

ANNUAL REPORT

2001—2002



Birth Companions

The Association for Women
facing Childbirth in Detention

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Registered Charity Number: 1084206

Our Honorary President



" Birth Companions give friendship and simple woman-to-woman help to women in prison, supporting them in pregnancy, during childbirth, and afterwards, in both emotional and practical ways.

The work that the Birth Companions do is pioneering and vitally important."

Sheila Kitzinger

Sheila Kitzinger, Honorary President

Who we are

- Birth Companions is a small charity providing practical and emotional support to women who face giving birth whilst in prison.
- We are a group of trained and experienced birth supporters who offer our services, on a voluntary basis, to women in Holloway prison.
- We provide support to women who would not otherwise have anyone to accompany them during the birth of their baby. We also offer our support to women who are unsure whether their family or friend will be able to get to them in time to be with them during their labour.
- We have been in existence for over five years and during this time have provided support to over 100 women.

The context within which we work

- There are currently almost 4000 women in prison in the UK. In 1994, a survey of female prisoners found 3% were pregnant. There are currently 68 places in Mother and Baby Units across England and Wales, of which 21 are in Holloway prison.
- Women who are pregnant and who give birth in prison do not receive the support and care that women in the community have long campaigned for and, largely, won. Outside prison, pregnant women and new mothers can expect to be cared for in a way which values their dignity and individual needs and which offers choice, continuity of care and cultural sensitivity. They generally have access to good nutrition, education and information. They also receive support from their family, friends and local community.
- In contrast, women who are pregnant whilst in prison are denied many of these things. Many women prisoners come from disadvantaged backgrounds and are therefore particularly vulnerable during their pregnancies due to the effects of poor health, poverty and lack of support. Foreign national prisoners face particular problems due to communication and cultural differences. In Holloway prison, almost a quarter of the women are from abroad.
- Research has shown that many pregnant women in prison have “an almost unmanageable fear” of facing childbirth without the support of family and friends.

Our work

Birth Companions performs a vital role for women in Holloway prison, providing support for those who would otherwise face giving birth alone. Although women in prison can be accompanied during childbirth by a companion of their choice, some women, particularly foreign nationals, have no one who can provide this support.

Birth Companions visit Holloway prison regularly to meet women who are interested in our support. When a woman registers with us:

- We draw up a birth plan with her so that we know how she would like us to look after her during her labour
- Provide her with our pager number so that she can contact us when she needs us.

"Having a birth companion made a difference to how I felt approaching labour because I knew I had someone going to be there"

When a woman in labour contacts the pager system, a trained volunteer birth companion goes to meet her in hospital and stays with her providing support and encouragement throughout her labour.

"The fact that somebody was with me throughout meant the most to me"

After the birth, volunteers visit the woman while she is still in hospital, taking her items such as food, flowers or clothing for the baby.

"A birth companion visited me after the birth. She gave lots of advice about breastfeeding".

Chair of Trustees' report

It has been a busy year for Birth Companions and, once again, we have managed to provide our service despite having only a handful of active volunteers. I would like to thank all my colleagues in the group who have all done so much, each in her own way, to contribute to the on-going work of Birth Companions. I would also like to pay particular tribute to the immense energy and dedication of Gillian Samuels who has followed in the footsteps of Vida Rye by visiting the prison weekly, drawing up birth plans, supporting women both antenatally and postnatally and liaising with the rest of the group.

I would also like to thank Debra Baldwin, Governor in HMP Holloway and her staff who have shown such a positive attitude to our group and the work we do, despite the difficult conditions that they, and the women they look after, endure daily.

With the numbers of women prisoners escalating rapidly, our services will, no doubt, continue to be in demand by women who would otherwise face giving birth without friends or family to support them. As we look to the year ahead, the Trustees have made the decision to employ a Group Co-ordinator. This will enable us to enhance the service we provide to women in Holloway prison and represent more effectively the needs of prisoners who are pregnant and those who give birth in prison.



Diana Parkinson, Chair of Trustees

Achievements during the year

- We provided our service to 27 women (although many more benefited from informal contact with our volunteers).
- We attended the births of 10 women, providing them with both physical and emotional support during their labour and visiting them in hospital after the birth.
- We drew up birth plans for other women who were not sure if their family would arrive in time to be with them during their labour and provided support to women who were spending time in hospital antenatally due to concerns about their pregnancy.
- We also provided follow-up visits in the prison to women whose births we had attended, ensuring they were receiving the necessary support and information.
- We produced a comprehensive handbook so that our volunteers have a manual to guide them in their work, ensuring that we provide a consistent and equal service to all women.
- We developed a training programme which allows us to offer a thorough training for new volunteers.
- We recruited 9 new volunteers who are currently undergoing this training.
- We welcomed Baroness Helena Kennedy and Professor Page as Patrons of Birth Companions.
- We recruited three new Trustees, Vida Rye, Avan Wadia and Beth McCann.
- We liaised closely with the prison authorities to increase our mutual understanding. During the year, they ran a training session specially for us.

Thanks to

Our volunteer Birth Companions

Gillian Samuel
Eleanor Stapleton
Maggie Vaughan
Isabelle Wise

Our Trustees

Jayne Herbert
Viv Gray*
Diana Parkinson*
Beth McCann
Vida Rye*
Terie Seignior
Avan Wadia

Our Honorary President and our Patrons

Sheila Kitzinger (Honorary President)
Professor Lesley Page (Patron)
Baroness Helena Kennedy (Patron)

Our funders

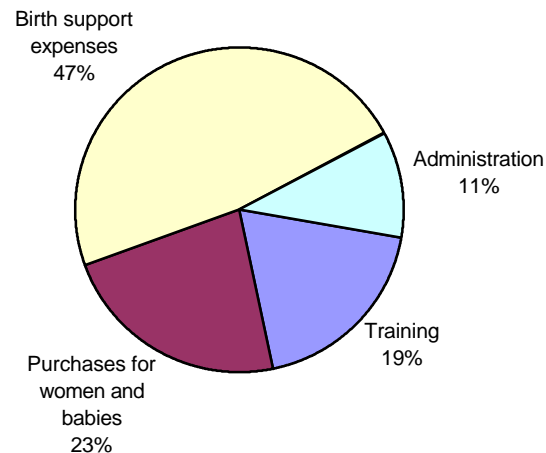
Allen Lane Foundation
Trust for London
A donor who wishes to remain anonymous

* Also Active Birth Companions

Treasurer's Report

Birth Companions has completed its fifth full year of operations. In the period April 2001 to end of March 2002, we recorded income of £2297.48 and expenditure of £1439.44. Our balance at the close of the financial year was £1774.48

As ever, our expenditure was principally for supporting our beneficiaries, training for birth companions and administrative communication costs:



A detailed breakdown of expenditure is available on application to the Treasurer.

Beth McCann, Treasurer

"I'd like to say thank you to the Birth Companions group for not only being there for my pregnancy but for also supporting me afterwards. As tacky as this may sound, you guys have rebuilt my trust and faith in human nature".

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