

Information for Birth Companions

Project MAMA will launch in 2018 and will be a peer support service offering antenatal, birth and postnatal support to women who are asylum seekers, refugees and those with irregular immigration status.

We believe that every mother has the right to give birth safely, make her own empowered choices and receive the support she needs for a positive birth and early parenting experience.

We will support women in Bristol through linking women with specialist birth companions who extol compassion and solidarity by supporting women who have overcome significant adversity on their journey to motherhood.

Who will I be supporting?

Project MAMA is being set up to provide birth support for women in vulnerable circumstances who are often separated from their families and communities through forced migration. Our clients are refugees, asylum seekers and women with irregular immigration status. These women are often socially isolated and do not have the crucial support networks around them that are needed during the maternity period. We have set up Project Mama to ensure that no woman goes without the compassionate and nurturing presence of a birth companion.

In addition to being socially isolated, women may not understand the maternal health system in the UK and their choices around birthing. Many have suffered histories of abuse, gender-based violence, trauma, emotional and mental health challenges. Many speak little English and may not have been in the UK or Bristol for long.

Who can volunteer as a birth companion?

Applicants will have birth-room experience. They could also have experience in antenatal support, breastfeeding support, parenting experience or have completed doula training or midwife training; additional spoken languages are an advantage.

We encourage women with a refugee/asylum seeker background to apply to volunteer. We also look forward to receiving applications from people with experience supporting asylum-seeker/refugee women.

We welcome applicants from all backgrounds and sections of the community. Owing to the specific vulnerabilities of the client group, we request female birth companions. We have an Equal Opportunities policy for service users and volunteers involved with Project MAMA.

We ask that Project MAMA birth companions:

- Have completed a doula training program, be a midwife or student midwife *or* have comparable birth room experience.
- Have attended a minimum of 3 births
- Be willing to undertake a DBS check

- Be willing to follow Project MAMA Policies, Procedures and Code of Conduct.
- Have the right attitude to provide quality, impartial support to women from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

What is involved in being a birth companion?

Birth companions will meet with expectant mothers to offer emotional support and encouragement. They will be compassionate and empathetic, offering company and a comforting presence throughout this challenging time in any woman's life.

Birth companions will support clients to access the NHS where required. They will work in conjunction with partner agencies, support groups and antenatal classes to ensure women have the necessary and desired support networks around them.

A birth companion supports an expectant mother, helps her make informed choices about her care and birth pathway and ensures she is prepared for birth.

How much time do I need to commit to becoming a volunteer?

For a birth companion taking on a client for the duration of her maternity and birthing process, we encourage:

- At least three visits before the birth (including appointments with the midwife/doctor where necessary)
- At least three visits after the birth
- A willingness to be a part of the 24/7 on-call rota to support women during labour

We, and the women you will support, value the consistency of support from the same birth companion throughout her pregnancy and in the birth room. However, we do appreciate the busy lives we all have and thus encourage birth companion partnerships, whereby more than one birth companion will be available to support a client.

If you have specific availability, e.g. the same day each week, your contributions can still be valuable and are much needed!

Volunteers will have the opportunity to debrief their experiences with a supervising volunteer who has substantial birth room experience. There will also be the opportunity to discuss experiences with other birth companions at monthly group meetings.

Our monthly volunteer group meetings will be held alternately in the daytime and the evening to ensure everyone can attend. We will plan training sessions based on birth companions' availability where possible.

Birth companions will undertake the Project MAMA training program and will begin to support women when they feel they are ready.

We will also have a bank of on-call birth companions, ready to help if a client's birth companion cannot attend a birth for any unforeseen reason.

Where are the birth companion volunteer groups and training located?

Our meetings and training sessions will be held in Bristol City Centre.

The women who we will support may live in various locations in the Bristol postcode area and births will largely take place at Southmead Hospital, St. Michael's Hospital and Cossham Hospital.

How do I become a Birth Companion?

Once we receive your completed peer support volunteer form, we'll invite you in to have a chat with the co-ordinator. If each party is keen to proceed, we will contact your referees and then request a DBS check.

After this, volunteers will await a date for a training program where they will have the opportunity to meet other birth companions and learn more about what will be expected in the role.

What does being a part of Project MAMA look like?

Being in the birth companion team will mean:

- Attending Project MAMA training sessions (3 days)
- Obtaining a comprehensive birth companion handbook
- Attending our monthly group meetings
- Staying up-to-date with fortnightly bulletins about the support birth companions are providing
- Reading relevant materials eg. Policies and procedures
- Checking-in with experienced supervisor
- Debriefing on the births you have attended

You will also be invited to our planning sessions and social meetings where you will have the chance to meet Project MAMA service users, old and new, along with other birth companions for friendly chats and support; you will have the chance to put forward your own suggestions as to the working of Project MAMA.

As a volunteer, Project MAMA will pay reasonable travel expenses and the training we provide is free. Some Project MAMA volunteers may decide to attend and pay for an external doula course as well and Project MAMA will be happy to recommend a program.

Where can I find out more about Project MAMA?

For further information visit our website at www.projectmama.org where you will find more about the work that we do.

You can also sign up to our mailing list here - <http://eepurl.com/c9YCO>