

BIRTH COMPANIONS

ANNUAL REPORT

**2005 – 2006**



'It was really horrible not having my mother with me but by having the Birth Companion there, it filled up all the loneliness of my mother not being there so I really thank the Birth Companion that was with me'.

## **CONTENTS**

<b>Chair’s report.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Group Co-ordinators Report.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>A Day in the life of Denise Marshall, Co-ordinator of Birth Companions.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Sandra’s Story .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Alecia’s story .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Thanks.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Treasurer’s Report .....</b>	<b>19</b>

**Chair's report**

This year has continued to see Birth Companions growing and establishing ourselves as a respected and valued service for women in Holloway prison.

Our Group Co-ordinator and Administrator have been supported by our team of prison visitors, phone holders and volunteer birth supporters and they have, as ever, showed tremendous dedication to providing the support that Birth Companions offers. I would like to thank them all for their hard work and commitment.

I would also like to thank the Trustees for their work over the last year. As a small organisation, we rely on our Trustees to advise and develop the organisation which takes an appreciable amount of their time. In addition, this year, we have for the first time ever, embarked on a process of consultation and strategic planning. This has led us to focus on strengthening the organisation's infrastructure whilst planning new developments for 2006 - 2007. I would particularly like to thank Kate Brown and Vida Rye, who retire as trustees this year, for their contributions as Trustees.

Without the support of our major funder, the Tudor Trust, we simply could not have continued to provide our service, so we owe them an immense and heartfelt thank you.



## Group Co-ordinators Report

This year we have continued our birth support work with women in H.M.P. Holloway and have again been available for all women who have called us for support. Birth and postnatal support is given according to the wishes of each woman. It is given by birth companions who are trained and experienced in supporting women around the time of birth. Sometimes women ask for us to be on standby in case their family or a friend cannot be there; other women request a birth companion until their family arrive, as they are travelling from some distance; some women are completely alone. Many of the women we support are foreign nationals alone in this country or young women who have become estranged from family or have no family support. In total, this year we gave support to 44 women.

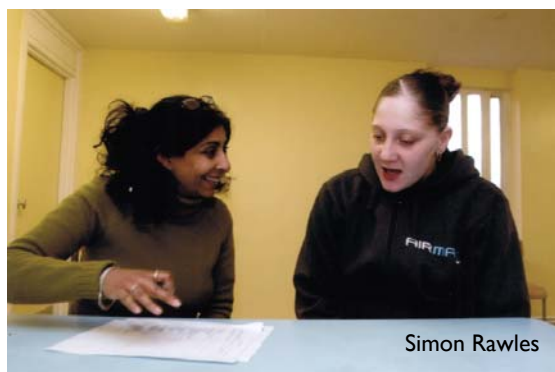
### Hospital support

During a birth, our birth companions can support a woman by breathing with her, holding her hand, supporting her to ask questions, massaging her back,

taking photos of the baby once it is born, helping with breastfeeding and helping the mother to bond with her baby. Despite the fact that on a weekly basis, numbers of pregnant women in Holloway were lower in 2005 - 2006 than in 2004 - 2005 due to the opening of new prisons with Mother and Baby places, we attended slightly more births than last year – 14 in all.

### Prison support

Our Prison Visiting team of Delia, Eleanor, Isabelle and Maggie have continued to provide a supportive presence for pregnant women in



Simon Rawles

Holloway. On average, one member of the team has visited each week to complete birth plans and help women to talk through their hopes and fears for birth and the future. They have also regularly visited the Mother and Baby Unit providing postnatal support. In 2005 – 2006, we gave antenatal support to 42 women of whom 13 were young offenders and 15 were foreign nationals. We helped 24 women with birth plans. We also gave postnatal support to 24 women of whom seven were young offenders and nine were foreign nationals. In six of these cases, we supported women during separation from their babies.

### **Separation and advocacy**

The majority of women giving birth from Holloway are accepted for a place on the Mother and Baby Unit at the prison. However, approximately a third of women face childbirth knowing that they will have to separate from their baby shortly after the birth. Many of these women request a birth companion and we support these women through their birth and

postnatally to give their baby the best start possible in these very difficult circumstances. Sometimes we are asked to become further involved and this year we were invited to a social work case conference where, with the mother's permission, we were able to put forward our very positive experience of supporting her postnatally and of her early parenting. Happily, following further assessments, this mother was reunited with her baby after a temporary separation.

### **Post-release work**

During the year, we realised that some pregnant women who we were supporting in Holloway were about to be released into the community and were actually likely to be more isolated and vulnerable after their release than they had been whilst in prison. This was particularly the case with asylum seekers who often were completely alone in the country, did not know the system and were faced with huge practical difficulties as they were about to give birth. At our AGM in 2005, we therefore amended our constitution to

enable us to work with women outside of detention and this meant that we could respond to the needs of two pregnant asylum seekers by continuing to support them after their release and helping them to register with their local hospital. The first woman was in a particularly desperate situation as she did not speak English, had been seeking asylum in France (so had no “status” in Britain) and wished to return to Algeria. Birth Companions provided birth and postnatal support and assisted this new mother through the complicated process of returning home with her baby. The second woman was suddenly moved from London to temporary accommodation in Bristol but we were able to identify and support a local doula who looked after her around her birth.

### **Liaison**

Liaison and work with other agencies has developed during the year and we have met with Prison Officers and the level 4 Governor, Steven Southgate, in the monthly Multi-Disciplinary meetings. We are also working more

closely with the other professionals who support pregnant women and mothers in Holloway: the midwives, the psychotherapist, the antenatal yoga teacher from SureStart and Hibiscus who work with foreign nationals. This has meant that we have been able to refer women for additional support between us. In March 2006, Hazel Cathcart, the midwifery team leader, invited Birth Companions and other groups to join the reconvened Maternity Services Provision Group in the Prison which will meet quarterly and should provide a good forum in which to raise issues in the future.

### **Trainees**

Over 2005-2006, we aimed to increase the number of birth companions available to attend births and visit women postnatally. We began 2005 with five new trainees; two more joined later in the year and another returned to us after a period of living abroad. This year, trainees played a very active role in phone-holding and supporting women who had been released into the community.

However, for a variety of reasons some of our trainees needed to take a break from their training or leave us during the year (one returned to Canada). However, we held an open morning in March 2006, after which two trainees joined us (with others joining in 2006 – 2007). At the end of March 2006, we had eight women training with us.

### **Future plans**

This year Birth Companions also embarked on a process of strategic planning, evaluating how we currently work and how we would like to develop in the future. We have begun to consider the ways in which our work can be developed to meet new areas of need that we have identified while working with women in detention. This has resulted in two new areas of work: post-release support work and breastfeeding

support. We plan to run pilot projects in these new areas and will seek funding for these. We also plan to apply for funding to do research into the needs of pregnant asylum seekers and mothers with young babies and hope to develop our support and information in this area in 2006-2007.

The strategic planning process also helped us to establish that the Group essentially wished to retain the core of how Birth Companions currently work so that this is not lost as we expand and move forward in the future. We have therefore developed a timetable for reviewing our policies and procedures and are setting up a working group to develop a 'Birth Charter' which will set out the standards we believe pregnant women and new mothers in detention deserve.

'It (Birth Companions) gives them somebody to trust and talk to about the anxiety of giving birth and also provides some extremely valuable information such as breast feeding'.

Steven Southgate, Governor, H.M.P. Holloway.

## **Women in detention**

There are 17 women's prisons in England. These are categorised as closed, open or semi-open. There are 7 mother and baby.

The last ten years or so have seen a dramatic rise in the numbers of women in prison from an average of 1560 in 1993 to around 4248 in January 2006. An all time high of 4672 was reached in May 2004. Despite this rise in numbers, Women in prison represent a very small amount of the total prison population at about 5.6% of a total of 75,030 in England and Wales.

Life in prison for women follows similar procedures to those for male prisoners. There are, however, a number of important differences in women's offending behaviour and their needs whilst in prison. These are explained in more detail below.

### **Characteristics of the female prison population**

**Offences:** Women tend to commit less crime and their offences are generally less serious. In 2004, 36% of sentenced women had committed drugs offences; 17% were convicted of violence against the person.

**Foreign Nationals:** Just over 19% of the women in prison are foreign nationals compared to about 12% in the male estate.

**Ethnic Minorities:** 30% of the female estate is from ethnic minorities in comparison to around 24% of the male estate.

**Drugs:** Women tend to have a different type of drug use from men with higher levels of hard drug use.

**Family:** Women are normally the Primary Carers for elderly relatives and children. Around 55% of women in prison have a child under 16, 33% a child under 5 and 20% are lone parents.

**Distance from home:** Because of the relatively small number of women's prisons, and due to their geographical location, women tend to serve their sentences further from their homes than male prisoners. This can place additional pressure on important links with family.

**Mental health:** Up to 80% of women in prison have diagnosable mental health problems, with 66% having symptoms of neurotic disorders (anxiety, poor sleeping). The comparable figure in the community is less than 20%.

**Experience of abuse:** Up to 50% of women in prison report having experienced physical, emotional or sexual abuse.

**Self-injury:** There are high rates of self-injury among women in prison, who were responsible for half the incidents in 2003. 16% of women self-injure in prison, compared with 6% of young offenders, and 3% of men.

### Mother and Baby Units

There are currently seven Mother and Baby Units. Two, New Hall and Holloway, keep babies with their mothers up to the age of 9 months. Bronzefield, Peterborough, Styal, Eastwood Park and Askham Grange accommodate babies with their mothers up to the age of 18 months. Askham Grange is the only open prison with a Mother and Baby Unit. Each application for admission is assessed on an individual basis by a multi-disciplinary-team, whose focus will be the best interests of the child.

[http://www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/adviceandsupport/prison\\_life/femaleprisoners/](http://www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/adviceandsupport/prison_life/femaleprisoners/)

## A Day in the life of Denise Marshall, Co-ordinator of Birth Companions

9:45

I get home after dropping my daughter at school, make a cup of tea and check my emails.

Good. A message from Eleanor, one of the Birth Companions: The community birth she was on call for happened yesterday so she is definitely coming into the Prison today with Elizabeth, a new trainee, whom she is mentoring.

Various replies to my email asking which birth companions will be available for births over the summer. Last summer was really busy: 8 births over July and August and the phone holders struggled as birth companions were on holiday. This year is looking more manageable and so far we are only on call for 2 summer births. This can change quickly if new women come into the Prison late on in pregnancy so you never can tell.

I update the phone holders on the current situation and confirm new arrangements. Stephanie has volunteered to replace Tracey, who wants to stop being a phone holder.

I phone the labour ward manager at the Whittington to arrange for some of our new trainees to come in to the hospital to observe births as part of their training.

I email the Prison Governor responsible for pregnant women with



Simon Rawles

some concerns - mainly, the women are receiving their pint of milk at night and it has gone sour by the time they want to use it in the morning. Could the milk be delivered in the morning instead as they have no way of keeping it cold?

The Prison has sent the weekly list of pregnant women and I notice 2 new women due in August! Is it happening again?

12:45

I am on the way to the Prison and get a call from Chamutal, another Birth Companion, who updates me. The officers phoned early this morning to say that Gloria was in hospital and asking for us. Gloria was feeling a lot of pain and Isabelle (Birth Companion) went to support her. Contractions have now slowed down - Gloria was in very early labour - and Isabelle has left her to sleep; Gloria will call us again

when she needs support and Isabelle could go back. Eleanor has also said she could take over from Isabelle, if needed, after her Prison visit.

1:30

Arrive at the Prison, laden with juice and healthy snacks for the antenatal class. I meet Eleanor and Elizabeth (this is her first visit) at the Gate and we go to sort out security clearance and a CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) check for Elizabeth. The forms are handed in and documents looked at and copied and then we are off through several locked doors and up the stairs to the antenatal class.

There are 7 women in the class today and I have met them all before. I ask the officer about the new women on my list and one is at Court, back late this evening, the other is having a legal visit.

I was made to feel at ease and even though I was in a lot of pain I was conscious my birth companion was always there. I had more trust in her than anyone else. The team has rebuilt my faith in human nature.

We sort out the drinks and snacks and then all introduce ourselves. The women ask for news of Gloria and are pleased to hear that she has had a visit from us. Eleanor explains about birth companion support and that she could do a birth plan with someone today.

I have brought in Susan's birth plan, which she did the previous week with Delia (Birth Companion) and ask her to check that it is ok. It has been typed up by our Administrator, Caterina, and has a covering letter explaining how we work. Eleanor and Elizabeth chat with the other women while I talk with Susan. The birth plan is fine. Roberta, one of the women prisoners starts talking about her "Board" next week. She is up in front of the Prison Board to get her place on the Mother and Baby Unit and is nervous that it will be like Court.

Sam 'sat the Board' 2 weeks ago and

got her place. She tries to reassure Roberta that it looks scary when you first go in but then they just ask you a few questions and it's ok.

Chantelle is worried that it will count against her when she 'sits the Board' that she is still on methadone. We discuss this and that she is following medical advice not to reduce too quickly as this could harm the baby. The Board will have this information. Another woman comments that she is not sure that she wants her baby in Prison with her because it will not be good for her baby to be a prisoner. We have a big discussion about this- what new babies need and the fact that the babies are never locked in etc.

I ask if it would be helpful to invite a mother from the Mother and Baby Unit to the class next week to talk about life with her baby on the Unit. The women would like this.

Birth Companions were a godsend. I was terrified of giving birth here,' one woman says. 'Isabel was waiting for me when I arrived at the hospital. I couldn't believe it. She hugged me, she consoled me and she cared for me the whole time. She even brought some clothes for the baby and African food for me.

We are about to watch a birth video and I check again whether anyone would like to do a birth plan. Valerie says yes...and she would like our support at the birth. She has been in the class for several weeks making up her mind about this. Valerie goes out with Eleanor and Elizabeth to do the birth plan and they have a long talk about various issues that have been worrying Valerie. She has just split up with the baby's father; she is worried about how her Mum is coping looking after Valerie's 2-year-old son.

The Prison Governor pops into the class and says he is working on the milk issue. A couple of women ask to talk

with him after the class; he will come and see them later.

We finish by doing some breathing and relaxation and then it is time for the women to be locked in again. As she is leaving Roberta asks if I can come to her Board meeting to give her moral support. I will check if this is allowed. The 2 new women are still not back so we leave them a leaflet and note; I will visit when I am in the Prison the following day.

5:00

We come out of the Prison into the sunshine and check our mobiles for news of Gloria.

---

## **Sandra's Story**

Sandra is 24 years old and currently on the mother and baby wing in HMP Holloway. She agreed to tell us about her experience and what help she received from Birth Companions.

I received a 2 year combination Probation and Drug Treatment/Testing Order for a conviction of burglary last year. I was having a very bad time at this point in my life. I was with a violent partner, it was a mad year and I got into using drugs. I did not know I

was pregnant until I was arrested on the charge. I was considered a persistent offender and ended up on remand for 4 and half months before I received the order. Things went well with the drug treatment order and I was clean of drugs after I got out of prison. Unfortunately I missed one of my appointments with the Probation Officer; I was taken back to court and was given a prison sentence.



That day was awful; I had a gut feeling it was going to happen because of my past. But it was still really shocking, I was gutted and crying. I did not want to have my baby alone in prison. I seriously considered an abortion at this point. I thought hard about it for two weeks and talked to the baby's father, he really wanted to have the baby and I began to think perhaps it would be possible and I could cope in prison. My main worry was what would happen to the baby if I couldn't keep it with me in prison. I have two sons who live with their father. This is the worst thing about being in prison, missing them so much,

and they don't visit me because it would be too upsetting, though I talk to them all the time. My Personal Officer suggested an application to the mother and baby wing. One of my Social Workers did not think this was a good idea and thought my baby should go into care after the birth, so I was originally turned down. I got a new Social Worker and they thought differently and supported me getting a place on the wing. I was really happy when I found out this was going to be possible and that I was going to be able to keep my baby with me.

I found out about Birth Companions in the Ante-natal classes on the wing, I knew it was likely that I could be alone for the birth and I did not want this to happen. When I went into labour I was taken into hospital and Lisa from Birth Companions came in and brought nappies for me in preparation for the birth. I had a really difficult labour and was in hospital for a week. Time went by and I was getting really frustrated with the pain, but my Birth Companion was there reminding me how to breathe and helping me stay relaxed. I had acupuncture twice to try and help the labour along, but even this was stressful as I found it painful. I was really not prepared for how difficult this labour was getting as my other two pregnancies had been fine. My baby was induced in the end. I was really scared but my Birth Companion held me as they gave me an epidural and I was so relieved she was there. She also made me laugh and feel secure. I had always had a partner with me before. After Sophie was born Lisa took photographs of her, I wouldn't have had any otherwise. She also brought me nice food to eat as I didn't like what

they gave us in the hospital. She also let my family know that Sophie had been born. Even though my labour was really difficult, it was great that I had a Birth Companion and also a nice Prison Officer with me at the hospital.

I would like to be able to keep Sophie with me until my release, which might not happen for 7 months. You are only allowed to keep your baby with you for 9 months after the birth. If I don't get out until my release date it will be over ten months. I have been told that if the rest of my sentence goes well I might be able to keep her with me for that extra time.

I'm feeling quite positive about the future and thinking about getting back with my two boys father. I want to be with my family and with someone I know. I also think that my uncle will give me a job as I worked for him before I got into trouble. Birth Companions were really helpful and I really think that everyone should make sure they get one, especially if they have no family who can be with them when it's time to have the baby.

## Alecia's story

Told by her Birth Companion.

I was called on Monday evening and told that Alecia was being booked in for a C Section (breech baby) on Wednesday morning. I agreed to go and got some details from Denise about Alecia's situation in Holloway so far. She has been given a place on D4 in the mother and baby unit and has been there for 2 weeks so far.

Had another call Wednesday morning. Alecia was labouring with contractions irregular maybe between 10 and 15 minutes apart. She was not dilating so staff wanted to go ahead with her section and almost as soon as I arrived they started to get things ready. My initial impression of

Alecia was that she seemed quiet between contractions and a bit panicky during them.

When we went through to theatre I encouraged staff to introduce themselves and let Alecia know what their role was and what was going to happen next. The Operating Theatre staff were very friendly and happy to explain and did not at all seem



disapproving of me being there asking them to explain to Alecia what they were going to do. There were some fears Alecia had and we talked about these while she was being prepared which I hope lessened some of her fears, including what a catheter was and how/why it is used. We gave some reassurance that a caesarean wouldn't stop her from having more children. We talked about what was going on and what all the machinery did and I tried to describe the operation to her. At 10.52 a little baby girl was born weighing 6lbs and having cried for a few seconds then settled down. Tried to get the midwife to take the baby over

to Alecia but in the end took her over myself. Alecia delighted and completely distracted from being sewn up because of her little bundle. Transferred to recovery and started to take photos and tried to talk more about what was going on – got the impression quite a lot of it was somewhat unexpected. During the afternoon we talked and she spoke to her friend with the phone card we bought and passed that message to the baby's father the he had a daughter. Ran through positioning at the breast and how to tell if she was feeding enough. Spent the afternoon talking about breastfeeding, nappies and what a beautiful baby she now had.

## Thanks

As ever, we would like to thank all those who have helped us during the year

Lola Alcaraz (Volunteer Birth Supporter)  
Bridget Baker (Trainee Volunteer Birth Supporter)  
Suzette Barry (Volunteer Birth Supporter)  
Claire Burford (Volunteer Birth Supporter)  
Caterina Coates (Group Administrator)  
Pat Cummings (Volunteer Birth Supporter)  
Claudette Elsaaidi (Trainee Volunteer Birth Supporter)  
Mirelle Harris (Trainee Volunteer Birth Supporter)  
Lisa Higginson (Volunteer Birth Supporter)  
Chamutal Isaacs (Volunteer Birth Supporter and Phone Holder)  
Kristin Keith (Trainee Volunteer Birth Supporter and Phone Holder)  
Jane Kyriacou (Trainee Volunteer Birth Supporter)  
Tessa Lim (Trainee Volunteer Birth Supporter)  
Denise Marshall (Group Co-ordinator)  
Lisa Millett (Phone Holder and Volunteer Birth Supporter)  
Delia Muhammed (Prison Visitor and Volunteer Birth Supporter)  
Lea Ouai (Trainee Volunteer Birth Supporter) and for her work with post release women  
Stephanie Smith-Browne (Trainee Volunteer Birth Supporter and Phone Holder)  
Tracey Sparks (Trainee Volunteer Birth Supporter and Phone Holder)  
Eleanor Stapleton (Prison Visitor, Phone Holder and Volunteer Birth Supporter)  
Michèle Stokes (Volunteer Birth Supporter)  
Maggie Vaughan (Prison Visitor and Volunteer Birth Supporter)  
Isabelle Wise (Prison Visitor and Volunteer Birth Supporter)

**Trustees**

Kate Brown  
Theresa Gilson  
Viv Gray

Jayne Herbert  
Beth McCann  
Diana Parkinson

Vida Rye  
Michèle Stokes  
Avan Wadia

**Honorary President** - Sheila Kitzinger

**Patrons** - Professor Lesley Page, Baroness Helena Kennedy

**Advisors**

Pam Lacey  
Jill Demilou

**Funders**

Tudor Trust

Thanks also to Simon Rawles for the photos he has kindly allowed us to use.

## Treasurer's Report

Birth Companions has now completed its ninth full year of operations. We began the 2005-06 financial year with funds of £10,530. During the course of the year, we received income as follows:

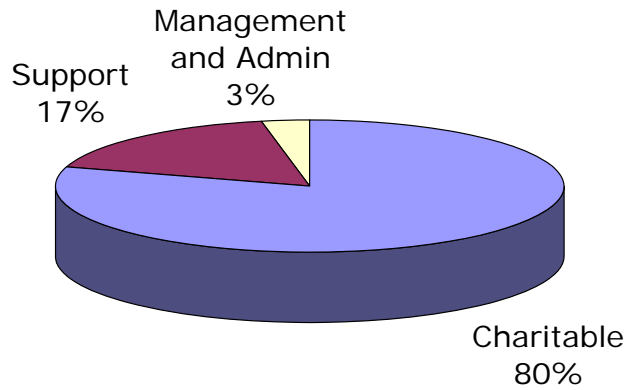
- £25,000 unrestricted funds from the Tudor Trust
- Donations-in-kind of £243
- Bank interest of £116

Total income was therefore £25,359.

Total expenditure during the year amounted to £27,132, which included £22,298 in staff and volunteer costs.

We ended the year with a cash balance of £9,021. This cash balance represents the total assets of Birth Companions.

As in previous years, Birth Companions was fortunate in having a group of volunteers who often looked after our clients without turning to the organisation for reimbursement of their travel or subsistence expenses. Although the benefit to our clients has been immeasurable, this intangible expense cannot be accurately reflected in our statement of financial activities.



A copy of our full, independently examined accounts is available on request.

## **Birth Companions**

The Association for Women facing Childbirth in Detention

PO Box 33804  
London N8 9GZ

E-mail: [info@birthcompanions.org.uk](mailto:info@birthcompanions.org.uk)  
Website: [www.birthcompanions.org.uk](http://www.birthcompanions.org.uk)

Registered Charity Number: 1084206