



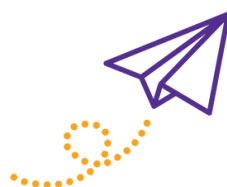
The Home-Start/CNWL Perinatal Mental Health Peer Support Pilot 2020-22

Achievements and Learning

The Home-Start London Consortium

Home-Start London is a consortium of 12 independent Home-Starts operating across 24 boroughs. It was set up in 2015 to facilitate and promote the provision of Home-Start services throughout the capital.

In 2020/21, London Home-Starts supported 2,026 London families and 3,222 children.



Background

One in five mothers / birthing parents will experience mental health difficulties during the perinatal period, these can vary from mild to severe, with depression and anxiety disorders being the most common. Receiving appropriate treatment and support can help prevent avoidable suffering and isolation, strengthen families and ensure children have a healthy start.

If left untreated, perinatal mental health (PMH) needs can have a significant and long-lasting impact on mothers/birthing parents and their families. There are also wider implications. The cost to society of the lack of timely access to good quality perinatal mental healthcare is estimated to be over £8 billion.[1]

The Covid-19 pandemic meant that mothers/birthing parents faced additional pressures such as isolation, fear of infection and bereavement. These factors contributed to the already high demand for perinatal services at a time when access to services became more limited. Those living in social-economic deprivation as well as from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds were disproportionately affected.[2]

This report shares the achievements and learning of Home-Start London's Perinatal Mental Health Peer Support Pilot. It is based on an independent evaluation undertaken from December 2021 to March 2022. The full evaluation report is available on request.

The Perinatal Mental Health Peer Support Pilot

In October 2020, Home-Start London launched the Perinatal Mental Health Peer Support Pilot in partnership with the Central North-West London (CNWL) NHS Foundation Trust.

The 18-month project aimed to provide volunteer support to 70 mothers/birthing parents with mild to moderate PMH needs across five London boroughs. Three Home-Starts operating in the target boroughs would deliver the support. These were: **Home-Start Hillingdon**; **Home-Start Barnet, Brent, Enfield and Harrow** in **Brent & Harrow**; and **Home-Start Westminster, Kensington & Chelsea and Hammersmith & Fulham** in **Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea**.



“It was really reassuring to see that Home-Start adapted its services and didn’t close down. They were there.”

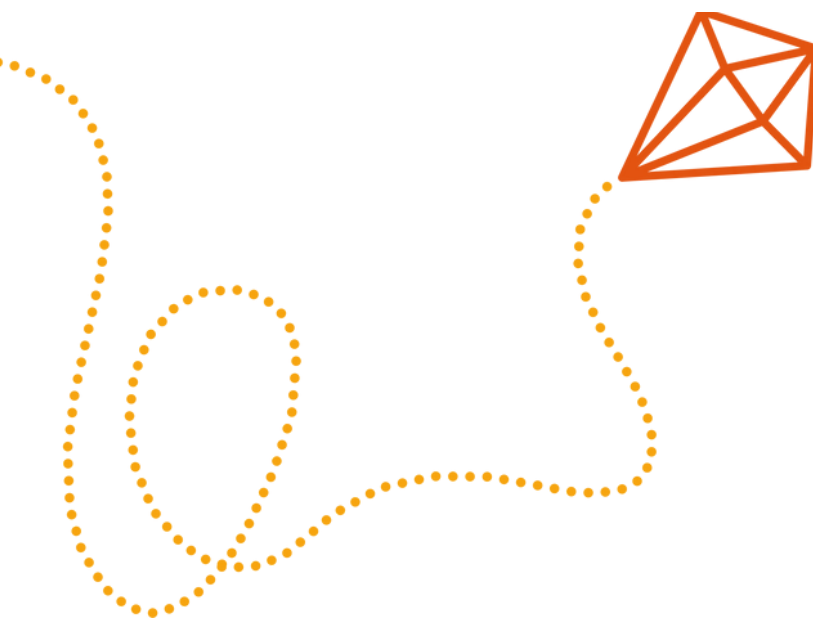
Perinatal Community Specialist Nurse, Brent and Harrow



By the time the pilot began, Home-Starts had moved to remote working in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. It was agreed that instead of weekly home visits, service users would be offered phone or online calls and access to online groups and counselling. As restrictions eased, in-person visits resumed either outside or inside the home.

Aligning with the NHS ambition for the creation of Integrated Care Systems, the pilot aimed to develop an effective partnership between Home-Start and NHS community PMH services. It was hoped that the partnership would both expand and enrich CNWL’s specialist services. Home-Start London was to play a key role in connecting the Home-Starts to each other and to NHS PMH services.





“She was a mum herself, so it was helpful to ask her things. There’s so much you don’t know as a first time Mum. It was helpful to check if things were normal.”

Service user

Home-Start’s model of volunteer-led support

The first 1001 days of a baby's life are important in laying the foundation for their future physical and mental health. To ensure that they have the best start possible requires a combination of an enriching home environment, nurturing relationships and parents/carers who are equipped to fulfil this role.

Home-Start's vision is that 'no parent feels alone'. We provide non-judgemental, emotional and practical support to families facing challenges with at least one child under five. Families may be dealing with a range of issues, including, but not limited to: perinatal mental health needs, immigration difficulties, insolvency, housing problems, domestic abuse and isolation.

Highly trained volunteers, supported by Home-Start staff teams, spend two to three hours each week in a family’s home. The support offered is both exceptionally broad and highly personalised. As well as a listening ear, this might include sourcing essential items or visiting a local Children's Centre. Parents might also be offered other services such as group support, family outings and counselling.



What was the impact of the pilot?

Improved mental health for women

In total, 89 service users accessed support through the pilot.[4]. Quantitative and qualitative data collected during and after the project demonstrates the positive impact that this support had on mothers/birthing parents mental health and broader well being.

The project had a target of 80% of service users reporting improvements in agreed outcome areas. These outcome areas were **mental health**; **social isolation**; **use of services**; and **child development**. The target was exceeded across all areas.

For the evaluation, interviews were conducted with 10 women and 10 women completed an online questionnaire. Women spoke very positively about Home-Start's support. They particularly valued their personal relationship with their volunteer and the parenting experience they offered. They also valued the length and continuity of support provided.

93%

of women
reported
improved
mental health

95%

of women
reported
improved
access to local
services

94%

of women
reported
improved
child
development

"I was really isolated. Meetings with my volunteer gave me something to look forward to. It was good to have a new relationship to build on"

Service user

An effective model of partnership working

The pilot was successful in developing an effective partnership between Home-Start and CNWL. Home-Start's holistic offer enhanced the clinical interventions offered by community PMH teams to provide a more comprehensive package of support for women and their families.

For the evaluation, interviews were conducted with 15 staff from CNWL and 14 Home-Start staff and volunteers. Both CNWL community PMH teams and management saw Home-Start as a trusted partner. Referrers noted Home-Start had integrated well into their multi-disciplinary network, was highly adaptable and culturally sensitive.

During the pilot, Home-Start was involved at all stages of the referral pathway. However, most frequently for women who either did not meet service criteria or were being discharged from PMH services. Home-Start was widely seen as playing an important role not just in improving women's mental health but in maintaining it - bridging the gap as women transitioned both into and out of community PMH services .

"Without Home-Start some of those women could have ended up becoming more unwell and coming back."

Perinatal Psychiatric Specialist Nurse, Hillingdon



"Without Home-Start I wouldn't be where I am today. They have helped me with my confidence, self-esteem, and my anxiety."

Service user



Case Study: Maria's Story*

Maria experienced domestic abuse in a previous relationship which left her with depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. At initial assessment, Maria's mental health was poor, as she had recurring panic attacks and was feeling lonely and sad.

Maria was matched with Jan, a Home-Start volunteer. At the start, which coincided with a lockdown, Jan made weekly calls. As lockdown lifted, they met for socially distanced walks outside. Then, when the rules allowed, Jan started home visiting. She supported Maria to book antenatal classes. Together they researched and visited local Children's Centres. Jan provided ongoing reassurance, helping to build Maria's confidence.

Maria now regularly attends her local Children's Centre and has built good relationships with the staff and other families. She rarely has panic attacks and can manage her emotions more easily. Her baby is thriving.

Maria said: "Without Home-Start I wouldn't be where I am today. They have helped me with my confidence, self-esteem, and my anxiety. Jan was very professional, but she was also a good friend. She always had a listening ear."

* All names have been changed to protect service user and volunteer anonymity.

Reflections and Learning

Trusted relationships underpinned the success of the pilot. In the two boroughs where Home-Start had a long-standing relationship with community PMH teams, the pilot was established more quickly. Clinicians understood the Home-Start model and felt confident making referrals. In the borough where collaboration was new, it took time to build up trust. Consequently, referrals were slower.

There were challenges **aligning NHS and Home-Start systems**, particularly in relation to monitoring and reporting. It was agreed that adaptations would be made to ensure it is easier for Home-Start and community PMH teams to use and better captures the change taking place.

The populations of the target boroughs are diverse. During the pilot, **language barriers** sometimes meant that Home-Starts were unable to match service users with a volunteer. Home-Starts are exploring new ways to attract more diverse volunteers who speak the required languages and understand the cultural norms.



“When you have someone who is so isolated and we need a volunteer or befriender, Home-Start is always our first port of call.”

NHS PMH Team
Manager





Looking Ahead

The impact of the pandemic and new challenges relating to the rising cost of living mean mothers/birthing parents continue to be at an increased risk of experiencing mental health challenges during the perinatal period. Meanwhile, the strain on NHS services grows. In this context, the distinct and complementary support offered by Home-Start is much needed.

Home-Start London is pleased to continue partnering with CNWL in 2022/23. We are keen to explore opportunities to develop our work in perinatal mental health and to expand the offer across London. We warmly welcome conversations with interested funders and potential partners.

Sources

[1] NHS (2018) The Perinatal Mental Healthcare Pathways. London: NHS

[2] Papworth, R. et al (2021) Maternal mental health during a pandemic. A rapid review of Covid-19's impact. London: Centre for Mental Health

[3] The pilot was extended by two months and the referrals target was increased to 76.

For further information please contact:

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