

SISTER CIRCLE

Sister Circle's Maternity Mates programme provides one-to-one pregnancy, labour and postnatal support

PATHWAY

Referrals can be made anytime during pregnancy, via the Sister Circle website: <https://sistercircle.org.uk/get-support>, or call 0796 0327 760.
NB: Sister Circle aims to call the mum within 2-4 weeks of receiving a referral.

If Sister Circle is not able to help the mother, the referer will be notified by email.

If Sister Circle is able to help, they will call the mother and develop a support plan

The mother is matched with a Maternity Mate during the 5th month of pregnancy. A meeting is arranged to introduce the mother and the Maternity Mate volunteer. They start to get to know each other and discuss how they are going to keep in touch.

Pre-birth Support (from 5 months pregnant)

Ongoing conversations & emotional support



Referrals to other services



Helping prepare for & attend medical appointments



Support with birth plan



Support to make choices about health care



Getting baby items



When the needs of the mother goes beyond what Maternity Mates can provide, Maternity Mates will refer the mother to other relevant services.

Birth Support

Support during labour and birth at hospital

Help understanding what is happening

Communicating with medical staff

Emotional reassurance and encouragement

After Birth Support (up to 12 weeks postpartum)

Includes support with things like registering the baby, infant feeding and referring to other professionals such as a Children's Centre.

1-2 months after support ends

Sister Circle organises a follow-up conversation with the mother to check in and ask for feedback on their experience using the Maternity Mates service. Women are also asked if they would like to be contacted in the future to become a Maternity Mate volunteer or part of the Sister Circle community of change makers.

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WHO ARE MATERNITY MATES?

Maternity Mates are local women volunteering to ease the mother's concerns and help her gain a positive experience of giving birth and caring for her new baby.

They are local to the area and can support the mum getting to know other people and organisations in the community.

Maternity Mates receive five weeks accredited training, about pregnancy, mentoring and advocacy, and baby feeding. They cannot provide legal or clinical advice, do any kind of domestic cleaning, shopping, cooking and babysitting, or meet the mother outside the borough.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR A MATERNITY MATE?

- Women who are new to the UK
- Migrants seeking asylum, or have refugee status
- Women who do not have much support from family and friends
- Women who experience mental health challenges
- Women who have expressed financial difficulties
- Women whose first language is not English
- Women who are homeless or living in temporary accommodation
- Survivors of domestic violence
- Women who have been trafficked or have experienced forms of gender violence
- All service users must be aged 18 years and older

HOW IS A MOTHER MATCHED WITH A MATERNITY MATE VOLUNTEER?

During the initial conversation with Sister Circle's support assessor, the mother will be asked to explain her circumstances and what kind of support she needs.

The team will find the best Maternity Mate to match her with, based on the language they speak, availability, their background, shared culture and experiences.

At any point during the relationship, if something does not feel right, the mother can talk to the support assessor.

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CASE STUDIES

MATERNITY MATES SUPPORT

Maira, a 34-year-old woman, arrived in the UK, after fleeing from Pakistan. She escaped with only the clothes on her back. Maira is currently living in Home Office accommodation in Newham. As a first-time mum, she is struggling with isolation, is scared about the pregnancy and feels unsure about how things work in the UK. She feels uncertain about her and her baby's future.



Maira was matched with an experienced Maternity Mate volunteer who provided comprehensive support throughout her pregnancy. The Maternity Mate answered many of the questions she had about her pregnancy, the appointments, and preparation for birth in their weekly conversations; and was at Newham Hospital when the baby was born. With the support of her Maternity Mate, Maira was able to access several resources and support services, including a baby bank, local library, and Migrant Help. These resources and support helped Maira achieve a sense of empowerment and independence.

After the support of a Maternity Mate, Maira was motivated to engage in her community, volunteering as a translator for newcomers at her accommodation, attending resident's meetings, and participating in various baby clubs.

BIRTH SUPPORT

Saida is about to have her 3rd baby and is confident about pregnancy and giving birth. However, her husband needs to stay at home to take care of their two other children while she is at the hospital. She is going to be induced early due to some complications and she feels her English is not very good. She does not want to give birth alone.



Saida is matched with a Maternity Mate for birth support. They are introduced to each other by a Sister Circle support staff and they get along immediately as they both speak Sylheti. It is agreed the Maternity Mate will accompany Saida on the day of the induction to help her settle and answer any questions. Inductions can be long but Saida is more comfortable as her Maternity Mate encourages her and shares techniques with her during the process. By the time she is in active labour, the Maternity Mate is at the hospital with her, holding her hand and helping her understand anything the midwives and doctors are saying. Saida gives birth to a healthy baby boy.