



February 2021 Issue 2

Welcome to the second issue of the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Maternity Voices Partnership (MVP) newsletter. Our [first issue](#) gave an overview of the MVP and a chance to meet the local Maternity Champions. We have also since released a newsletter with information about the Local Maternity and Neonatal System (LMNS) Team, which you can view [here](#).

In this issue we will be focussing on the following:

- Spotlight on the Senior Responsible Officer for the Together We're Better Maternity Transformation Programme
- What has the MVP been involved in recently?
- Feedback from service users
- Our focus over the next few months
- How to get involved

Spotlight on the Senior Responsible Officer SRO for Maternity

Hi everyone,

My name is Heather Johnstone and I'm currently the SRO for the Maternity Transformation Programme, although my main job is working as Executive Director of Nursing and Quality (Chief Nurse) for the six Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs).

I've been watching the work of the MVP evolving and have to say I'm really delighted to see such great involvement by so many mums from all walks of life.

As you can guess from my title, I'm a Registered Nurse but I've also got a Degree in Midwifery and, despite letting my midwifery registration lapse some years ago (meaning I can't work as a midwife currently), I have always stayed very close to maternity matters. But it's not just through work that I feel qualified to undertake this privileged role. I'm a mum of three very grown-up children and have lived experience of maternity services in the local area, even if the most recent experience was 30 years ago!

Like many of you, the birth of my children wasn't quite how people portray it on TV. I had a very long and drawn-out labour with my first son, eventually having a ventouse delivery. My son then had a small fit and had to be transported halfway across town to the Special Care Baby Unit where he stayed for five days. Meanwhile I sat in a ward full of new mums cuddling their babies until I was discharged and eventually able to stay with my son before he came home.

My second son was born on a day when there had been a major chemical spillage in town and I had to go in earlier than I wanted, as the traffic was chaos, meaning the labour ward told me to head over. I had a long afternoon and evening and eventually had an emergency caesarean at 5am the next morning, as he was becoming distressed. This was before the days of epidurals in emergencies or knowing the sex of your baby before it was born, and I woke up feeling like I'd be cut in half with my husband telling me we had a second son. Needless to say, at this point I told him if he wanted a daughter, he would have to adopt one.





However, only a few months later having had my caesarean and then further major abdominal surgery (not related to pregnancy) I found myself pregnant again. Thankfully, after my two previous experiences I was x-rayed and told that my pelvis was the issue and this time I had an elective caesarean. I had an epidural, went to theatre and went through the strange experience of feeling like someone was washing up in my tummy as they delivered my baby girl.

Nobody ever asked me about my experiences and if they had I'm sure there would have been lots of opportunity to learn from them. For example, I will never forget the sadness I felt when I couldn't hold my baby whilst mothers around me held theirs. Nobody intended for me to be saddened, they just didn't recognise the significance of that period of separation whilst others bonded.

As both a midwife and a mum I have had the honour of bringing lots of new life into the world and I was even fortunate enough to be present when my first Grandson was born just over a year ago. Whilst childbirth will always be a miracle in my mind, I'm more than aware that it doesn't always go well or according to the hopes or plans of parents. That is why the work of the MVP is so vital to drive improvements within maternity services locally.

I look forward to working with you all over the coming months and hopefully years, and sincerely hope that between us we can use our collective experience to make local maternity services the best they can be.

Thank you all for your support to this work.

What has the MVP been involved in recently?

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Together We're Better MVP champions have been unable to visit community centres, baby groups, etc. Instead, the use of technology has been utilised to the best of our abilities. We have communicated, listened, posted, tweeted, and used Microsoft Teams and Zoom, just like everyone else in order to keep the conversations going. Below is just a snapshot of what the MVP have been up to recently.

- **Co-production:**

The MVP has been actively involved in a variety of co-production activities, including input on various leaflets produced by our maternity providers – thank you to everyone who has put forward comments. We have some exciting co-production opportunities coming up, including involvement in University research projects and Health Visiting Stakeholder events.

- **Keele University:**

MVP Champions were asked to attend a virtual session with year 3 Midwifery students. Workshops were facilitated by the champions with a small group of students who were given a scenario and asked to consider key themes from a service user perspective. This was an extremely valuable event with the students and highlighted the importance of communication and how the service user voice is invaluable. Following this session, Staffordshire and Wolverhampton Universities are keen for the MVP to be involved in their future events.

- **Involvement with sub-groups within the LMNS:**

We now have an MVP representative on each of the sub-groups within the Maternity Transformation Programme/LMNS, as the voice of the Service user is invaluable to allow for co-production of maternity services.

- **Manic Mumdays:**

The MVP Champions have set up a fantastic initiative designed by mums for mums and their



families, to connect with each other to discuss whatever may be on their minds. These one-hour sessions take place mainly each Thursday between 12pm and 1pm, although dates and times may sometimes vary. Guest speakers have been invited from various places, including Kicks Count, Tots Play, Sunflower Support Group and many more. To join the secure chat on Facebook rooms visit the [Maternity Champions COVID-19 support Facebook group](#).

Feedback from services users:

Your feedback, positive, neutral or negative is vital to improve the quality of maternity services and increase co-production. Telling us about your experiences means that we are able to inform others and able to work together to improve maternity services. All feedback is gathered by Champions and collated by the MVP Lead who provides a detailed quarterly report to the system-wide Maternity Transformation Board.

The Maternity Champions COVID-19 support group Facebook page was established to support service users to communicate directly with other service users and offer support during these unprecedented times. To date, there are over 635 members throughout Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. The group is monitored and managed by the Champions, all of whom are mother's themselves.

We have received a huge amount of positivity since this group has been set up, here are just a few comments direct from service users:

“Thank you so much to the champions for the COVID Facebook page – it has reduced my anxiety tremendously.”

“Thank you for keeping us all informed. I agree times are hard and people are missing out but the most important thing for me is that my little one is safe.”

“It’s a great group that has been set up and I appreciate that people are working hard for the physical safety of pregnant women.”

Our focus over the next few months

We will continue to communicate and update you via our various social media platforms and will endeavour to answer your questions/concerns in a timely manner. We will shortly be asking for service user feedback on the Postnatal Period and support following discharge.

We will also be focussing on engagement with seldom heard groups and black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities. We also do not want to not forget dads and partners and we are keen to engage with them to find out experiences from their points of view. Please look out for ways in which you can share your feedback with us.



How to get involved

Finally, thank you on behalf of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent MVP for taking the time to read this newsletter. If you have found this information useful and would like to find out more about the MVP, whether becoming a Maternity Champion or how to share your feedback you can do this in a few ways:

Email us: sasot.mvp@nhs.net

Contact the Project Support Officer/MVP Lead – Helen Carr: 07928 525377

Join our Maternity Voices Partnership closed [Facebook group](#) (you will be asked to answer 3 simple membership questions).

Follow the Maternity Voices Partnership profile [Facebook group](#).

Join the Maternity Voices Champions COVID-19 [support group](#).

Follow us on Twitter: [@SaSoTVOICES](#)

Follow us on Instagram: [mvp_staffs_stokeontrent](#)

Useful information:

[National Maternity Voices website](#)

[National Maternity Review: Better Births](#)

**We need your voice to
enable choice**