



Department
of Health

Countdown to Birth

A case study using the feedback from young parents to develop an Antenatal Workbook and Mobile Phone APP for this client group.

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It has been superseded by the [Delivery of the healthy child programme](#) guidance.

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Countdown to Birth

A case study using the feedback from young parents to develop an Antenatal Workbook and Mobile Phone APP for this client group.

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Purpose of document

This case study focuses on an improvement in service quality, innovation or a new way of working, specifically along one or more of the strands of the health visiting service vision and family offer:

**Community
Universal
Universal Plus and
Universal Partnership Plus.**

Case Study Overview

Somerset Partnership NHS Foundation Trust is committed to the delivery of the Healthy Child Programme (HCP) which is the recommended framework of Universal and progressive services for children and young people developed to promote optimum health and wellbeing. As part of the Universal Partnership Plus element of the health visiting service vision, the HCP stipulates that enhanced support for vulnerable families will be achieved through the early identification of their needs and using a multi-agency approach to address these.

In response to concerns about the lack of a joined-up multi-agency approach for vulnerable young parents in Somerset, a pilot study commenced in November 2011. The aim of the study was to develop an integrated/multi-agency model of enhanced support and a sustainable care pathway for vulnerable young parents and parents-to-be, including care leavers.

Part of the pilot involved a review of the services available for young parents. This review identified a lack of resources specifically aimed at young parents. In response to these findings, it was agreed that an innovative interactive antenatal workbook, entitled *The Journey*, should be developed to provide specific advice and support to young parents on an individual basis.

The workbook is can be completed either in the home environment or another setting with the expectant young person and, if possible, with their partner. The workbook is aimed at those who are unlikely to access any antenatal support.

The workbook provides the following eight structured sessions:

Session 1 The Contract

Session 2 About you

Session 3 Attachment and bonding

Session 4 Support and relationships

Session 5 Healthy choices for your baby

Session 6 Healthy choices for you

Session 7 The system

Session 8 Next steps

Integral to the antenatal workbook is a 'Pregnancy Countdown' resource, similar to a calendar, which details the development of the baby each week, e.g. 'Your baby can now hear your voice and other sounds. So start to talk to your baby.' This has been specifically designed to help the young person develop an affinity with their unborn baby and to promote attachment and bonding at the earliest stage. It is essential that the workbook is completed with the young expectant parent/s at their own pace, which may mean that some of the sessions will require more than one contact. The workbook will be given to the young person to use as a resource in the future.

Training on the use of the workbook will be provided to the health visiting teams with in-depth information on each of the subjects covered. Currently, the possibility of developing a smartphone app version for both iPhones and android devices is being explored. The aim is to provide this resource in a format that young parents will be familiar with and it will help to ensure that they have access to the right level of support and guidance at the optimum time.

There are plans to share the initial draft of the workbook with young people, in both the hard copy and app versions, to give them the opportunity to make suggestions on how the final version should look. This will assist with ensuring that the content is appropriate, relevant and young-parent-friendly. The final draft will be piloted within South Somerset prior to publication.

Achievements

The health visitor young parent development worker who was seconded to the pilot study has worked with a number of young parents in both the antenatal and postnatal period. Part of this work was to find out their views on the services that have been provided to them and to consider different methods of communication and learning styles. Findings were used to promote effective communication skills for practitioners/ workers that would be appropriate for young parents.

The health visitor young parent development worker also worked with the young parents' health visitors to review the current service provision as well as mapping the support provided by other agencies such as Children's Centres. Focus groups were also held with these staff to explore their knowledge base and skill-set in working with this vulnerable client group. The focus groups also provided an opportunity for staff to explore their self-beliefs and judgement as well as any preconceptions that they may have had.

The development of the antenatal workbook has been in response to what young people have said about their experiences of the services they have received and also to concerns raised by staff about their lack of resources and specific skills to work confidently with these young parents.

Throughout the pilot there has been excellent support from other stakeholders, in particular from the Targeted Youth Support Team from the local authority. This has demonstrated a willingness to work together to enhance the delivery of a service to meet the needs young parents more effectively.

As a result of the findings of the pilot, a number of workstreams are emerging whose development and progress are being closely monitored by a multi-agency steering group with representation from commissioners and other stakeholders.

The antenatal workbook is closely aligned with other pieces of work being undertaken by the Trust. In particular, delivering the Pregnancy, Birth and Beyond programme to targeted families, the implementation of the Family Partnership programme approach, which aims to change the way health visitors work with families, and the review of the Family Health Needs Assessment tool.

Benefits

As the antenatal workbook is still in development, the benefits described below are those that are anticipated.

The antenatal workbook will assist the provision of enhanced support to improve the delivery of integrated services to support vulnerable young parents and parents-to-be. This approach will provide assistance with achieving a coordinated approach to care, reducing duplication, identifying gaps and using all available resources.

For families, it is anticipated that the antenatal workbook will achieve the optimum support for young parents: they will receive support from the right person at the right time and effective signposting to the resources they require.

Providing specific advice and support to young parents on an individual basis will have a positive impact on their future.

It is anticipated that, as a result of using the workbook with an appropriately trained member of the health visiting team, the outcomes for young people will be:

- improved emotional attachment and bonding with the unborn child
- improved physical health for young parents and their children
- improved parenting capacity
- improved resilience
- improved sexual health
- increased access to employment, education or training
- improved access to appropriate accommodation
- a close working relationship between the health visitor and the young parents.

For health visiting teams, it is anticipated that the workbook will provide effective resources, tailored to meet the needs of young parents. The training provided will equip teams with the knowledge and skills they need in order to develop and deliver innovative and tailored services for young parents (including young fathers) and their children.

It is hoped that the workbook will increase the numbers of targeted antenatal contacts for young parents as part of the Healthy Child Programme. Although the workbook will provide a standardised and evidence-based model of service delivery, it is hoped that the delivery will be undertaken in partnership using the skills acquired from the Family Partnership approach and also based on need following a comprehensive Family Health Needs Assessment.

Challenges

The Somerset Young Parent Integrated Pathway stipulates that the optimum time to commence the workbook is after the 16th and definitely before the 22nd week of pregnancy. This allows time for a comprehensive Family Health Needs Assessment and time to go through the antenatal workbook at an appropriate pace. This will be dependent on timely referral from other agencies.

Although midwives have been closely involved in the pilot, extensive work is required to promote the pathway to the wider Midwifery Service, general practitioners, school nurses and education providers.

Initial findings from the pilot, suggests some common themes:

- Ç young parents see health visitors as closely aligned to social workers
- Ç young parents report not seeing health visitors very much after the first few weeks
- Ç young parents feel that there is an initial assumption from professionals that their age means that they won't parent well
- Ç young parents have suggested that they weaned their baby by guesswork because the information came too late from health visitors or not at all
- Ç young parents feel that there is an over-reliance on handing out leaflets, without relaying the information in a meaningful way.

Given some of the perceptions of the young parents, based on the service that they have received, further work is required to promote the health visiting service to them in a more positive light. It is anticipated that over time the young parents' improved experience will change these current perceptions.

During the pilot, staff focus groups revealed a general confusion about attachment. Although practitioners were able to describe attachment behaviours in infants and the importance of secure attachment to infant wellbeing, they were unable to clearly define what attachment is. These issues will be addressed through the planned training.

Learning, sharing and sustainability

Key to the delivery of the Somerset Young Parent Integrated Pathway is the development of a sustainable service which provides the optimum support for young parents. In order to achieve this, a demand was identified for effective resources aimed specifically at young parents, particularly in relation to promoting attachment and bonding, which has led to the development of the antenatal workbook, *The Journey*, and the associated smartphone app.

The pilot and research into other models have also identified themes which will form the focus of future training and courses developed to work with young parents in Somerset. These are:

- early antenatal relationship building
- adapted styles of communication
- a focus on the promotion of attachment
- the engagement of young fathers.

All of these themes will be incorporated into the antenatal workbook and the training for health visitors.

