We are deeply grateful to midwife Kelly Silk for her support, involvement and guidance throughout.



In October - November 2019, Sharon Bennett and Sarah Dixon of the Women's Art Activation System ran a series of 6 making sessions for women in pregnancy, in collaboration with community midwives from the Stroud and Stonehouse teams in Gloucestershire.

We know as artists that making things with our hands can be very therapeutic and that preparing for having a baby can be an emotionally turbulent time of great change in identity for the woman.

So we designed the concept of making sessions, attended by a midwife, where a group of women in pregnancy could come together and make something, creating a space for them to think about the coming changes in their life, and how they sit within that.

We promoted the sessions on Facebook, Instagram and via the midwife teams in Stonehouse and Stroud.

We also sought support and connection with Homestart, who gave us invaluable advice about running perinatal sessions.

Midwife Kelly Silk took part in the sessions and helped us develop the concept. Another midwife, Elly, came in her place when she was unable to attend so there was a midwife attending at least part of every session. The midwives took part in the making and were also able to answer questions and offer midwifery support to the women on request.

The sessions were held in Stonehouse Scout Hut and were free of charge to attend, with materials and refreshments included.

The midwife said:

“the group offered a wonderful way to connect with pregnant women that was less pressurised and more organic than a usual clinical situation, allowing fluid and evolving conversations to cover topics in ways that normally wouldn’t be accessible in the usual midwife-mother scenario.”



Several women were referred to the group by their midwives while others found us through our Facebook activity to promote them. A total of 5 women participated in the groups, with another two who said they were coming but never did. Attendance was intermittent for a range of reasons. One participant had her baby after the second session. Others had medical appointments or wellbeing and health challenges, making it hard to get to the sessions consistently.

In the sessions the women were offered support with making baby hats, crochet blankets, and making their own notebooks. They were also supported to work on their own projects and develop creativity, including colouring in (images of pregnancy and birth as well as their own choice of patterns and other images), making toys and a cloth advent calendar. The midwife also offered some ideas around understanding the position of the baby in the womb.

We asked the participants to complete the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale at the beginning and end of the series.

All but one of the forms (all forms, beginning and end) showed wellbeing scores below the population norm of 51.6. Only two people completed the form at the start and end although we are expecting one more to be completed.

CONCLUSIONS & REFLECTIONS

We have spent some time reflecting on the pilot and we have the following thoughts:

- The sessions provided a safe, informal and confidential space for sharing that participants rarely or never find elsewhere
- The sessions drew in people with a range of emotional and life challenges and this meant that in addition to expected pregnancy ups and downs, attendance is inconsistent. We will aim to book in a greater number of women in future groups so that there are more people in the room each week
- The involvement of a community midwife as an equal in the group, and as a maker, meant that the women could ask questions they may not feel able to in clinical settings and appointments
- We offered a space where people with risk of depression can be identified. We would want to ensure that we are able to refer or connect these people with suitable support beyond the making sessions
- The women involved connected with each other and made it clear to us they found the sessions very useful and they wished they could continue for longer
- It was also clear that the fact the sessions were free of charge was a deciding factor for at least some of the women attending





- For transport, the sessions need to be near to a bus or other public transport route
- The sessions allowed women from different social backgrounds to mix and connect in a way that is not typically possible in paid-for spaces
- The midwives expressed having gained a benefit from developing creative practice as part of their involvement.

“Sharon and Sarah created a space that felt very safe to explore creative expression; I’ve discovered the motivation to pursue a practice of my own, which has given me an invaluable tool to pause and unwind from an emotionally intense job.”

Kelly, midwife

NEXT STEPS

We are actively seeking a second small grant to take The Baby Makers to another area in Gloucestershire. We want to maintain momentum, and take what we have learnt forward into a second pilot. We also need to test the model with a different midwife team to see how the involvement of midwifery can be done in different areas. We believe we need to aim for a larger group, and would like the sessions to run for 8 weeks to allow for the women to benefit more fully and connect more deeply with each other and with their creative work.

We are taking training courses to improve our skills and awareness in working with vulnerable people and those with emotional health challenges. We will want to be able to signpost well, as we clearly had involvement with some people signalling possible or probable depression, according to the wellbeing scales offered.

We will then be seeking more substantial funding to take the project forward for a longer period across the county. We are aiming to run up to two sessions a week in different areas, over a year period, in our current capacity. There may also be an opportunity to develop a model that could be replicated in other areas. We need further work with midwifery to investigate this and a year period in two - three different areas would allow us to test out the ways in which the sessions could involve midwives for benefit of the women in pregnancy, and of the midwives themselves as part of their self-development and wellbeing.

If you have an interest in supporting the further development of The Baby Makers we would be very happy to hear from you.

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