



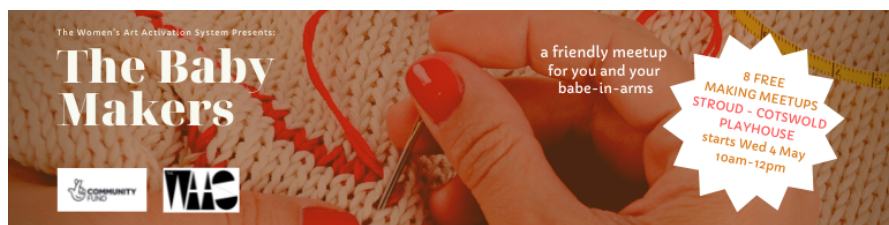
With thanks to the **National Lottery Community Fund** for a grant of £9828 to provide creative wellbeing sessions with people in pregnancy and after giving birth in Gloucestershire

THE BABY MAKERS REPORT 2021-2022

With National Lottery Community Fund support we offered two series of 8 making sessions for women in pregnancy and in the postnatal period. We also led a one-day workshop to create maternal histories in the form of bunting for Stroud's Museum in the Park and BBC Radio Gloucestershire.

Presented by an artist-health professional team in Stroud, Gloucestershire in October-December 2021 and in May-July 2022.

Free to attend, participants were invited to make something whilst their body is making or nurturing a baby. With support of artists and health professionals, a community of care was created for each group.



The Baby Makers is a creative group that aims to create wellbeing and community for new mothers and their healthcare providers. We work with people in deprived areas, experiencing isolation and at risk from mental health issues in Gloucestershire. The project responds to the needs of people in pregnancy and post-birth, and reduces their vulnerability to mental health problems through building community and providing health and creative support and activities.

The sessions create an intimate space where our participants, and those who care for them professionally, can come together to make something, talk, learn, and form a mutually supportive community.

"Mental ill-health in pregnancy and beyond is an increasing cause of maternal death; 40% of deaths within the year after pregnancy were from mental health causes, with maternal suicide remaining the leading cause of direct deaths in this period."

MBRRACE-UK: Saving Lives, Improving Mothers' Care 2022: Lessons to inform maternity care from UK and Ireland Confidential Enquiries in Maternal Death and Morbidity 2018-20



THE SESSIONS

Pregnancy Group - Stroud

Participants said:

"I really enjoyed scheduling some time to try to be creative with my new baby. It was wonderful to be around other new mums and to share thoughts and feelings. I'm naturally introverted so struggle to start conversation with people I don't know, but being in the group made me feel more comfortable as we were all in the same boat."

"I have learnt a new skill from scratch (crochet) with the support of a very patient teacher. I am thrilled to have learnt something new which I can carry forward with me for years to come. I have almost finished my hat and have already made a start on a new jumper. I'm finding crocheting in the evening after taking care of a baby and a toddler all day very relaxing!"

Over 8 sessions in October - December 2021 we hosted 13 participants: people in pregnancy who wanted to join the group. We had different health professionals taking part, including 2 doulas and a hypnobirthing teacher. Both of The Women's Art Activation System (The WAAS) artists, Sarah and Sharon, attended all sessions. Photographer Catherine Harder donated a free photo shoot both to document for The WAAS and to provide personal photos for the participants.

These sessions provided:

- 1-1 chats with doulas
- Hypnobirthing relaxation meditation techniques and additional resources to take home
- A professional photographer who took photos of the sessions and gave free individual headshot and pregnancy photos for those who wanted them
- Learning new craft skills
- Creative support in designing and planning
- All materials
- A warm, comfortable space and healthy refreshments

The Baby Makers

We are so happy to welcome you to these National Lottery funded sessions with the Women's Art Activation System (WAAS).

No previous creative experience is necessary and no project is too small. We have had participants making everything from kit toys to elaborate advent creations, doing colouring, and photo collage, sewing, drawing, and crochet. We will support you in whatever you decide you want to work on.

We are providing some materials and you can bring your own as well.

We will also have the benefit of a birth professional present. She will be making something too as part of the group. You can make the most of her presence by asking her for support around anything to do with your pregnancy. We will also provide signposting for additional resources for anything that might be affecting or concerning you. Your wellbeing is paramount.

Event Timing: 22 October - 10 December - Fridays 10am-12pm

Event Address: Trinity Rooms, Stroud GL5 2HZ

Find it - <https://goo.gl/maps/LRcPcNxUmZCWSW8Z9>

Contact us at 07708 399766 or waas@thewaas.org

To register your place please share the following information (Your info will be kept private and safe according to the terms of UK-GDPR):

Post-Natal Group - Stroud

Over 8 sessions in May - July 2022 we hosted 16 participants and their newborn babies. We had 2 health professionals taking part in this series, a midwife who had been part of our pilot series in 2019, and a doula. Each provided activities and support for the group from their practice, as well as learning new creative skills as participants. Both of The WAAS artists, Sarah and Sharon, attended all sessions.

"I was not expecting to enjoy this so much as I'm not at all creative and still trying to be! But the support was there and I've met some lovely people and the ladies who run the group are brilliant and so patient and helpful.. I'm glad I was able to get a spot as know the group was in demand! A big thank you!! "

"I was unsure whether to attend the group as I'm not in the slightest bit creative but I wish I was..I'm so so glad I went, it was truly the best 8 weeks with great women and brilliant teachers! "

"There was something so appealing about the crafting element as well and pregnancy support. In one place. I think the lasting effects are perhaps noted now as I realise how little time I put aside for myself and how healing and beneficial it was when I did!! "

These sessions provided:

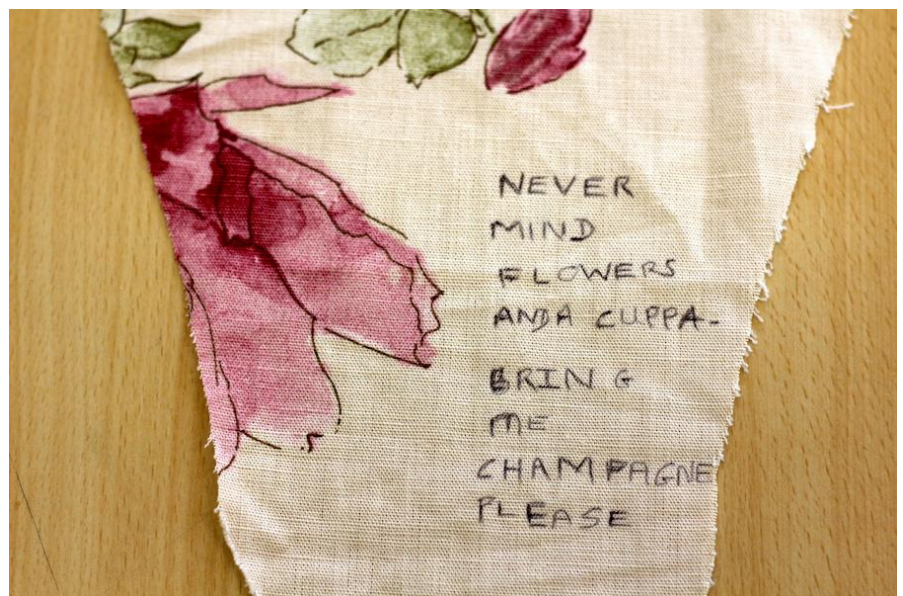
- 1-1 chats with doula and midwife
- Birth professional advice and health signposting
- Birth trauma debriefing/safe space with doula/midwife
- Relaxation and physical health practices with doula/midwife
- Learning new craft skills
- Creative support in designing and planning
- All materials
- A warm, comfortable space and healthy refreshments and snacks
- Baby change area and lots of pram space and parking
- Travel stipend to enable participants to come to the group

The Baby Makers - Making History

We were invited by Stroud's Museum In The Park to support their project to gather local maternal histories, through a day of making.

Using the model of Mother Bunting created by Sarah Dixon in 2015 we brought many of our Baby Makers, along with other mothers from Stroud District to join this free session. A total of 19 participants shared their stories and experiences of birth in Stroud. These were recorded on audio, writing and in the form of bunting flags, using craft materials, pens, cloth, etc.

The Bunting was stitched together by The WAAS and is now accessioned into the Museum collections along with the recordings and written records. Some of the stories were also shared on BBC Radio Gloucestershire.



OUTCOMES & LEARNING

Healthcare professionals said:

"I loved being part of the project. I found that conversations about birth subjects - whether the process of induction or struggles in choosing a name - flowed easily as everyone sat together creating our pieces. Since taking part in Baby Makers in 2021 I have continued and developed my crocheting - [I now] make umbilical cord ties for my doula clients."

Gillian Holmes, Doula

"I've kept a really beautiful relationship with some of the mums I met there. I think it was really beneficial for a lot of them to be able to just be in a space with other people going through the same thing"

Oli Raeburn, Doula

Outcomes

- We supported 25 people in the perinatal period, and 5 healthcare professionals to learn new skills and form community together
- The doulas expressed having gained a benefit from developing creative practice as part of their involvement. One has gone on to use her new crochet skills to make umbilical cord ties to use in her work.
- Maternal histories were captured for posterity, contributing to Stroud's marginalised histories collections at The Museum In The Park
- Birth stories shared on BBC Radio with Anna King
- Initiated discussions with Manchester Art Gallery for possible future collaborations
- Talking with Stroud Museum in the Park to look at a wider maternal histories project
- Post-natal group remain in contact and meet up regularly, they started their own WhatsApp.
- 100% of respondents said they learnt something new, and found the sessions enjoyable and accessible
- Improved well-being and added value has reportedly lasted long after the project ended.
- Learning a new creative skill has been reported by participants, both those in perinatal stages and the professionals, as having been a significant benefit over the longer term.
- The sessions provided a safe, informal and confidential space for sharing that participants rarely or never find elsewhere
- The involvement of healthcare professionals as equals in the group, and as makers, meant that the women could ask questions they may not feel able to in clinical settings and appointments



Learning

Stroud's Museum In The Park said:

"I was very pleased that The WAAS responded to my appeal for stories of Menstruation, Maternity and Menopause in 2022. These areas of women's health in particular are poorly represented in our collection. As a result of working with The WAAS to host 2 workshops, we now have stories of motherhood and menopause from 19 different local women in our collection. This has been captured through artworks – pieces of bunting representing the maker's experiences – written recollections and audio recordings. Thus we have greatly increased the opportunity to tell stories of the experiences women go through everyday and have done so throughout history. Sarah and Sharon were a pleasure to work with and I very much hope to collaborate with them again in the future."
Fern Ryan, Curator

THE WOMEN'S ART ACTIVATION SYSTEM

Piccadilly Mill West
off Lower Street
Stroud GL5 2HT

<http://thewaas.org/waas@thewaas.org>

@the_waas
#systemnowactivated
#thewaas

- In future groups we will ensure strong mental health professional support is integrated into the model. Using the Warwick-Edinburgh wellbeing scale alongside developing relationships with participants enabled us to identify concerns and signpost people who were experiencing or at risk of emotional/mental health challenges. We want to improve ways to measure the outcomes and wellbeing as this single data point doesn't tell us enough about the impacts
- Over the course of the pilot and this recent series, we've identified that working with a midwife or other NHS professionals could allow us to reach a wider range of people and to identify and refer those in most need of support
- The future groups will be post-natal. Post-natal groups are better attended due to availability of people post-birth. Although the pregnancy group was highly valued by participants, in practice they are often called away to appointments or for other reasons. People in pregnancy are often not able to join at all, due to work commitments.
- The fact the sessions were free of charge was a deciding factor for at least some of the women attending so we will ensure this continues

NEXT STEPS

Taking forward the learning and the growing sense of the value of this work we are applying for funding to run 3 more series of The Baby Makers, in Stroud, Stonehouse and Gloucester in 2023-24. We will offer post-natal groups as have seen that the demand and attendance for these is significantly higher than the pregnancy groups. We will be including a mental health professional in the groups.

We are still considering how to support pregnancy in an alternative more accessible model, this would be a separate project in the future.

We are developing a maternal histories project separately, following the success of the Baby Makers: Making History sessions at the Museum in the Park.

We are actively seeking to partner with researchers and/or healthcare providers to explore the power of the model and develop a framework that could be used more widely to reach people going through pregnancy and birth, addressing the problems in the recent MBRRACE report regarding maternal health, and previous reporting by Homestart and others.

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

Sarah Dixon

Sharon Bennett

