

BfN News

Mums Supporting Mums

Covid-19 heros

Hear from the women in our network who have been working on the frontline.

Black Breastfeeding Matters

BfN CEO makes an official statement.

Annual Evaluation

The results are in. We share the highlights and learnings.



JULY 2020
SUMMER
ISSUE 77



BfN volunteer Jes Johal

HELLO!

JULY 2020
SUMMER
ISSUE 77

Editor's Note

Welcome to the Summer 2020 edition of BfN News.

We hope that you and your family have found a new normal and you are safe and healthy.

The past few months have been a time of reflection and learning for BfN from many perspectives. We have found new ways of working to reach families during lockdown, addressed our position as an organisation in light of the call to action by the Black Lives Matter protests and sought to put in place increased levels of support for our staff and volunteers.

Alongside a collection of our usual news and updates from across the network, in this edition we also share the personal stories of some of the courageous women in our network who have been working on the frontline in country's efforts to tackle coronavirus. On our cover, we wanted to make space for these inspirational women who have put themselves in harms way to help others.

We extend our thanks to everyone who has shared images and stories for inclusion in the newsletter. In BfN News we try really hard to represent the diversity of the families we support in our work across the UK - and we would love more pictures that represent you and your family. So please do get in touch if you have any to share.

As always, we welcome your feedback, comments and ideas. Please send them to leanne.rayner@breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk. We'd love to hear from you.

We wish you and your families a safe transition as we emerge from lockdown - thank you for your ongoing commitment and support.



BfN Director Zara Bergman



Mum and baby in Lambeth, London

A message from BfN's CEO



The last few months have been unlike anything any of us have ever experienced before. For most of us in March the country came to a standstill - roads were quiet, businesses were shut down, schools were closed and suddenly we all had to work from home at the same time as entertaining and educating our children and dealing with anxieties about our own health and that of our friends, families and communities.

We know many BfN members work in health care settings and so for them this was an even more stressful time - busier at work than ever before and getting used to ever changing rules and regulations. BfN staff and volunteers adapted very quickly (most of us were used to working from home anyway - ahead of the times!) and dived straight into working out how we could continue to support families during these most unusual times.

A few BfN areas were allowed to continue offering some forms of face to face support, (typically the areas where our project work is closely integrated with the NHS), others set up online support groups and many, many volunteers stepped up their volunteering on the helpline, meaning many families have still been able to access the help and support they so need. I write about the BfN response more fully [here](#).

In this issue of BfN News we want to celebrate the amazing effort BfN staff and volunteers have put in over the last few months. We feel these are historic times, and so we are making an online archive of stories of supporting on the frontline during 2020. You can read a taste of these in this edition of the newsletter, and more online too. Please do add your memories and stories of these times if you wish.

Into May and as lockdown continued and we settled into the 'new normal' ways of living, we were horrified to hear of the brutal murder of George Floyd at the hands of the police in the United States. The brutality of this crime and realisation of the presence of racism within our world has been brought into sharp focus for many of us on a personal and organisational level.

Although fairness and social justice has been part of BfN's ethos since we were founded, like many organisations, we have really scrutinised what we do and how we work and recognised that there is so much more we need to do if we want to be a charity that can truly offer support to all families regardless of their background.

Over the last few weeks there have been many good conversations held with members, volunteers and staff over what we can do to show solidarity with the anti-racist movement and take responsibility for improving race relations in the charity.

As a breastfeeding charity with a long history of supporting women in the UK, we recognise the health and social inequalities that unfairly persist and affect women's ability to breastfeed as they choose. We know that these barriers are even higher for mothers from black, asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. We have set out our position as a charity on racism and racist behaviour ([read it here](#)) and now we want to share the actions we are taking and developing.

We remain committed to listening, learning and doing more. I recently sent an email detailing some of the steps we have taken so far and what more we plan to do. We know it will take time but we are in this for the long haul. We have more work to do. We are listening.



Inspirational Stories From Covid-19 Frontline Workers in our Network.

All of our lives have been turned upside down by the Coronavirus crisis. For many of us, it has been a delicate balance of social distancing, remote working and home schooling.

But for some of the amazing women in our network, it has meant working on the frontline to ensure that families continued to receive the support they needed during lockdown.

We wanted to share some of their stories with you and we will keep adding to these on our website over the coming weeks and months.

Heartfelt thanks to you all for your courage and commitment. You are a true inspiration!

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Rebecca Verlander

Rebecca has been working at UCLH since the pandemic began, as an Infant Feeding Support Worker and for the Islington BFN breastfeeding support service. She says 'I've been working at UCLH since the pandemic began, as an Infant Feeding Support Worker and for the Islington BFN breastfeeding support service. To begin with, it was really scary – we weren't using PPE and started to get confirmed cases before we were protected. Luckily, the PPE was distributed quickly, and we started wearing it every day. I have struggled with this as wearing a mask for 11 hours gives me a headache, dry throat and sore lips. It's been tough.' [Read her full story here](#)

Sarah Gray

Sarah is a Sister on a Coronary Care Unit where we look after people who have been hospitalised with heart conditions, and are either awaiting their Coronavirus results (we test all patients now) or who are positive. At the start of lockdown our unit was closed and we were joined with another ward to pool staff. Several of my colleagues underwent intensive training to enable them to help out with staffing the increased ICU capacity the hospital had created, and many more were deployed onto the COVID wards – where most of the care has been end of life. [Read her full story here](#)



Inspirational Stories Continued.

Marion Paddock

Islington Breastfeeding Peer Supporter Marion has continued to offer support to mums and learn lessons throughout the coronavirus lockdown. She recounts 'Mums and staff were feeling all very overwhelmed, fearful, and apprehensive. Understandably anxiety levels skyrocketed.' [Read her full story here](#)

Zoe Chadderton

Zoe is a midwife and Breastfeeding Co-ordinator at a central London hospital. She is also a BfN Supporter, Supervisor, Tutor and Director. She has continued to work throughout the pandemic. Feeling thankful, she says 'Hopefully we are through the worst of it now, but we are still at capacity. We're being as flexible as we can be and over the next four weeks things may be busier as staff start to use annual leave up – but I'm confident we can cope.' [Read her story here](#)

Hannah Goodwin

BfN Derbyshire volunteer Hannah works as a Healthy Family Peer Support Worker, however the service was suspended at the end of March. Hannah has worked in critical roles as part of the NHS response to Covid-19. She recalls 'I was redeployed as a Health Care Assistant on a rehabilitation ward at our local community hospital on April 16th. I had never worked on a ward before, so everything was new to me.' [Read her story here](#)

Tower Hamlets Baby Feeding Service

Joy Hastings, Tower Hamlets Baby Feeding Service Manager has been leading her team to rapidly respond to the coronavirus crisis. She reflected on the experience saying 'We have continued visiting the postnatal wards throughout the lockdown...When we see a mum – we wear scrubs, goggles, mask, apron & gloves. We try to stay 2m away...but we do go in closer when needed to review positioning and attachment.' [Read about their experiences here](#)

Covid Chronicles by Rachel Priestley

During the pandemic, Rachel Priestley from The Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust asked a new mum how her birth had been. She recalls her saying 'I will never worry about anything again. I haven't got time for that. I have nothing to worry about.' [Read her response here](#)



BfN statement on black breastfeeding matters

BfN stands alongside all black mothers and families, and are willing to do anything we can to ensure mothers and babies get real change for the better.

At the heart of BfN's values is empowerment of women, and none of us can feel empowered if we are raising our children with threat from racism.

As a charity we have always believed in social justice for mothers and babies, but often we have felt limited in what to do, in part due to our own ignorance – which is our responsibility to correct.

We hear our fellow black mothers and families and we are committed to doing more – using our core values of empowerment, empathy and actively listening.

We are committed to learning and educating ourselves. We will share and amplify black women's voices. We are here for you.

[Read our policy on Equality and Diversity](#)

Racism: A major contributing factor to maternal complications in Black Women (My personal account)

My name is Ernestine Gheyoh Ndzi, a black woman resident here in the UK and a mother of two beautiful girls. The killing of George Floyd simply because he is black and many others that lost their lives prematurely for the same reason calls for serious action from all especially black people like me.

There are many that have been killed or have suffered severe racism but have not spoken up. Today, I choose to speak up about some of my nasty experiences of racism. My account will be centred around my experience of childbirth and breastfeeding.

A report published by the Mother and Babies: Reducing Risk through Audits and Confidential Enquiries across the UK (MBRRACE-UK) published in 2018 stated that black women in the UK were five times more likely to die in childbirth than white women.

Why is this the case? Reports suggest that being black and pregnant carries more risk. Assuming that is the case, the deaths are facilitated by racist behaviour. Racism makes the doctors and midwives not pay...

(cont...)



...Ernestine's Story continued.

...attention to black women, and black mothers are less likely to speak up if they fear they won't be taken seriously.

The reason for my account is to raise awareness and encourage more black women to speak out because we can't allow such nasty treatment to continue.



I cried but had no voice to speak out because I did not think anyone would listen.

An account of my experience

I had a very difficult pregnancy with my youngest daughter resulting from complications I developed when I had my first daughter. Many times, I was rushed to the hospital in an ambulance.

In addition, I was constantly bullied and harassed by a group of teenage girls that went to a school close to where I lived. They called me names such as 'fat', 'monkey' and shouted at me to leave their country. Most of the time I avoided them and paid no attention to them. Part of the reason for my silence was because I knew that discrimination against blacks was rampant, and they were not the first to rain racist comments on me.

Sometimes, I felt like I should not have come to the UK because of the hateful comments. However, my health issues worsened with time. I was advised by the doctors to have a caesarean section at 36 weeks, but I refused because I wanted to carry the pregnancy to full term. At 38 weeks, I had my baby through caesarean section. I told the doctors that my body takes a long time to recover from an anaesthesia such as epidural (based on the experience with my first daughter).

The C-section was done in the morning and by 16:00 a midwife came to tell me that I would be discharged that evening. I said that would not be possible because my legs were still numb. By 18:00, a midwife came and asked if I had showered. I said no, because I still could not feel my legs. She became stroppy with me, saying I should have got out of bed and showered. I was shocked and surprised but did not respond

because I was feeling exhausted and rather too emotional to answer. Many thoughts ran through my mind as to why she would speak to me like that. She left and returned with a bowl of water to assist me, but all she did was pull and push and grumbled to herself.

I cried but had no voice to speak out because I did not think anyone would listen. Each time the baby cried at night, I had to call a midwife to hand the baby to me to feed. No one spoke to me about breastfeeding or even asked if I needed any help.

Unfortunately for me, my baby cried a lot that night. I got too scared to continue ringing the bell rather, I used the side of the bed to pull myself closer to the baby's cot. When a midwife came in at 4:00am doing their rounds, she shouted at me for lying down on the bed with the baby. I tried to explain that I was feeding the baby, but she gave me no opportunity to speak. She took the baby back to her cot and left. I felt less of a human, less of a mother and worthless. I cried but felt my tears were not helping me either because it gave me a headache.

By 6:00am, I was on the phone asking my husband to come in, but unfortunately, he couldn't because he needed to drop my first daughter off at school at 8:45am before coming to the hospital. At that time, I could feel little movement in my legs, but there were still very heavy. I literally had to drag them on the floor.

When my husband arrived by 9:30, the doctors came in and told me that I would be discharged as soon as the paediatrician had checked the baby. They completely ignored the fact that I was very tired, hadn't really recovered from the anaesthesia and still had abdominal pain. The paediatrician checked the baby and said although she hadn't opened her bowels yet, we could still go home and I should call the GP if the baby didn't by the following day.

We eventually left the hospital late afternoon that day. When I got home, my abdominal pain got worst, my legs were still heavy, the baby was not latching on very well, my nipples were so sore already and the baby was not latching on very well, my nipples were so sore already and the baby was crying a lot. When it got to about 20:00, the abdominal pain was unbearable. I was helpless on the floor with the baby screaming and my husband... (cont...)

...Ernestine's Story continued.

...struggling to manage the situation. I refused to ring 999 because of the experience at the hospital. We rang 111 instead and requested a doctor come out to me, because I couldn't bear to go back to the hospital and re-live the previous night's experience.

The lady that answered the 111 call was concerned that I had a C-section the previous day and was home already with all the pain. However, after the initial questioning, it took 3 hours for a 111 doctor to call me back. She asked questions and told me she was on her way from about midnight, the doctor only got to me by 4:00am.

She stood about 3 meters away from me and said she was in a rush to get somewhere. She asked me to bring a urine sample, which she only looked at and said, 'Yes, there is blood in your urine, I will give you antibiotics'. I thought, of course there will be blood in my urine, I just had a baby. She gave me antibiotics and some pain killers and left. I took the medication and spent most of the time crying and wishing someone could just be a little supportive.

The midwife visited the following day and asked me how I was doing. I explained that I was struggling with the abdominal pain and breastfeeding. All she said was, call the GP if the pain isn't subsiding and go to a baby group for breastfeeding support. She spent 10mins with me and left. 4 hours later, the health visitor arrived, checked the baby and asked me to take the baby to a nearby baby centre after a week for checks. That was all, she did not return.

I sank into depression, but was unable to tell anyone what I was going through. I could not explain to my husband how I was feeling because I thought he had too much to deal with caring for us, and my other daughter.

The baby centre and baby groups were hugely unhelpful. When I walked through the door, I could feel all eyes on me. I was the only black woman in there. Rather than just having normal conversations, they start with questions like 'which country do you come from?', 'how long have you been in the UK?' I interpreted the questions as why are you here?

This made it all the more difficult for me to ask for any help or want to go to a baby group. It took me well over eight weeks for the abdominal pain to subside and well over 6 months to start to feel like a human being again.

I am fortunate to be here and to tell my story but others have not been that fortunate. When I share my story with other black women and listen to their stories, I feel like mine was minor, but trust me it wasn't.

It breaks my heart because the pain black women go through is completely unnecessary. We have done nothing wrong being black.



My encouragement to black mothers is to speak up, because by doing so, someone could help.

The way forward

Racism is deeply rooted in our society and even more difficult to call out because most acts are subtle. Generally, a woman pre and post childbirth, is overwhelmed with hormones and requires support. Postnatal depression is on the rise because of the hormones and the lack of support.

This is worse in black women because of the added racism. It will take the UK government and society a lot to get black women and men to trust them.

My encouragement to black mothers is to speak up, because by doing so someone could help.

Do not be like me and deal with it on your own.

SPEAK UP!

#BLACKLIVESMATTER

The importance of our commitment to black women and their families

We know that black women are five times more likely to die as a result of complications in their pregnancy than white women.

In November 2018, commenting on the [MBRRACE-UK report](#) which published this shocking statistic, we said this was unacceptable and required urgent action.

Today our view has not changed, except clearly more needs to be done to tackle this. We are grateful to Dr Ernestine Gheyoh Ndzi of York St John University, who has willingly shared her experience of giving birth in the UK.

Importantly, as Ernestine's story testifies, we need to work harder at removing the culture of silence that protects racists and allows racist behaviour (both blatant and unconscious) to play out in health and social care systems.

As a charity we have always believed in social justice for mothers and babies, but often we have felt limited in what to do, in part due to our own ignorance – which is our responsibility to correct.

We hear our fellow black mothers and families and we are committed to doing more – using our core values of empowerment, empathy and actively listening.

[Click here to access educational resources and further reading on the BfN website](#)



BfN is committed to amplifying the pregnancy, birth, breastfeeding and motherhood experiences of black women.



BfN backs FiveXMore campaign

The FiveXMore campaign addresses why Black Women in the U.K. are 5 times more likely than white women are to die during pregnancy and after childbirth.

There is a five-fold difference in maternal mortality rates amongst women from black ethnic backgrounds and an almost two-fold difference amongst women from Asian Ethnic backgrounds compared to white women. Action is needed to address these disparities, but not enough is being done to put a stop to these deaths of black women during pregnancy.

The FiveXMore petition has already gathered over 160,000 signatures and the government have made a response to it - committing to funding the necessary research into factors associated with higher maternal death in Black and South Asian women, which is great and exactly what the campaign was asking for.

However, the campaign highlights that "concrete action" is needed, not just "continuity of care" which they reckon will be established in 2024. It also calls for the government to specify what it will do specifically for BLACK women, as it's specifically Black (not BAME) women who have the highest risk of dying during pregnancy (five times more than a white woman.)

BfN will continue to highlight and support this very important campaign

Find out more at www.fivexmore.com



BfN's CEO Announces Volunteer Helpline

At BfN we recognise that volunteers are central to our work in supporting women and families.

We have been overwhelmed by your willingness to carry on supporting mothers, parents and families during this difficult time, even in situations where normal, face-to-face services have been suspended.

We hope that our well-established pathways for support for volunteers, supervision and BfN central services, have remained constant during this period.

However, we are also aware that such an extended period of stress, uncertainty and disruption may create different problems that you are unsure how to handle.

So, we have launched a new helpline for all BfN volunteers who may need information or support relevant to your volunteering in BfN.

The line will be linked to a member of the BfN central staff team and will be open for live calls from 10am to 11am on Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, outside of these times there will be an option to leave a message and we will return your call as soon as we can.

Please note that this is not a crisis line and it is not an alternative to supervision. It is simply an offer of connection in a period that we know has been tough on volunteers.

If you require support, please do give us a call on 0333 230 9474.



BfN Recognised as an IBLCE Breastfeeding Support Counsellor Organisation

In February this year BfN was approved to join the list of 'Recognised Breastfeeding Support Counsellor Organisations' that individuals can gain experience with as part of their IBCLC requirements.

We join a long list of organisations from the UK and all over the world including ABM, LLLI, Cuidui Ireland, Australian Breastfeeding Association, Breastfeeding USA and many more.

So, if becoming an IBCLC is something you are interested in working towards, you can now use your BfN volunteering or paid work experience for this.

[More details about what is involved in becoming an IBCLC can be found here](#)



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Get started today!

www.easyfundraising.org.uk



Midlothian Helpers Course Conquer Moodle and Zoom

By Kirstin Worsley - Scottish PfG Project Manager

We were all set to start our helpers course on 20th March, with a 'meet and greet' session followed by 12 weeks of training.

However, we started to worry that this might not be possible due to the coronavirus situation. So on pretty much the last day before lockdown in Scotland, we had our only face to face small group meeting and then headed into the brave new world of Zoom!

With Sarah Edwards help, we transitioned the planned Helpers course to seven Zoom sessions, with Moodle in between.

Even though it was new to most of us, we started to dip our toes in to breakout rooms, whiteboards and all the fun that comes with delivering training in this new way.

All I can say is WOW! The trainees have risen to the challenge and have attended every session smiling and ready to learn. Breakout has given extra opportunities to get to know each other and practice new skills.

Whole group talk has become second nature. Listening carefully is certainly a well developed skill for everyone!

We could have had over 20 babies and children in the group too, but with the support of others in the trainees' homes, they have had the space, support and encouragement to learn.

This was very much appreciated while we navigated this new way of learning, and has left us wondering 'Why did it take a pandemic for us to do this?'.

Moodle has been a bit of a worry though and it caused a few frustrations, but the engagement and determination of the trainees has meant that we did manage to use it effectively.

Special thanks goes to Shruti who coordinated Moodle during the training, which went very smoothly due to her commitment and hard work.

Our final session is coming up and we will complete the course on the same day that we would have if lockdown had never happened.

I am so proud of all of these ladies and their families. I hope that the training has given them all some focus during this very uncertain time.

BfN Annual Evaluation Survey 2020 Insights

What we are doing well, where we can improve and helping us to provide the evidence required to asecure further funding.



Which service?

18% BfN Drugs in Breastmilk Service
10.5% National Breastfeeding Helpline
18% social media chat support



Who responded?

90% were mothers
6.5% Health Professionals
1.5% other

64%

Matching last year's results exactly, 64% of mothers contacted BfN because they were experiencing breastfeeding problems.



Once again, the most popular topic of discussion with BfN Peer Supporters was positioning and attachment for feeding.

We wanted to know more about why people used our services and the difference it made. **We learned that:**

45%

of mothers were struggling with painful breasts and nipples.

56%

said that BfN supported them to breastfeed for longer than they otherwise would have.

92%

said that the support and information they received was specific to them.

24%

of mums wanted to talk about their mental wellbeing or mood

We asked about the impact that BfN had, they said:

I felt lonely and isolated on my breastfeeding journey
I had people who could give me support with breastfeeding
I felt confident about making choices regarding breastfeeding
I felt able to continue to breastfeed for as long as I chose
I felt part of a community that supported me with breastfeeding

Before BfN support

35%
63%
63%
61%
36%

After BfN support

8%
93%
94%
91%
83%



97% were **satisfied** with the support they received from BfN.

98% would **recommend us** to family or friends.



BfN Annual Evaluation 2020 Survey Insights

Every year, BfN release a survey to help us see what we are doing well, where we can improve and also give us the evidence we need to help secure future funding.

The 2020 survey was launched on 1st March 2020 and initially received a high number of responses. Once the news of Coronavirus and the subsequent closure of schools and lockdown was announced, survey responses fell.

Our efforts moved to the Covid-19 response, supporting staff and volunteers to work from home and developing a change in the way we support families. The decision was made to extend the survey until the end of April and less focus was placed on the survey by BfN social media and projects as they concentrated on supporting families through coronavirus. We received 256 responses in total – far fewer than previous years, but understandable due to the circumstances.

90% of the responses came from mothers, 6.5% from Health Professionals and 1.5% from others. 18% of respondents were supported by the BfN Drugs in Breastmilk Service, 10.5% from the National Breastfeeding Helpline and our social media chat support gave us 18% of the responses. Other BfN Project areas also had a high response rate – as expected.

When asked all the ways they had contact with BfN (ticking all that applied) just over half of the mothers (53%) attended a breastfeeding drop in group led by a BfN peer supporter, whilst 34% reported they had used our website for information and another 34% spoke to a Supporter on the telephone. 7% had a visit from a BfN Supporter in hospital (last year it was 12%) but 27% had a home visit – higher than last year's 12. 32% of mothers asked for information about medication/medical intervention and impact on breast milk/breastfeeding.

We hope we were able to ensure all these mothers were able to continue feeding their babies if they wished to, since many reported being told to stop breastfeeding unnecessarily.

As in previous years, we asked a variety of 'before/after' questions and were delighted with the answers, which proved the value of peer support: 45% felt confident feeding their baby in public before contact with BfN, rising to 93% after support from BfN. 63% agreed they had the information needed to make decisions about feeding their baby before contact with BfN, rising to 95% after support from BfN. 40% of mums could breastfeed without pain before contacting BfN, increasing to 78% after support from us.

Once again, more than half of the mums questioned (56%) claimed BfN supported them to breastfeed for longer than they otherwise would have done. Reasons given for this included evidence based information about medication, information about attachment, expressing milk, managing blocked ducts and mastitis, meeting other like-minded mums, knowing what is 'normal' new born behaviour and that it is possible and beneficial for older babies and toddler to breastfeed. There were also lots of comments about general support, building confidence and encouragement.

We hope these results help to demonstrate how important the support you offer to families really is – and how appreciated you are. Thank you for all you do to support families!

Nina White, Programme Manager

For more information and to watch the evaluation survey video, [click here](#)

National Breastfeeding Helpline Update

By Fliss Lambert, NBH Manager

Last time I wrote an NBH update for the newsletter, we were in the very early stages of our response to the Covid 19 crisis, but already we had been amazed at how our helpline volunteers had responded.

I can honestly say that over the last couple of months, they have continued to step up and do so much to meet increased demand for helpline support.

As lockdown was announced we applied to SERCO (one of the NBH funders) for additional funding to help us meet the need for remote breastfeeding support. They approved our request and we quickly used this to set up a voicemail option on the helpline - so now if callers are unable to get through when they ring us, they have the option to leave a message, and one of our fabulous team of (paid) voicemail supporters will call them back as soon as possible.

This intervention has meant that we are now able to either answer or give the option to leave a voicemail to every caller to the helpline during opening hours.

We have some amazing statistics from April and May - Over those two months, our volunteers answered 3078 calls - this is an increase of 92% on the same period last year! They spent over 1015 hours actually in calls - a 112% increase on this period last year - so not only are we answering more calls, we are also talking for longer - the average call length has increased as well.

In addition to this, our voicemail team have returned around 500 voicemails since the 23rd March when this feature was introduced.

We have also answered 455 web chats and we have responded to 553 social media messages during this is a 48% increase on the same period last year on social media alone.



“ I am very grateful for the knowledge, passion and empathy shown by the volunteers at the National Breastfeeding Helpline. Thank you very much!

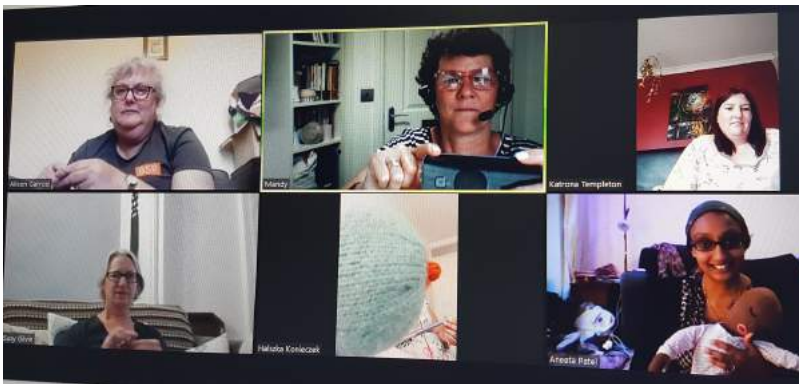
All of this during a time when everyone's lives have been turned upside down - volunteers, like everyone, have faced uncertainties about work and income, kids suddenly at home all day needing help with home schooling, emotional worries about their own health or that of family members and friends.

It's been a truly challenging time but the amazing effort that our volunteers have put in on the helpline, web chat and social media has shone through and created a real beam of positivity.

We've also had the opportunity during lockdown to get together virtually which has been lovely - we've had virtual breakfast get togethers, a virtual afternoon tea celebration during Volunteers Week, plus online Zoom chats to allow volunteers to discuss issues that are important to them. It's been lovely to see so many people attending these virtual events as well.

The thousands of families you've supported during this period will remember you forever.

Thank you so much for all you've done and for being there for other families during this time.



“ Thanks to everyone who has taken part in these chilled sessions - those who offered their time and skills, and those who attended and shared.

Wellbeing Wednesdays

Mandy Barlow - Supervisor Tutor

These sessions began at the start of April as a response to people sharing how lockdown life was for them in our Remote Supervision sessions.

The first sessions were simply space to talk about how we were managing. How we were finding juggling all our responsibilities, in the midst of our own tumultuous feelings, aside from how it affected our offering of breastfeeding support. How some of us felt overwhelmed by the different pressures of becoming SAHF (Stay at Home Families). It was simply a space for 'us'.

As most supervision and volunteering became remote and virtual, lots of us were inundated with people to connect with - not just through BfN either, obviously. The nature of the Wednesday sessions changed - people offered to lead sessions on crotchet, Astronomy, Science Homework, British Sign Language, and all sorts of interesting subjects. Kirstin was also leading on the NBH Book Club.

I did try hard at the crochet session, (ask Zara!!) but honestly, it was more about seeing people's faces, and connecting with people, when it felt that face-to-face connection had all but disappeared. I want to say a huge thankyou to Zara Bergman, Katrina Templeman, Aneeta Patel and Anna Cooney for leading multiple sessions.

The next session is Origami with Anna Cooney on 24th June, and we still have offers of crossstitch, friendship bracelet making, more Astronomy and British Sign Language etc. If anyone is interested in these, or offering other sessions, then please email me [mandy.barlow@](mailto:mandy.barlow@remotesupervisors@) or remotesupervisors@ and we will co-ordinate.

We heard about the reality of Zoom fatigue, and now that lockdown is being eased, and our time is being reclaimed by other things and people - we're not sure how many more miles there are in Wellbeing Wednesday - maybe we could continue in another way? Let me know your thoughts!

BfN Book Group

Kirstin Worsley, Scottish PfG Project Manager

Who knew we had a book group? I didn't until a few months ago. Now resurrected, we have been meeting for the past four months and have a fiction evening once a month. We have also had a couple of non-fiction meetings although the first of these was where we realised that not one of us had actually read any books to bring and share. It was lovely to see everyone though!

We meet monthly, on Zoom of course, and as with most book groups, we all share our thoughts about the chosen book. It is also an opportunity to chat to others about life and build new friendships around the country.

So far, we have talked about "Clock Dance" by Anne Tyler, "We are all Made of Molecules" by Susin Neilsen and "Girl Woman Other" by Bernadine Everisto.

This has stimulated lots of discussion, but not too many arguments! This month, meeting on 15th July at 8pm, we are reading "Yellow Crocus" by Laila Ibrahim.

It is great fun to meet people from across the UK so if you would like to join us, please feel free to invite yourself onto the "BfN Book Group" on Facebook, or email me for more details:
kirstin.worsley@breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk

South Coast Team Volunteer and Breastfeeding Week Celebrations

Ordinarily an opportunity for a social gathering in the sunshine to celebrate, this year things had to be done a little differently.

The South Coast Team (which is made up of Portsmouth, Havant & Waterlooville, and Fareham & Gosport) hosted week of events which were coordinated using zoom and advertised across social media platforms.

Each day there was a zoom event for both mothers and volunteers to attend, while regular support

groups ran alongside coffee, cake and chat sessions. There was even a quiz night and a sunday lunch 'meeting'.

Volunteer profiles were shared on social media, both self written details of their volunteering roles and breastfeeding journeys - alongside posts written by service leads thanking and celebrating volunteers.

It was a different way of marking the week, but we were delighted that mothers and volunteers were able to get together and celebrate their breastfeeding journeys - and the dedication and commitment of our volunteers was recognised and celebrated - even if it was through a computer screen.

Derbyshire knitted boob relay

Between the 20th and 26th June, Breastfeeding Network volunteers in Derbyshire took part in a knitted boob relay across the county.

Participants committed to cycling, running, and walking the equivalent route of 170 miles to relay their knitted boobs - taking in the locations of their usual drop in groups along the way.

Their aim was to let families in Derbyshire know that breastfeeding peer support is still available to them during the Covid-19 lockdown.

Just as partners have an important role in supporting a breastfeeding parent, the partners of volunteers joined in too – making the challenge even more fun for the entire family.

In partnership with Derbyshire Community Health, the volunteer peer supporters were quick to launch online support for Derbyshire families and have continued to run virtual drop in groups Monday to Friday. The groups offer evidence-based support, companionship and answer questions from parents about feeding their babies during these difficult times.

We are so proud of all of the BfN volunteers who rapidly responded to the Covid-19 challenge.

The Derbyshire team created videos to raise awareness of their groups and increase their reach. They have also hosted a series of Facebook lives covering maternal mental health, weaning and breastfeeding in a sling to name but a few.

We've even seen volunteers taking part in live guest spots with other local baby groups, answering questions and sign posting mums back to BfN Derbyshire groups for further support as required.

We think you're all fantastic. Thank you!



[Click here](#) to find out more about the knitted boob relay on the BfN Derbyshire Facebook page.

Finalised Code of Conduct and new Conflict of Interest Policy

BfN Updates

Anyone who has checked the Code of Conduct on the website recently will have noticed that the 'DRAFT' running through it has finally been removed. Previously you might have wondered why an organisation that had been proud of its values has been operating a 'DRAFT' code.

Why does any of this matter?

It matters hugely because BfN's work and ethos are strongly values based and there is nothing like a crisis like COVID-19 to remind us how much we all need to stay true to them, it's why we can be confident about our work and its impact, and rightly expect our routine monitoring and evaluation to demonstrate this.

The Code was last reviewed in 2016 and the only reason for the body of the Code remaining draft was that it wasn't always clear if it applied to volunteers only, or only to those working directly with mothers and their families- so some very small changes have been made to ensure that it is applicable to everyone in whatever role they have with BfN. [Link](#).

All of us, no matter what our role is have a responsibility to understand and subscribe to the BfN's key values and approaches to supporting mothers and their families.

The bigger change has been the removal of the appendix and Frequently Asked Questions. Until recently if anyone working for BfN in any capacity wanted to also work with another early years organisation they were unable to continue with BfN as this was seen as an unsurmountable conflict of interest.

In 2015 the Board recognised that this was not a reasonable position to hold, and also saw that the circumstances in which someone could hold 'dual roles' might not be easy to articulate.

In order to resolve this a pilot was capably led by Phyll Buchanan to explore these complexities and make recommendations. The study concluded that it was possible to have dual roles without a conflict of interest, but that simple guidance would not be helpful- the nature of the individual's role in BfN, of the other role, its client group and its location were all factors that would need to be considered.

The Board therefore supported the study's recommendation that dual roles should be assessed on a case by case basis, initially in discussion with supervisors, and if necessary, at Board level. All of this was covered in an appendix and Frequently Asked Questions in the draft Code of Conduct. In reviewing this last year, the Chair and HR manager asked the Board to take these two additional sections and prepare a separate Conflict of Interest policy.

This was done and approved by the Board in February this year, and the new policy (with a strong resemblance to the appendices) can now be found with all BfN's other policies for staff [here](#).

Conflicts of Interest had dominated discussion about the Code of Conduct- but the Code is wider, and underpins so much, our mother centredness, our respect for a family's relationship with their NHS carers, our emphasis on the evidence base and lots more....

When did you last look at the Code of Conduct, really look? Please go back and remind yourself!

Anne Kerr
Chair - BfN Board of Directors

What Does Peer Support Mean to You?

Peer-support is...

Peer-support is a coffee and maybe a biscuit or three.

It's people there, and not just for the cute baby, but people there for me.

It's kind words, said by others, that I took home and said to myself.

It's an exercise in self-care, it's good for my mental health.

It's an 'oh my goodness, yours does that too?'

It's never feeling alone.

It's a feeling of community and togetherness. It's a hug from inside my phone.

It's the reassurance that I craved, in the most caring of voices.

It's the information that I needed, to help me make informed choices.

It's moaning about sleep deprivation in a safe place, full of trust.

It's never caring that my top is stained or my hair hasn't been brushed.

It's talking to people that believe in my strength as a woman and a mother.

Peer support is all of the beautiful things that happen when women empower one another.

It's about empathy and understanding and not about knowing what is best.

It's about evidence-based, independent information that ALL women can access.

It's about ensuring that the myths peddled are discredited and busted.

It's about promoting sources of support that women and families know can be trusted.

Peer support is about giving women back the confidence in their bodies that modern society has left in tatters.

And I don't know about you, but I think that bloody matters.

Cara

Victoria's Positive Peer Support Experience

My first baby was born just before Christmas 2019. I planned a hypnobirth, because I wanted a calm drug free delivery. Unfortunately, my waters were low, when I went for a scan just before and everything changed.

Between Monday and Wednesday, I had multiple interventions ending with me attached to a hormone drip. By Thursday morning I was only 3 cm dilated, my baby was in distress and I had spiked a temperature of 40 degrees. My baby was finally born by emergency caesarean. I was gutted.

My baby girl was put on my chest briefly, then whisked away to neonatal. We were both treated for sepsis and had cannulas fitted – which was very uncomfortable for us and for feeding. I worried about hurting her and I was in pain because of my surgery.

To be honest, the hospital offered no specific breastfeeding support – and some of the midwives showing me had never breastfed before themselves. One midwife suggested I use a rolled up towel under my 'pendulous' breasts' but the sister...



...Victoria's Story Continued

...in charge told me off for doing this. Then my baby lost weight and I was pressured to cup feed. It was a very bad experience and I felt at a loss. I was desperate to get out of hospital and get the breastfeeding support I needed in comfortable and familiar surroundings. Once I was allowed home (on a feeding plan a week later)

I had a breastfeeding peer support worker come to my house and spend over an hour with me working on positioning and attachment. She suggested tongue tie and I got a referral to the hospital where they said there was no tongue tie. But I was still experiencing issues and painful nipples.

When my baby was two weeks old, I attended the BfN Bolsover breastfeeding support group and the support they gave was outstanding. To hear similar experiences from other mums was great. I cried the whole meeting. They offered me cake and comfort.

I finally got a referral to an infant feeding specialist, who came to the house and confirmed that my baby had a posterior tongue tie. When my baby was 6 weeks old, we got her tongue tie released. I also got advice on positioning, and attachment which really helped.

All this time I continued attending BfN support group at Bolsover, then the new Chesterfield support group that opened. By the time baby was 10 weeks old, I was no longer experiencing pain! I was so relieved.

BfN peer support volunteers helped me with so much – with positioning and general confidence boosting. My husband came to the groups too, they helped him as he felt like a spare part until then!

My baby is now 6 months old, exclusively breastfed and I've even mastered feeding her in a sling! Thank you!

Victoria and Alessia



Move in May Brings Motivation During Lockdown.

Thank you to everyone that signed up to the 'Move in May' campaign. It seems like a long time ago now, but for so many people it was the perfect distraction as lockdown measured starting to have an impact on mental and physical health.

It was great to see the pictures of people on social media getting involved at home - especially with so many little ones taking part and having a bit of fun (with a little help from Miss Milk.)

[Click here for more information on the Move in May campaign.](#)



BfN Sandwell Celebrates 10 Years of Supporting Families !

May 2020 saw the 10 year anniversary of BfN peer support in Sandwell. The service began as a small project supporting families in the local hospital, and has gone on to become a borough-wide service reaching over 700 families a year.

The small, but busy, team supports families at home visits, antenatal classes, drop-ins and clinics as well as on social media, over the phone, via text and email. BfN volunteers support the paid team at drop-in groups and clinics and work closely with the IFT at City hospital.

As Covid-19 restrictions loomed, we held our first virtual drop-in group via zoom on 19th March, and swiftly moved from face-to-face home visits telephone and video call support. We assigned a social media taskforce team to focus on developing and growing our presence and reach across all our social media platforms.

Our virtual drop-in groups are aligned to our usual community service, covering a range of topics, including BF myths, mental health, introducing solids and expressing. We also developed a virtual antenatal workshop, which debuted on 28th March 2020. Sessions have been held regularly since and this is something we now plan to continue long after lockdown is lifted.

To celebrate the 10 year milestone, we had hoped to hold events throughout the month of May, but as lockdown loomed, we knew we had to think again.

We created a short video of ourselves to promote the service, inspired by the 'knitted-breast throwing' videos on social media.



A local (and very talented) singer Reyna worked with us and generously recorded both music and lyrics (written by the team) for the video.

Seeing the full video for the first time was so emotional - the majority of the team and volunteers in the video had been supported by BfN from the very start of their feeding journeys, trained with us and are now supporting others.

It makes me so proud to see this group of talented, compassionate ladies come together to innovate and support the wider breastfeeding community in this challenging time.

A big 'thank you' to the entire Sandwell team, but particularly Lydia and Elena for their enthusiasm and input with the antenatal workshops, Donna and Becky for being the driving forces and technical help for the video, and Louise for being an absolute rock throughout.

Special thanks goes to Reyna for taking our lyrics and turning them into something beautiful. [Check her out on Facebook](#)

Click Below to Watch:

[BfN Sandwell 10 year anniversary video](#)
[10 years Sandwell Babies montage](#)

Who's Who and Who's New

Hannah Savigar - Jones Training Developer

Hannah has recently joined BfN as a Training Developer. She is working on a new online training course for volunteers to provide support on the National Breastfeeding Helpline.

Hannah comes from a public health background and also works in smoking cessation, delivering training and providing support for adults who want to quit smoking. She lives in Gloucestershire with her two young sons and a black Labrador called Pumba.

You can contact Hannah at:
hannah.savigarjones@breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk



Sarah Cowperthwaite Online Support and Development Officer

Sarah has joined the team as Online Support and Development Officer, working to support and improve our online services, including social media and webchat.

Sarah is an ABM Breastfeeding Counsellor and comes from a digital and web background, having previously worked within the third sector.

Sarah lives in Salisbury, Wiltshire, with her partner, two boys, and their playful Cocker Spaniel, Perry. In her spare time, she likes to knit and potter around the allotment with her family.

You can contact Sarah at:
Sarah.Cowperthwaite@breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk

HR Update from Julie Muir

During the last 3 months HR has felt very proud to be part of The Breastfeeding Network as it has adapted its service provision with the support of staff and volunteers in the organisation.

At this difficult time BfN has not only adapted but also expanded and continued to recruit with 22 new paid jobs and 17 new staff bringing the total staff numbers to 125 filling 221 contracts of employment.

We welcome all new starts and thank all staff and volunteers for their hard work!

Congratulations

**A huge thank you to everyone that makes BfN what it is.
You all make a difference to families across the UK.**

Helpers

Jenny Campbell
Maeve Hindson
Kathleen Kernahan OrjanaLat
enstein Van Voorst
Kay Marie MacDonald
Annabel MacLennan
Laura MacKenzie
Lindsey MacKenzie
Mhairi Penman
Laurie Stewart
And their tutors: Kirstin
Worsley/Sarah
Edwards/Carolanne Lamont

Andrea Hines-Hemans
And her tutor: Diana West

Jennifer Althorpe
Rani Bhatlapenumarthy
Jazz Holly Dawson
Megan Durose
Kimberly Ellis
Kelly Louise Fleet
Rebecca Hardy
Harriet Harwood
Penny-Louise Leveritt
Jade Louise Morris
Katharine Natalie Polden
And their tutor Eleanor
Johnson

Nina Adams
Charlotte Brookes
Mary Collins
Jeskirat Johal
Ayesha Pusey
Sammi Riley
Narelle Rollings
Shani Smith
Lucy Taylor
And their tutors: Naomi
Waters/Lydia Murtagh/Donna
Ebanks

Amy Warren
And her tutor: Esther Pierce

Lucy Passmore
And her tutor: Joy Jones

Sadie Sellars
And her tutors: Sukie
Woodhouse / Shruti Arora

Emma Roden
And her tutor: Francesca
Elver-Fiddimore
Robin Atherton
Heather Burgin

Aimee Gee
Liz Knox
Achsah Nasser
Jo O'Grady
Isobel Timms
And their tutor:
Jane Neesam

Alice Bygraves
Nellianna Funk
Amandine Kornhauser Victori
a Lemmon
Vaida Milne-Tyte
Lilly O'Keeffe
Amelia Seeto
Ellen Walker-Wise
Maraki Zanou
And their tutor: Jane Taylor

Charlotte Curtis
Rebecca Kay
Hannah Lane
Martina Lenatti
Zoe Oldham
Lindsey Peakall
Rebecca Roberts
Amy Willetts
And their tutor: Shruti Arora

Helpline Supporters

Amy Danson-Green
Louise Everett
Sarah Mobbs
Elena Stott
And their tutors: Shruti
Arora/Carolanne Lamont/
Naomi Waters

Zara Bergman
Samantha Cherrill
Diane de Jesus
Brianna Dymond
Rebecca Lopez del
Rincon Troussel
Samantha Thompson
Chloe Way
And their tutor: Mandy Barlow

Cara Jamieson
Pamela Jamieson
Joanne Johnstone
Pamela Kennedy
Emma Mackie
Elissa Miller
And their tutors: Carolanne
Lamont/Esther Pierce/Kirstin
Worsley

Irene Fenske
And her tutor: Sarah Edwards

Tutor/Supervisors

Nikki Blanch
Donna Ebanks
Lydia Murtagh
Sarah Seghal
Kirstin Worsley
And their tutors: Eleanor
Johnson, Joy Jones and
Carolanne Lamont

Probationary Supporters

Catherine Bertenshaw
Lindsey Coffey
Amy Danson-Green
Susie Holt
Elena Stott
Alys Vaughan-
Williams Sophie Walters
And their tutor: Carolanne
Lamont

**If your name is missing
from this list, please
accept our apologies.**

**We value each and every
one of you!**

**Please contact us to
ensure that you are
included next issue.**

**Thank you for your
understanding.**

Thank you to our helpers - supporters - tutors - supervisors - staff - friends - fundraisers - donors - funders.