

Annual report 2023/24



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Working together to improve maternity and neonatal care for everyone in Somerset.

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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at: somersetmvp@evolvingcommunities.co.uk

You can download this publication from evolvingcommunities.co.uk/somerset-mvp

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Message from our Lead

I'm delighted to present our annual report for 2023-24, the first since I became the Lead for Somerset Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnership (MNVP) in 2023.

Somerset MNVP has been running since 2018, formerly with Donna Butland at the helm; she continues to guide the ship though as she is now Senior Lead, using her wealth of experiences to provide strategic leadership.

There have been other changes to the Somerset MNVP team this year. In August 2023, we recruited a part-time Engagement Officer, Olivia. She runs our baby group and attends pregnancy and baby events, where she has spoken to hundreds of new parents over the course of the year. (You can find out more about our team on page 5).



I want to take this opportunity to give a warm and sincere thank you to everyone who has been involved with us and supported our work. Thank you to every single person who shared their maternity story with us and to every professional we worked closely with to hear these experiences and create change at the most senior level. Thank you also to our many committee members, new and old, who are able to contribute and support new pieces of work as they come in – we appreciate you.

Maternity and neonatal services are still going through a difficult time, with workforce challenges, estates issues and financial constraints. However, the profession continues to attract people that are truly dedicated to making things better for women, birthing people and families.

Fortunately, in Somerset we are part of the NHS maternity and neonatal leadership team, embedded within the system for evaluating, developing and improving care. We have established strong relationships with the NHS Trust, Integrated Care Board (ICB) and Local Maternity and Neonatal System (LMNS) as we continue to champion the voices of service users to make necessary and important changes to the future of maternity and neonatal care.

We are committed to continuing this excellent work, as well as growing our team so that we can maximise our impact in the years ahead. We look forward to continuing to work with everyone across Somerset in 2025 and beyond!

Dylan Perry

Lead, Somerset Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnership

"I'm so proud to be working with our community of service users and hospital staff to continually develop our local maternity and neonatal services."

About us

Somerset MNVP is commissioned by the Somerset ICB to fulfil its responsibility to involve service users and communities in maternity and neonatal services.

Our vision

Inclusive, safe, personal and kind maternity care for everyone in Somerset; designed, implemented and evaluated in partnership with the communities that receive the care.

Our purpose

To ensure service user voice is at the centre of decisions and to provide insight and oversight to improvements, quality and safety of services. We also provide strategic critical friendship to the LMNS.

Our approach

People's views come first – especially those who are often marginalised or ignored by institutions and systems. We believe in transparency, openness and co-production. We positively challenge, question and support the development and oversight of maternity and neonatal services by raising the voices of service users and supporting them to be involved.

How we find out what matters to you

We are always listening. We want to involve as many people as possible in our work and to hear from a wide range of voices and communities from across Somerset. Our team uses many different ways to find out what matters most to you, including:

- Going out into the community organising clubs, attending events and visiting groups
- Running surveys and focus groups
- Working with other organisations
- Visiting services to see how they work
- Using social media we have 3,278 followers on Facebook and 983 on Instagram
- Newsletters shared monthly on social media.

Find out more and get involved

- evolvingcommunities.co.uk/somerset-mnvp
- somersetMVP@evolvingcommunities.co.uk
- facebook.com/SomersetMVP
- instagram.com/somersetmaternityneonatalvoice
- x.com/SomersetMVP
- **O** 07767 914952



Our team

We have a small team of staff and volunteers, and a volunteer committee who support us to review leaflets, documents and information for NHS Somerset's maternity and neonatal services. We also share upcoming events and opportunities to work with us and the Trust.

Since the end of this reporting year (March 2024), we are feeling very fortunate that two additional people have joined our team, Lyndsay, a parent with lived experience of neonatal care is leading our neonatal work, and Alex who is supporting our online social media work, building engagement and raising awareness of our regular groups, STAR awards and surveys.



Donna (she/her)
MNVP Senior Lead

"I have led Somerset MNVP since 2019, and I am also the Southwest NHS England service user Lead representing your voice within regional maternity and neonatal networks and leadership.

"I have two children aged eight and 12. I had a difficult first birth experience and then a homebirth with my second. Although my maternity experiences brought me to the role, my job is to represent everyone, especially those who are marginalised, and to be an expert service user lens in the design, development and safety overview of care and services, which keeps people at the centre of NHS improvements and change."



Dylan (they/them)
MNVP Lead

"Hi! I'm Dylan. I am nonbinary/trans, and I have three lovely kiddos. I had my son when I was 19 and living in Bristol (he is nine this year) and two daughters (aged five and three) with my husband, born via planned sections at Musgrove. I've worked for the MNVP for three years now; I was Vice-Lead before becoming Lead. I previously worked in community and perinatal mental health services as a peer support worker and I'm planning to finish my counselling training one day to support LGBT+ people/youth.

"I've been working in service improvements for five years now, and I've found my true passion in working to improve maternity and neonatal services in Somerset for all future families. It's so vital that we get care and facilities right for everyone."



Olivia (she/her) MNVP Engagement Officer

"My role involves getting out and about in the community to gather feedback and listen to people's experiences. Over the next 12 months my focus will be to continue to build our engagement work in the community- building links and relationships with local groups and organisations, recruiting and supporting volunteers to increase our reach and capacity for engagement, and continue to run our Bump2Baby weekly group.

"Hopefully some of you will recognise me already- I normally come with one, two or three little people in tow! My beautiful children who are six, three and one. My own experiences of motherhood motivate me to make things better for everyone. I'm trained in counselling skills and recently completed my breastfeeding peer support training."



Lyndsay (she/her) MNVP Neonatal Lead

"I am part of the LGBTQI+ community. My wife and I have been together for 20 years and we have two children together aged 12 and nine. My nine-year-old was born at 24 weeks.

"My work for the MNVP sees me visiting four different neonatal units across the southwest and Bristol, bringing a combination of support and conversation in order to gather feedback to improve services for neonatal parents.

"Since 2017, I have worked in various charities and services supporting families on neonatal units, in perinatal mental health within the community or as a peer leader for the NHS. I am a wellbeing practitioner and artist, and my area of focus is prevention of mental health issues using nature and creative flow. I look forward to meeting some of you in the near future."

What is it like being part of our committee?



"I just love that support we have - having someone listen to our stories and speaking to others who feel similar about how our maternity services are. It's just nice to have that sense of community." **Abi, MNVP Committee representative and mother of two**

"It's an incredibly welcoming group, full of lovely, very knowledgeable members and I feel very proud to play a small role in helping to shape maternity services for future parents-to-be." **Pippy, MNVP Committee rep and mother of two**





"I'm proud of our contribution to the redesign of the maternity reception at Musgrove Park Hospital. I think it is much more welcoming to families, especially those who struggle in clinical environments like myself. We took a lot of different perspectives into account when adding our feedback. What I like most about the group is that our thoughts and experiences are welcomed. We are heard because we get to see future edits and designs of the patient information we review, and our suggestions are included." Alice, MNVP Committee rep and mother of one

"It's really rewarding having the opportunity to positively impact the experience of future maternity service users." **Hope, MNVP Committee rep and mother of two**



Engaging with our communities

We engage with our communities in a variety of ways including through the regular clubs and events we organise, and by involving service users and staff when we visit maternity and neonatal settings. We also raise awareness of our work and engage though reports, newsletters, social media and our website.

Building connections

We were pleased to welcome Olivia, our new Engagement Officer, to our team in 2023. She had a busy year making connections and building engagement and support by visiting these events and organisations.

- The Nelson Trust. Visited and talked to staff and the women they support.
- Home-Start West Somerset. Attended an open day and real birth antenatal session, and held a feedback meeting with staff.
- Mums and Munchkins, Chard. Joined a group session and connected with their online community and engaged through social media.
- Nourish Bumps and Breastfeeding.
 Attended a listening event for new parents and received feedback from the volunteers who run the group.
- Community Midwifery Baby Group, Trull.
 Visited the group and distrubuted our Have Your Say feedback forms to those who attend the group.



Mums and Munchkins, Chard



Pregnancy+ Wellbeing morning, Trull



Dads Breakfast Club

"Giving everyone the opportunity to share their story and shape maternity services is crucial for building a safer, more inclusive space for everyone. We would love to hear from you!"

Olivia, Somerset MNVP

- Infant Feeding Group, Wellington. Attended and facilitated the group on several occasions and held a listening space.
- Pregnancy Wellbeing Morning. Visited and networked with other professionals, local businesses and spoke to many expectant and new parents.
- Healthy Little Ones. Attended health visitor sessions in Wellington and Taunton and connected with group leaders across Somerset.
- Health Hub, Yeovil. Attended the hub at Boots Middle Street to gather feedback.
- Baby groups. Visited several groups to listen and gather feedback: Baby group (Creech St Michael), Storytime and Bounce & Rhyme (Taunton Library), Storytime (Wellington library), Little Seedlings (Cheddon Fitzpaine), St John's Stay & Play (Wellington), Village Midwife postnatal sessions (Taunton area), Children's Centre group (Williton), Stoke Tots (Stoke St Mary), Compass Wellbeing Stay & Play (Taunton).

Family fun day

To thank our committee members and volunteers, we held a family fun day with Halloween crafts, food and toys. This is our annual opportunity to give back to everyone who has joined our committee or volunteered their time and effort to share their stories with us or help us with projects. It's also a great way to engage potential new volunteers.





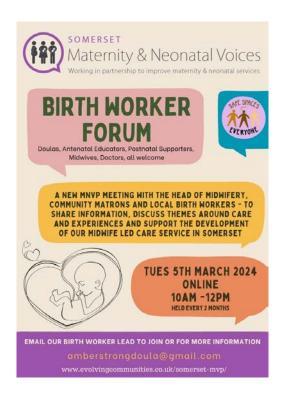
Family fun day

Birth worker forum

In February 2024, we set up a Birth Worker Forum to share information and discuss themes around care and experiences as well as supporting the development of our Midwife Led Care service in Somerset.

Attendee list:

- Head of Midwifery
- Community matrons and team leads
- Local birth workers
- Doulas
- Antenatal educators
- Postnatal supporters
- Midwives
- Doctors



15 Steps to quality maternity care

In February and March 2023, we held our annual 15 Steps in Maternity review visits at Musgrove Park and Yeovil District Hospitals. This is informed by the NHS England 15 Steps Framework that looks at improving the quality of services by bringing in 'fresh eyes' to visit, observe and spot things that staff might walk past.

We visited the hospitals with groups of service user volunteers and identified strengths and areas for improvement across five categories, asking ourselves if spaces felt:

- Welcoming and informative
- Safe and clear
- Friendly and personal
- Organised and calm
- Accessible and inclusive.

We also shared a video from our visit online and gathered feedback via our social media channels to inform the final report.



Working in parties Act to improve malerally services Have you used Somerset Maternity Services? Join us for the 15 steps walkabout to tell us your first impressions on what can be better and what works well. SAVE THE DATE YEOVIL DISTRICT HOSPITAL 10th Feb 2023 MUSGROVE PARK HOSPITAL 10th March 2023 9.30 - 2.30 Lunch included + expenses paid

Maternity

FIFTEEN STEPS FOR

Yeovil's 15 Steps event (February 2023)

Left to right: Taylor (service user), Alex (service user), Donna (MNVP Senior Lead), Leanne (Matron), Dylan (MNVP Lead), Lisa-Marie (service user), Stephanie (LMNS Midwife).

Musgrove's 15 Steps event (March 2023)

Left to right: Katie (service user), Sallyann (Director of Midwifery), Michaela (service user), Hope (service user), Rhos (service user), Donna (MNVP Senior Lead), Dylan (MNVP Lead), Alex (service user), Nicky (Head of Midwifery).

We made several recommendations for improvement to Somerset NHS Foundation Trust, including:

- Improve inclusion and accessibility
- Add information in more languages
- Consider space/heat/privacy issues for patients and staff
- Better toilet access, especially for visitors
- More spaces that look and feel like Bracken Birth Centre
- Improve parking
- Take down old information and posters
- Clearer signage across maternity areas
- Improve space and seating for patients and staff (break rooms)
- Improve reception areas.

Read more about our report

Art for hospital spaces

Between July 2023 and February 2024, we worked with Lisa Harty, the Art and Design Manager at Art for Life, which works with local artists to create beautiful artwork for hospital spaces. We shared mood boards with our committee and their feedback helped shape the artwork that was created for Musgrove Park Hospital maternity reception.



"I'd love to see nature brought in. I've always said earth tones are better than hospital blue. I think pictures of trees, flowers, birds and lovely bits of nature, perhaps inspired by the Quantocks or Blackdowns."

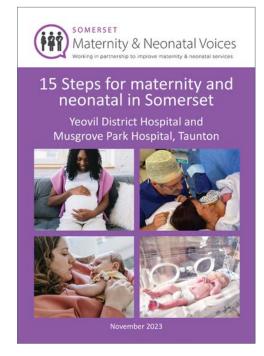
"It has been shown that scenes of nature can help reduce cortisol, adrenaline and noradrenaline; persons with a view of green space have a faster recovery than those that don't. So definitely introducing nature images is a plus, perhaps some plants too. I like the idea of wood as an aesthetic, but more benefits would be gained by natural images."

"This is much needed. Grieving parents wait in and walk through this area to either get to the ward or appointments for their postmortem results, and in their next pregnancy."

"We really want the black and white family photos changed. This section is really triggering for parents affected by baby loss/infertility/trauma. Something less happy families/baby focused would be good – more neutral please."







When the final artwork was installed, we had lovely feedback from our committee, including:



"So much nicer and more welcoming."

"The artworks are so beautiful!"

"So happy to see the baby photos changed to something less triggering for loss parents going back to the unit."

"Loads of positive feedback about the artwork from staff and service users at Musgrove already."

"The artwork is so beautiful and calming."





Artwork installed in and around the main maternity reception





Main maternity entrance: Before and after the artwork was installed

Recognising good care

We introduced our STAR Awards after the COVID-19 pandemic, so that service users and colleagues could give recognition and praise to staff providing outstanding and memorable care in maternity and neonatal settings. Any staff member can be nominated, no matter their job role, from anaesthesiologists, cleaners, ward clerks, neonatal nurses, maternity support workers, midwives and consultants.

We run these awards every month and post them on our social media channels.





Members of the Special Care Baby Unit (SCBU) Team at Yeovil District Hospital



Elenora Forbes, Yeovil SCBU Team



Ruth Taylor, Yeovil SCBU Team

Co-production and collaboration

Throughout the year we worked on a variety of co-production projects with the partners in Somerset NHS Foundation Trust and the LMNS. The MNVP were involved in these projects from the beginning and have been a core member of the working groups, bringing service user feedback into design and development.

- Badger Notes digital system survey
- Pelvic health
- ICON A campaign to support parents with staying calm during infant crying.
- Maternity prevention and healthy lifestyles group
- Supported antenatal education
- Updated the Personalised Care and Support Plan based on your feedback by adding the BRAIN tool
- Birth Worker Forum
- Test of change in triage
- Co-produced CQC feedback action plan
- Care outside guidance Supporting women seeking choices that fall outside guidance.
- Equality, equity and personalised care training as per Core Competency framework (version two, module four) September 2023.
- Induction of labour video script
- Postnatal letter
- Working with new fathers project
- The Essential Guide to feeding and caring for your baby
- Recruitment of Maternity and Neonatal Independent Senior Advocate.

Badger Notes

Badger Notes are the maternity, neonatal or childcare records that are produced by midwives and other health professionals involved in a person's care.

In May 2023, we worked with the digital midwives at the Trust to share feedback from service users on their experience of digital BadgerNet and Badger Notes. We heard from people who were between 16 weeks pregnant and 10 weeks postpartum.



Working with new fathers

We were asked by Charlie, the Dad Matters Co-ordinator for Somerset, to support work on a project for new fathers in Bridgwater.

In October 2023, we talked to dads at our monthly Dad's Breakfast Club about their thoughts on the proposed leaflet for the new service, including accessibility and the language used, as well as how to approach the project itself to engage new fathers.



"Too many words. I would try and add paragraphs to catch the eye and make you read on."

"I think it's very welcomed support for new dads and it's great to see. I think it's generally well worded, however there is a lot of text on it and it's slightly overwhelming so would be good to see this reduced. Also, it wouldn't be very accessible if someone struggled to read or if English wasn't their first language."

The final leaflet has far less text and is visually engaging.





Dad's Breakfast Club, Middlezoy



As this is part of a project to find the best way to support new dads we will collect some anonymous data about the outcomes and ask you for some feedback.

If we are getting in right, then great, but if you think we can do better, then we want to know so we can make changes to the support we provide.

We are hoping to offer this service to all new dads across Somerset in the future and your input into the development of this service will be invaluable.

How do I book an appointment?

We recommend that you book this appointment when your baby is around 4 weeks old but if a different time suits you then that is also fine.

We also offer appointments on Saturdays and during the evening for those of you that work.



To book your appointment please call 01278 720270

This project is open to all new fathers and non-birthing partners who are registered with a GP in the following practices:

Cannington
Cranleigh Gardens
East Quay
North Petherton
Polden
Redgate
Somerset Bridge
Taunton Road
Quantock



Infant feeding



During 2023, we worked closely with Better Breastfeeding, an organisation that campaigns to improve support for breastfeeding mothers in the UK, as they were supporting Somerset NHS Foundation Trust's work at strategic level to complete a 'gap analysis' report. This report identified gaps between the current level of services and what is desired or ideal for families in Somerset, highlighting improvements that could be made.

We raised awareness of this work in the community and gathered a diverse range of views and opinions from service users across Somerset and from professionals who provide support with infant feeding.

What we did

- Ran an evening workshop in July 2023.
- Spoke to people who worked in the infant feeding teams (IFTs).
- Attended pregnancy events.
- Promoted the Better Breastfeeding survey and conducted our own MNVP survey, which asked about people's experiences of infant feeding in detail.
- Analysed all previous feedback/data that we had received on breastfeeding.
- Spoke to people who worked in the postnatal/doula/birth worker space about their conversations.
- Listened to and supported people to breastfeed at our weekly Bump2Baby group which takes place in Middlezoy.

Themes identified

- Verbal and written information can be difficult to understand; written information could be more accessible, clear, and easy to read.
- Antenatal education is valued but access to the information post birth would be useful.
- Support and information given by health professionals can be inconsistent and contradictory.
- Access to the infant feeding team can be difficult; people are unaware of the service, referral
 process and criteria. Those who have been supported felt they had incredible support.
- Personalised care and compassionate support could be improved. Traumatic birth
 experiences, pressure to breastfeed, mental wellbeing, informed choice and individual
 needs, were areas of concern. Whereas some expressed that an individual health
 professional had 'saved their breastfeeding journey' because the support provided was
 compassionate, met their needs and allowed them to continue to breastfeed.
- Many expressed the need for peer support and support in the community; getting to
 hospital can be difficult after birth. Community and VSCE groups are valued but need to be
 accessible, inclusive, and given more support.

- Social media is a great resource for parents as it is accessible from home and used during the
 night when feeding feels lonely. More evidenced based sharing of information and education
 regarding breastfeeding support and the benefits of breastfeeding for both baby and parents
 would be useful.
- Better support and information needed for breastfeeding parents when returning to work.

Recommendations for improvement

We presented our findings to the LMNS Board and made the following recommendations to support them to co-design a new long-term breastfeeding strategy for Somerset.

- Have a universally excellent offer from all hospital staff (and health visitors ideally).
- Improve antenatal education around breastfeeding the why and not just the how.
- Think about a consistent and accessible peer support offer in the community.
- Improve GPs interactional knowledge with medications and breastfeeding.
- Reduce the amount of conflicting information out there.
- Look at other countries like Norway where breastfeeding rates are still very good.
- Improve support for extended breastfeeding and consider external circumstances like parental leave and work.
- Expand the capacity of IFTs across Somerset so they can help more people.
- Think about how we can work with the rest of the sector, for example, lactation consultants, to provide care in the community a joined-up way.







"I wasn't told about the benefits of breast feeding for myself and baby. I have since found out about all of the health benefits for me and baby. I have found out with my other pregnancies about peer support groups to help to build my confidence."

Service user

"Staff at Musgrove were brilliant and so supportive. Also attended Breastfeeding Together group in Taunton which was a lifesaver. I found at the time the health visiting service was not holistic and I didn't feel supported by them. Definitely felt during my time breastfeeding that health visitors and GPs needed way more training (and knowledge) than they have as they are your first point of call once you are over the newborn period." **Service user**

New Hospital Programme

In May 2023, the Government reconfirmed in Parliament that Musgrove Park Hospital would continue to be part of the New Hospital Programme with work scheduled to start in 2025. We were asked to gather feedback and hear people's experiences of the maternity and neonatal units at Musgrove to inform development work. Since then, the new Government has announced that this project is likely to be completed sometime between 2030 and 2035

We worked in partnership with Somerset NHS Foundation Trust to co-design a survey which



we shared on social media. We asked what people would like to see in a new hospital building, with prompts about space, equipment, facilities, separate bereavement areas, family spaces, accessibility, colours and artwork. We had 35 responses from staff, service users and birth partners.

On 3 August 2023, at the roadshow for the New Hospital Programme, we met and shared our findings with the then Under Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Lord Markham, and the Director of Midwifery and Matrons.



Left to Right; Colin Drummond, Chairman of Somerset NHS Foundation Trust, Rebecca Pow, former MP for Taunton Deane, and Lord Markham, former Under Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (credit: Rebecca Pow's office.)

Get involved

Share your feedback

We are here to listen. Tell us about your experiences of maternity and neonatal services in Somerset - good or bad, we want to know.

The feedback you provide will be shared anonymously with the LMNS and wider health providers where appropriate. It will be used to improve care and services.

We are unable to reply to you or resolve complaints; if you would like to raise a complaint you will need to do this with the hospital or care provider.

Volunteer with us

Are you feeling inspired? We are always on the lookout for new volunteers. If you are interested in volunteering, please get in touch.

"Listening to the experiences of those who use our services is essential to ensure that we understand the lived experience, consider where improvements are required and assess the impact of improvement work undertaken. With the service user voice at the heart of everything we do, we are extremely proud to work closely with our MNVP. Together, we are dedicated and committed to improving maternity and neonatal services for the people of Somerset."

Sally Bryant, Director of Midwifery, Somerset NHS Foundation Trust

"It is a privilege to support this report and the work of the MNVP. The work undertaken by colleagues in the MNVP and the strength of voice and presence they have across our system is so important in helping us to improve services, and to ensure that what we hear and learn, and the subsequent actions we take have the impact our population need to see and feel."

Shelagh Meldrum, Chief Nursing Officer, NHS Somerset



Contact us

- evolvingcommunities.co.uk/somerset-mnvp
- somersetMVP@evolvingcommunities.co.uk
- f facebook.com/SomersetMVP
- instagram.com/somersetmaternityneonatalvoice
- x.com/SomersetMVP
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