

## HIGHLIGHT REPORT: WESTMINSTER MATERNITY CHAMPIONS

### Supporting Baby Clinics at the Portman



In 2019 the Church Street Maternity Champions partnered with Church Street Children's Centre and the Health Visiting Team to support their weekly baby clinics. The Maternity Champions play a key part in connecting parents with the different services on offer at the Children's Centre – getting to know parents, speaking community languages and helping them to feel confident to open up about problems that they were experiencing. The Maternity Champions also helped to translate into Arabic and other community languages for other services at the Portman; shared information with parents about the flu jab, and breastfeeding and referred parents to the outreach team and Middle Eastern Women and Society.

One mother said, *'The maternity champions are my family because they listen to me and support me.'* Another mother who had received information from a Champion on introducing solid foods said, *'I was very worried and stressed and scared to start to give my baby any solid food because I am not very sure where to start and which fruit and vegetable I'm allowed to give her. Now after I met the maternity champion and go through the leaflet with me and explain to me what food I can start with, I'm really confident.'*

### ■ Maternity Champions at SouthWestFest

On a sunny Saturday in July the Churchill Gardens & Tachbrook Maternity Champions hosted their very own stall within the Health Zone at the annual SouthWestFest event, speaking to over 40 parents.

The maternity champions made a wonderful display about the benefits of breastfeeding and provided peer support covering topics such as breastfeeding and returning to work; correct latch techniques and how starting solid foods does not have to be the end of breastfeeding. There were also lots of handouts on these subjects which parents could take home with them. They also ran a fun game, the Baby Food Taste Test Challenge where parents were challenged to guess the ingredients of some common processed baby food; leading to lots of conversations around signs that your baby is ready to start solid food, reading labels and checking sugar content. One parent said, *'I can't believe how much sugar is in this. They make the pouches look like you are giving your baby something really healthy.'*

Parents were also given gift packs that included breastfeeding covers, baby books with separate information on how reading to your baby promotes bonding and recipes for making your own nutritious and low-cost baby food. One parent said, *'Thanks so much for the gift bag - finding somewhere private to breastfeed when I'm out can be so difficult, the cover will come in so handy.'*



## ■ Musical Baby Drop-Ins

The Harrow Road, Mozart and Westbourne Maternity Champions continued to support weekly musical drop-ins for parents and babies, providing informal peer support and breastfeeding training for parents that attend. Their support is a key part of Community Families, an innovative programme which combines creative activities with pastoral care to support families with under fives and aims to embed sustainable, self-governing peer support networks.

A very positive independent evaluation in 2019 stressed the importance of the combination of creative musical activities and the informal support provided by the Maternity Champions. Parents reported that the sessions supported bonding with their child and had a positive impact on their child's self-confidence. Maternity Champions play a key role in the sessions with 89% of parents reporting having received support from a Maternity Champion. For example, during and after one session a Maternity Champion listened and talked with a parent who had had a traumatic birth experience. The Maternity Champion used her active listening skills learned in the training programme to make the parent feel comfortable to share and talk about an experience that she found very upsetting and that she hadn't shared with anyone before. Another parent said, ***'Maternity Champions create a space to just "be yourself and stop". It really makes a difference when you are having a bad day or a bad night and someone comes and ask you if you are alright.'***

The evaluation also suggested that the sessions are successfully achieving their goals of building local peer support networks with 98% of parents reporting that they had connected with new people in their area as a result of attending.

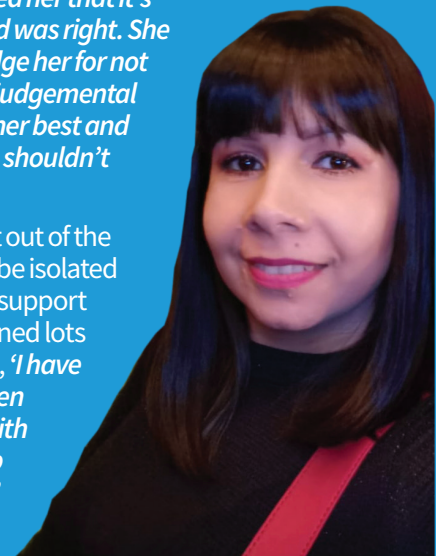


## ■ Spotlight on Maternity Champion, Marcella

Marcella became a Maternity Champion two years ago after going to one of the parents and baby drop-ins in Queens Park. She met Champions project worker Lina at the school gates who told her about the session. She was initially reluctant to go but really liked it when she did. She decided that she wanted to become a Maternity Champion as she felt she understood from her own experience how hard it can be as a new mum and wanted to help people in this situation: ***'I understood a little bit how a new mum feels when she doesn't have any family or friends around and doesn't speak English and doesn't know how to do a lot of things like go to the doctor and feels very isolated.'***

Marcella's favourite activity is yoga for parents and babies at Queens Park Children's Centre. She feels this activity is very good at attracting mums with new babies and the Maternity Champions can make use of their training in breastfeeding and peer support. Maternity Champions can give lots of support but sometimes all parents need is someone to listen and to feel reassured. ***'One day I was talking to a mum and she was upset because she was finding it hard to breastfeed and her family was putting a lot of pressure on her. I spoke to her and reassured her that it's totally her decision and whatever she decided was right. She was trying to find someone that wouldn't judge her for not breastfeeding and I was able to be that non-judgemental person and reassure her that she was doing her best and that the baby was well and happy and so she shouldn't worry.'***

Being a Champion has helped Marcella to get out of the house and do something different: ***'I used to be isolated from the community and I always wanted to support the community and do something. I have gained lots of new skills and experiences.'*** She continues, ***'I have made new friends and learnt a lot from women from other cultures and been able to share with each other. I'm so happy to be part of a group in the community that makes me feel useful.'***



## ■ Design Council Workshops

In Summer 2019 the Maternity Champions were invited to take part in a redesign of early year services in the BiBorough run by the Design Council. The aim of the sessions was to explore how the council could align health visiting with the broader pre-birth to five pathway, taking a 'whole systems' approach to the pathway. The Westminster Maternity Champions Manager, Emma Sweeney attended the sessions along with service users and a wide range of professionals from council, health and voluntary sector services.

The sessions involved five design workshops between June and November 2019. Emma reflected, 'We were very excited to attend the workshops and represent the views and experiences of the local women that our Champions engage and support. The expectation is that the learning from the workshops will help to shape future service delivery models'.

The sessions started by mapping the existing service and pathway and then went on to explore ideas and concepts for improving the service. The Design Council facilitated attendees to challenge the status quo, think big and innovate. The sessions also involved research into parent's experiences and views and feedback on some of the ideas generated. Emma was able to use the Maternity Champions activities to engage residents in this feedback process. At the end of the sessions the groups pitched their top ideas to senior commissioners. One of Emma's favourite ideas was a new pathway linking peer support into every new parent's journey. Emma said, ***'Taking part in the sessions was a great experience and it was an excellent opportunity to think more strategically about where Maternity Champions can add to the experiences of new parents in the borough and to ensure that voices and experiences of the residents we support were heard and taken into account. I also enjoyed the techniques used by the Design Council, some of which I have been able to take away and use when designing services with Maternity Champions.'***