



Mammas Baby Project Report September 2023

Background

Mammas Baby Project was set up in June 2021, in response to a need in the community for families in crisis to access sensitive, in-person support due to their additional vulnerabilities and the barriers they face, such as insecure housing, refugee/asylum status, no access to public funds, domestic violence, lack of family support, additional health needs and where English is a new language. When stresses on families become overwhelming, it jeopardises the formation of close, protective, responsive relationships between babies and their parents. It was envisaged that by reducing stresses, mother-baby relationships can be protected.

Baby Project sessions are held weekly, on an appointment basis, where pregnant women and those with children under 3 years of age, can access emotional support, antenatal and breastfeeding support, emergency supplies (including infant formula), welfare advice and Healthy Start, support with housing applications and council tax, help with school/nursery applications, integration into existing services and parent and baby groups, and referrals to other organisations where appropriate.

Baby Project Aims

1. Work with Leicester Public Health to fulfil the aims of the Unicef Baby Friendly Guidance for Local Authorities regarding food insecurity for families with babies under 12 months [UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Guide for Local Authorities and Health Boards](#)
2. Protect breastfeeding and the maternal infant relationship
3. Provide means to ensure every baby is safely fed regardless of family income or situation
4. Offer one to one emotional and wellbeing support to pregnant mothers and those with children up to 2 years+ facing adversity
5. Support families experiencing food insecurity/financial hardship to provide food and essentials for their baby

Objectives

1. Help families overcome breastfeeding barriers through in person, telephone, and WhatsApp support
2. Issue formula and food vouchers where appropriate, in accordance with the WHO Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes [The International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes - Baby Friendly Initiative \(unicef.org.uk\)](#)
3. Support families with Healthy Start applications
4. Working with the wider network of statutory, voluntary and community organisations across Leicester to improve awareness of the work and aims of Mammas Baby project
5. Supply emergency items for babies and mothers via referrals to Baby Basics and taking donations where appropriate.
6. Inform parents on safe preparation of infant formula

7. Ensure there is a safe and non-judgmental environment for parents to discuss their needs
8. Provide information and support to access further services including Mamas groups and Blossom & Bloom

In November 2022, UNICEF published new guidance on supporting families in the First 1001 days, who are experiencing food poverty ([UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Guide for Local Authorities and Health Boards](#)). The guidance features two Baby Project case studies highlighting good practice in line with the WHO Code. Between January and February 2023, Mamas worked with Leicester City Council to put into place a Formula Voucher Scheme with a dedicated 7-day a week helpline, enabling formula-feeding families struggling to pay for infant formula to reliably access it.

The first formula vouchers were issued in March 2023. Families are assessed and vouchers are issued according to need. For some families this may be a one-off, others may receive weekly vouchers over several weeks or months. In some circumstances we found that pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers were going without food due to insufficient funds. In those cases, vouchers were issued so that they could buy food to feed themselves. Where women are doing any breastfeeding, encouragement and support is given to maximise breastfeeding.

Baby Project data

The table below shows an upward trend in referrals to the Baby Project each quarter and a corresponding increase in the number of formula vouchers issued. Please note that the figures for the current quarter are taken from 1st July-11th September 2023, so three weeks of data remains to be added.

Dates	Referrals to Baby Project	No of vouchers issued
Jan-Mar 23	36	4
Apr-Jun23	45	47
Jul-Sept 23	42	39

90 vouchers issued totalling £1525 (54 Formula, 36 Food)

Benefitting 39 families in total:

22 families received 1 voucher

6 families received 2 vouchers

5 families received 3 vouchers

1 family received 5 vouchers

1 family received 6 vouchers

2 families received 7 vouchers

2 families received 8 vouchers

Where referrals came from:

Mammas helpline and Mammas Team (incl. self/ongoing referrals)- 13

Health visitors- 11

LCC Refugee Support Workers- 7

LCC Family Wellbeing Service-1

Zinthiya Trust- 4

CFF- 1

Wesley Hall Community Centre- 1

Peace Centre- 1

Appointments

113 clinic appointments over 19 weeks

Home/Hotel visits over the period- 3

Breastfeeding Support- 21

Antenatal- 8

Baby Basics Referrals- 14

Clothes/items from Donations- 16

Healthy Start Applications accepted-12

Help with housing issues- 5

Emotional health & Wellbeing Support- 36

Benefits/Welfare Support- 8

Travel to appointment reimbursed for 6 families

Languages supported with in clinic and on home visits:

Gujarati- 10

Urdu- 5

Hindi-5

Sorani Kurdish- 5

Tigrinya- 2

Baby Project Case Studies

Stephanie with 3-month-old twins Joshua and Jacob

Stephanie, a single mum, and an asylum seeker, was referred to the Baby Project by her Health Visitor. She had been moved from a hotel in Cambridge to a flat in Leicester with her 3-month-old twins who she was combi-feeding. With no funds available to her, she was struggling to buy formula for her babies and food for herself. With no friends or family in the UK, she was also very lonely.

- The Baby Project team assessed Stephanie's situation and agreed to issue formula vouchers each week. Vouchers were issued for a period of 2 months
- A Baby Basics referral was made for clothes for the babies and nappies were provided from donations
- Food was provided from donations
- The team provided a supportive space for Stephanie to share her worries and her hopes for the future
- Stephanie was encouraged to join the Stay & Play group at the Children's Centre and Mamas' 'Telling our Tales' course.
- A referral was made to Shama Women's centre, which provides free courses for women

Stephanie is now in receipt of welfare funds for her family and no longer requires formula vouchers. She still chooses to drop into the Baby Project each week for a chat (or even a nap!) Last week, she showed us photos of the beautiful clothes she used to make for her family in Nigeria. She has enrolled on a sewing course at Shama.

"I'm going to learn how to do button-holes. I want to start sewing again."

She told us, *'Since coming to UK, this is the first group that makes me feel belong'*

Kamini with 16-month-old Dilan

Kamini was referred to the Baby Project by Zynthia Trust. She came to us after her husband's tragic suicide left her the sole carer of their 16-month-old son. Kamini had arrived in the UK with her husband, on a spousal student visa. They had been supporting themselves adequately until his sudden death. With her family's sole earner gone and with no access to public funds, Kamini took shelter with her sister who herself was managing on restricted means

- Our team provided emotional support and referred Kamini to Blossom & Bloom for further support for her mental health
- Fortnightly food vouchers were issued and continue to be issued whilst Kamini awaits a determination on her visa and benefits
- Food parcels were facilitated through Wesley Hall Community Centre
- Baby essentials were provided from donations

- With encouragement, Kamini joined Blossom & Bloom coffee mornings where she was able to meet other mums and was added to the Mamas Toddler & Me WhatsApp group

Kamini told us,

“I am truly grateful for the service and assistance I receive. The staff’s professionalism, warmth and willingness to go above and beyond left a lasting impression. Their dedication to helping individuals like me is commendable. Thank you for your outstanding support!”

Shama with 5-week-old twins Hassan and Hussein

Shama was originally referred to the Baby Project by her Early Help worker for breastfeeding support and help with baby essentials when her twins were 5 weeks old. During the home-visit, she confided that her husband could be emotionally abusive and controlling. They also have 4 older children (aged 11, 9, 6 and 2 years at the time). Shama did not want to be referred for support with domestic abuse as her husband was not physically harming her or her children. We helped with baby essentials from Baby Basics, clothing from donations and provided a phone card as she had no credit available on her phone. Over the next year, Shama stayed in touch, asking for help with baby items and phone credit from time to time. When her twins were 14 months old, Shama’s husband beat her severely leading her to seek medical help. The abuse was reported and her husband was arrested and given a no-contact order. He is currently on bail, awaiting trial.

At this point, Shama had no financial means whatsoever, she did not know what her legal status was in the UK, she had no bank account or any welfare support available. While her social worker helped put support in place, there was a gap of 6 weeks where there was no money coming in. She tried food banks but her children would not eat the foods on offer. Our team did the following:

- Provided regular, ongoing emotional support by phone in Urdu
- Issued weekly food vouchers for the 6 weeks before her universal credit payment came through
- Encouraged Nusrat to join the Freedom programme with Freeva

“I thank God I got help when I needed it most. My children are smiling again. There is peace in the house after long time”

Maryam with 6-month-old Hannah

Maryam attended a Mamas Baby Massage course when her baby was 6 months old. She was very quiet and appeared reserved during sessions but would stay back to ask questions at the end. She had many concerns about the healthy development of her children. During these chats it became apparent how isolated Maryam was. We learned that she and her 3 children had been moved from hotel to hotel after becoming homeless. This was following a ten-year period of physical and mental abuse from members of her husband’s extended family which she finally escaped.

Through the Baby Project, we were able to:

- Provide a safe listening space, emotional support and referral to Blossom & Bloom for ongoing support with mental health
- Provide clothes for the children, nappies and food from donations
- Check that Maryam was receiving benefits she was entitled to
- Encourage attendance at Highfields Baby & Me sessions

Maryam and her family have recently been moved to a council house

“I’m glad we have a home and don’t need to move but I still have traumatic flash-backs. I don’t mix with people because I’m scared even now looking over my shoulder- worried they might come and take my children from me. I come to the group to learn more about how to help my baby’s development but I don’t talk to people about my life- just only to your team”

Phoebe with Noah

Phoebe was first referred to Mamas by her health visitor when her baby was 2 weeks old, for breastfeeding support. The health visitor was concerned about Phoebe’s low mood. During a home visit from Mamas, Phoebe reported feeling lonely and confided that she and her husband were struggling financially. They were not entitled to any benefits due to being here on student visas. Through the Baby Project, we:

- Provided clothing, baby toys and toiletries from donations and via Baby Basics
- Provided regular reimbursements for nappies
- Referred the family for food parcels from the Wesley Hall food pantry
- Stayed in touch and provided ongoing encouragement and breastfeeding support
- Invited Phoebe to groups- she enrolled on Telling our Tales, and took part in a Maternal & Neonatal Voices Partnership (MNVP) focus group where she shared her experiences of maternity services in Leicester

Phoebe told us

“Sometime just talking to someone helps. I miss my family and my home in India. But we are making new home here. I will restart my dissertation soon and I am feeling more positive. I feel I have friends here”

Janvi

Janvi was referred to the Baby Project by her health visitor when she was 7 months pregnant and in an abusive marriage with an alcoholic husband. Her health visitor had also contacted social services. When Janvi first came to see us, she was anxious and tearful. She had no family of her own in the UK and no right of stay. Our staff encouraged Janvi to confide in social services, explaining that they would find her somewhere safe to stay and that Mamas would support her along the way. Janvi came to see us over several weeks whilst social services arranged her move to a refuge, 3 weeks before her due date.

We did the following:

- Provided clothing for Janvi and her baby from donations and through Baby Basics as she had left home with very little in her possession

- Delivered a one-to-one antenatal session in Hindi, focussing on the importance of breastfeeding and getting off to a good start
- Stayed in touch with Janvi via WhatsApp throughout her 4-day stay in hospital after having her baby, providing encouragement, reassurance and emotional support
- Visited Janvi at the refuge for ongoing emotional and breastfeeding support
- Accompanied Janvi on walks and café trips to help build her confidence in going out again
- Encouraged attendance at Mammias baby groups and reimbursed Janvi's travel costs

At the first Baby & Me session Janvi attended, she was the first person to introduce herself to the group

“Hi, my name is Janvi and this is my baby. She is 4.5 months old and I love her very much, she is my world - she makes me so happy. When she sleep, I just wait for her to wake up. When I see her smile, I forget all my worries”

Raheema

Raheema was referred to the Baby Project by her health visitor for emotional support when she was 34 weeks pregnant. At her appointment, Raheema shared her fears about giving birth and having family members 'taking charge' of her newborn. She was new to the UK and living with a mother-in-law who could be abusive. Her husband was working away from home and not committed to their relationship. While Raheema speaks English well, her preferred language is Urdu. Our team did the following:

- Provided emotional support
- Provided antenatal support and breastfeeding education
- Helped with Universal Credit application
- Provided support via WhatsApp when Raheema went into hospital as she had no birthing partner
- Visited Raheema in hospital and showed her how to express colostrum
- Provided bedding and baby essentials when Raheema moved into an unfurnished flat with her baby
- Encouraged attendance at Mammias Baby Groups and Blossom & Bloom coffee mornings

At 6 months Raheema's baby is still exclusively breastfeeding and she is looking forward to introducing solids. Raheema has recently joined Telling Our Tales and has formed a close bond with another mum from Pakistan.

‘I know before it was hard but Alhamdulillah, things are way better. Everything I went through was worth it. I like being part of Mammias group’