

NATIONAL CHAMPIONS AMAZING STORIES



“I WANTED TO DO SOMETHING TO HELP. I’VE ALWAYS BEEN INTERESTED IN PREGNANCY AND I WANTED TO DO MORE”

FACTFILE

NAME

Jane Finch

ORGANISATION

Parents 1st

PROJECT

Volunteer Pregnancy Pal and Birth Buddy Programme

WHAT SHE DID?

- Took a taster course which helped build her self-confidence, assertiveness and listening skills before progressing on to the Pregnancy Pal and Birth Buddy accredited training.
- Developed a range of specialist skills, including understanding the antenatal and postnatal role, active birth, signposting, breastfeeding support skills and safeguarding children.
- Became a Pregnancy Pal and Birth Buddy to two mothers, supporting them in the latter stages of their pregnancy, through childbirth and the first six weeks of the babies' lives.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DID SHE MAKE?

- Supported the physical and emotional well-being of two mothers, their partners and babies before, during and after birth.
- Provided hands-on support during one birth and assistance during another.
- Learned many new skills and gained self-confidence by training and volunteering in a field that has always interested her.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Volunteer Pregnancy Pal and Birth Buddy Programme offers a range of emotional and physical support to parents in Southwest Essex before, during and for six weeks after birth.

Volunteers are usually experienced local parents who are carefully recruited and then offered high quality accredited training and supervision to assist them to use an enabling and empowering approach. Their roles include advocacy, outreach and signposting, assisting expectant parents to keep well, feel supported and gain useful information.

COMMUNITY HEALTH CHAMPION

When it comes to the realities of childbirth, there is little that Jane Finch hasn't seen.

A mother of four, she's had a partner pass out on her in the middle of one birth and faced another that was particularly traumatic. There have been 'nightmare' deliveries and relatively straightforward ones.

"I had my first child quite young," she said. "I was very scared but excited. I never went to any groups or childbirth classes – only to my midwife for a check up. I was working full time and really didn't think I needed them until I went into labour."

Fortunately for Jane, she had her mum for support, both during and after the birth. However, many young mums don't have a partner or family network to fall back on.

The Volunteer Pregnancy Pal and Birth Buddy Programme was set up by social enterprise Parents 1st to promote a positive experience throughout pregnancy and birth, and to enable a confident start in becoming a parent. Based in Basildon in Essex, it draws on the experience, knowledge and skills of local parents who volunteer to offer the support to expectant parents that has been shown to be so beneficial.

Pregnancy Pals and Birth Buddies promote health and well-being and help to prepare for the birth. Birth Buddies also provide emotional and physical support to the mother and her partner during labour and delivery. Support continues for six weeks after birth.

In March 2010, Jane became one of the project's first volunteers.

"I wanted to do something to help," she said. "I've always been interested in pregnancy and I have been a breastfeeding supporter in the past but I wanted to do more.

"What's so interesting about this is that people might come from all sorts of backgrounds and have all sorts of needs. They might have language barriers, be partially sighted or hearing impaired. They might have suffered violence or had a bad birth experience previously. Or they might just be people who are new to the area. It's about learning to see what people want and need."

After an initial taster course, which assisted her in building her own and other people's confidence by developing non-judgmental and active listening skills, Jane took the accredited training course, learning among other things about active birthing techniques, labour, breastfeeding and building relationship support.

Following a referral to the programme, she was matched up with her first 'mum' in the summer of 2010. Her second gave birth early in 2011.

In both cases, the first step was to meet the mum to discuss any issues she might have. A well-being assessment was then carried out and phone numbers exchanged.

"We might arrange to meet again to go for an ante-natal visit or just for a coffee and a chat," said Jane.

Two weeks before the birth, Birth Buddies are on call 24/7 and when labour starts, they go round to mum's house or meet at the hospital.

"I'm there to support the mum and the dad if he's around," said Jane. "No two births are the same. I've supported a mum in an active birth. It was a very quick labour and I was helping with breathing. It was very different the second time around when the mum attempted labour but then had to have an epidural. So it was quite slow – more a case of providing a support role for mum and dad.

"Once I know everyone's healthy, I come away from the hospital and then leave it three or four days before going round to see how things are going. I check to see if the mum's OK, whether she wants to discuss anything and how she feels about the baby's feeding. I then tell her what services and support groups are available. After six weeks, I come away and, hopefully, the result is a very confident and outgoing mum."

The benefits of having Birth Buddies on hand include shortening first-time labour, decreasing the chance of a Caesarean (C) Section, increased breastfeeding and reducing the likelihood of post-natal depression.

But for Jane there have been other unforeseen benefits.

"I've got lots out of it and learned new skills," she said. "I've gained a lot of confidence. I had thought about training to be a midwife before my fourth child came along. This is a great way to get back into the sort of work I'm interested in. I'd tell mums who are interested to give it a go. After you've had the initial support, you'll be surprised at what you can achieve."



CONTACT

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Altogether Better was founded on the firm belief that community health champions have the potential to make a significant impact on health inequalities. In 2008, we were awarded £6.8m from the BIG Lottery Well-being Fund to run our innovative, five-year programme in Yorkshire and the Humber. We have 16 locally-delivered flagship projects across the region, testing out different community health champion approaches in a range of settings. Altogether Better is also bringing together a network of health champion projects across the UK and forging links with international health champions.

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