Exploring peer support for positive parent   
and infant mental health in Moray

# Summary

Peer support is when people use their own lived experience to help others. This can have many benefits such as improving people’s feelings of wellbeing, belonging and ability to cope with everyday life. Peer support has been shown to benefit parent and infant mental health, for example in reducing loneliness and anxiety amongst new parents. There are different models of this, including volunteer-led support groups that meet in person and online. This project worked with peer researchers in Moray to consider parent and infant mental health and how this could be supported through peer activities. The work suggested there is a need for more perinatal mental health support in Moray and that this could come through peer-led activities that offer in-person, drop-in support.

# Activities

Peer research. Mixed Methods. Qualitative: peer researchers. Quantitative: online questionnaire.

# Questionnaire

83 respondents. Most aged between 31 and 40. 94% female. 42% from Elgin and Lossiemouth area, 28% from Forres area.

# Interviews

A team of five peer researchers (PR) was recruited for the project and they have conducted research through seven interviews one-to-one and in group settings.

# What are the gaps?

78% respondents felt there was limited or no availability of peer support for parental and infant mental health in Moray.

Respondents reported mental wellbeing challenges during pregnancy (78%) and at other times (73%) suggesting there is a need for support.

# What might helpful peer support look like in Moray?

* **Connection – Promoting peer-support opportunities should make use of methods parents most value**. To promote peer-support our survey showed the most popular methods for parents were social media/Facebook, internet searching, speaking to the health visitor, baby groups, speaking to the GP.
* **Hope – Tackling stigma needs to be a key consideration for any application of peer-support especially groups.** In terms of the application of peer support toward service access or improving personal mental health, it can help address worries around anonymity and judgement including self-stigma.
* **Identity – Peer support should be person-centred and flexible in how parents choose to view their mental health challenges.** It can focus on specific areas of mental health challenge as a route to engagement. Our work revealed that peer support could most likely address / support issues around anxiety, mood challenges, confidence, self-esteem, loneliness, connection with partner, connection with friends and sense of identity.
* **Meaning - Peer-led education about child development and pregnancy needs more positive promotion to increase popular awareness that this is possible.** Peer supporters need recognition as a legitimate source of support and information for the perinatal / early parental stage of parenthood. To do this they need resources and a stronger evidence base for promotion.
* **Empowerment - For delivery it is important to choose formats that work for parents.** Most respondents wanted something they could attend in person, with a child but not necessarily including interaction with their child as part of this, had a drop-in format but also with the potential for 1-2-1 support.

# Next steps

The study’s valuable results should be further honed through development and research. This should include promotion of peer-led education about child development and pregnancy.

Moray Wellbeing Hub and Children 1st can use their key skills around peer-support to further develop offerings as well as encouragement to other organisations in Moray in partnership. This would include the mechanism of peer research to provide peer-support for parents and continue to learn and develop best practice.

# Contact details

Moray Wellbeing Hub

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