

Evaluation of the Breastfeeding Support project delivered in Bradford

Prof. Maria Bryant (1,2), Dr Sara Ahern (3), Prof. Tracey Bywater (2), Dr Kate Mooney (2,3), Thomas Blenkiron (3), Dr Dea Nielsen (4), Dr Benham Tajik (2), Dr Sebastian Hinde (2), and Prof. Josie Dickerson (3), on behalf of the Better Start Bradford Innovation Hub.

1. Hull York Medical School; 2 Department of Health Sciences, University of York; 3. Family Inequalities Research Team, Born in Bradford; 4. A Fairer Start, Nesta; 5. Centre for Health Economics, University of York.



What is the Breastfeeding Support programme?

The Breastfeeding Support project is a universal intervention developed within the Better Start Bradford programme and delivered by Health for All. The primary offer of the project is a timely and personalised support service for mothers, with the aim of helping them to reach their breastfeeding goals.

Women are offered the service in hospital or shortly after discharge to ensure access to feeding support as early as possible. Support is provided by qualified breastfeeding support workers, and is offered both in the home and via the telephone. Women can receive support from the project until their baby is 6 months old.

Summary of our evaluations of the Breastfeeding support programme

Researchers from Born in Bradford and the University of York, evaluated delivery of the Breastfeeding Support project to women living in three wards of Bradford between October 2018 and March 2024.



A. Implementation Evaluation



The service provided support to **95% of women** within 24 hours of referral



The service supported **1538 women** with 1000 going on to complete the project



The participating women were preeminantly from ethnic minority backgrounds.



Women who responded to the satisfaction questionnaire were **extremely satisfied** with the support they received from the project.



B. Qualitative Evaluation

Women appreciated the **comprehensive and responsive support**.

Elements of the service that were key to its success were the **proactive offer of support and ease of access**, visits in the home, support available in home languages, focused support on feeding, and the positive relationships between support workers and women.

The service was found to offer a range of support, including **practical advice and emotional support** as well as access to breast pumps.



C. Effectiveness Evaluation

The project was found to be effective in **increasing rates of any breastfeeding at 6–8 weeks**. More women who received the service were breastfeeding when compared to a matched control group that did not receive the service.

72%
of women
breast/breast &
bottle fed in the
Breastfeeding
support group

56%
of women
breast/breast &
bottle fed in the
control group

The programme cost £572 per women, **increasing the health of the mothers and babies** who took up breastfeeding and reducing their care needs.

Evaluation findings with further detail



A. Implementation evaluation

- Women received timely support from the project with 98% receiving their first support contact within 48 hours of referral and 95% within 24 hours of referral.
- Initial support contacts were delivered for 1538 women, and **1000 women completed the programme**. The rate for completion of the programme increased over the last two years of delivery.
- Participating women were **predominantly from ethnic minority backgrounds**. With reference to the inner city Bradford area where the programme was delivered, the Breastfeeding programme under recruited women from both White British and White Other backgrounds, but over recruited from Asian British Pakistani backgrounds. This likely reflects ethnic differences in breastfeeding initiation.
- Women who responded to the satisfaction questionnaire were **extremely satisfied with the support they received** from the project. 99% of respondents had a median score of 4/5 or more, which suggested that respondents felt the project was useful, easy to access, and that they were satisfied and happy with the support they received.

B. Qualitative evaluation



- Both staff and women who participated in the service showed that the service offers women a **range of support**, including practical advice on techniques for feeding, emotional support, and support resources including breast pumps.
- The key elements of the service included how accessible the it was, meaning women could receive **timely support from staff they trusted** and had established **good relationships** with over time.
- Both staff and mothers valued **home visits**, as they helped to ensure women were offered tailored support in an environment that was **comfortable and private**. Finally, antenatal work was identified as vital to providing a more supportive wider environment for breastfeeding, as well as giving women key information about the breastfeeding experience.

"what I did enjoy is, I knew that, you know what, for a good two weeks I knew that there was support there, I knew that there was someone there and I could just call them and they'd call me to find out how I was, etc, how I was doing with my breastfeeding." (participating mother)



C. Effectiveness evaluation

- Using the Born in Bradford's Better Start cohort, we compared outcomes for women who took part in the Breastfeeding support programme to a control group matched on parent sociodemographic characteristics, and breastfeeding intention.
- There were **higher rates of any breastfeeding (including exclusive and breast & bottle feeding) at 6–8 weeks** post-birth for women who took part in the Breastfeeding support programme (72%), in comparison to women who did not take part (56%). This difference was statistically significant.
- There were also **higher rates of exclusive breastfeeding** for women who took part in the Breastfeeding support programme (36%) in comparison to women who did not take part (32%). This difference was not statistically significant, so we could not be as certain that these results were due to chance.
- The breastfeeding support project cost £1.08mn for the five and a half years it was delivered, costing **£572 per women enrolled**. This implied a **cost per additional breastfeeding child of £3,651**. Previous modelling work has shown that each additional breastfed baby results in one extra week of life lived in perfect health across the mother and baby and a £297 saving in future care needs. However, more work is needed to understand the full range of benefits of breastfeeding.

Relevant references

1. Better Start Bradford Innovation Hub (2023). Breastfeeding Support, Final Report
2. Evaluation of the Breastfeeding Support project in the Better Start Bradford area (2024). ISRCTN registration: ISRCTN84780524

Contact details

Please contact Professor Maria Bryant
(maria.bryant@york.ac.uk) for more
information.