



Salamander Trust
TRANSFORMING THE WAY WE THINK ABOUT HIV

Developing a national network of 'Mentor Mothers' to support women living with HIV through pregnancy

4M: My health, My choice, My child, My life



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Background

Approximately 1,200 pregnancies are reported annually in the United Kingdom (UK) in women diagnosed with HIV.¹ Women living with HIV may encounter significant psychosocial challenges in their journey to motherhood, even though the UK rate of vertical transmission is currently <0.5%. Peer-support has been shown to have a beneficial impact on the well-being of pregnant women living with HIV. Building on a London-based 'Mentor Mother' programme,² we describe its expansion across the UK and present our preliminary evaluation.

Methods

We aimed to train 40 women living with HIV across the UK as 'Mentor Mothers', through key local HIV organisations. Our innovative two-day training package was facilitated by two experienced trainers, one a Mentor Mother herself. It comprised coaching on clinical and psychosocial aspects of pregnancy and HIV, together with creative writing workshops, to encourage trainees to reflect upon their own pregnancy journeys and offer advice to others.



4M trainers, Nell Osborne and Angelina Namiba, with Hilda Achola, Social Care Support Worker at BHA Leeds Skyline.

Results

Between April and October 2016, we trained 46 women living with HIV to be Mentor Mothers, in eight UK regions. The median age of women completing training was 40.5 years (range 22–67); 40% were of Black African ethnicity. Overall feedback from participants was very positive. All rated the different training components as either

good or excellent. Nearly 90% of Mentor Mothers reported that both their knowledge about HIV and pregnancy and confidence in action planning had improved.

The creative writing component was also rated highly. Mentor Mothers reported that this had been their first opportunity to share their journeys in such a way in a safe space. Their stories were collated into a handmade booklet. Copies were given to each participant and the host organisation and will be shared with healthcare professionals to deepen their understanding.

Working in partnership with local HIV support organisations was central to this project. We thus ensured good geographic coverage, as well as delivering training in areas with both high and low HIV prevalence.

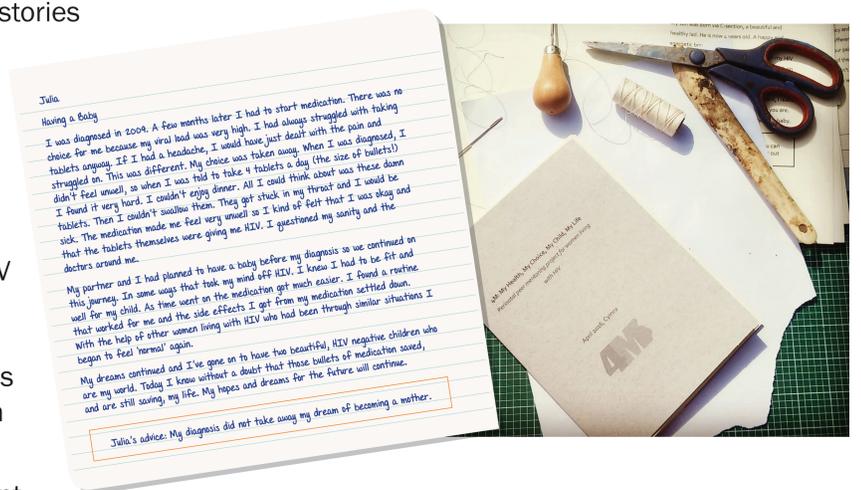
Key challenges included: recruitment and retention (often due to conflicting commitments); concerns about attending training delivered by strangers; and concerns about confidentiality. One training session was cancelled because the host organisation closed through funding cuts. In response, we created bespoke flyers for organisations to circulate to potential participants; visited organisations prior to training; used pro-active communication and follow-up with booked participants; met childcare costs when needed; and used social media to raise the profile of the project.

Key successes

- We exceeded our planned number of Mentor Mothers to train.
- We were invited by local hospital trusts and universities to hold supplementary workshops on HIV and pregnancy.
- We established an innovative training package that has received positive feedback from participants.
- We have developed a sustainable model of care to support women living with HIV during pregnancy and early motherhood.

“We would like more of this training and support organised down here more often, thanks. It is very important that women get this type of training and get together more, for the large majority of women that are still in the dark about these issues.”

MENTOR MOTHER, BOURNEMOUTH



“The creative writing workshop brought a lot of memories that are useful on my journey keepsake but something that can help others [sic]. This is something powerful, yet without creative writing, it is left hidden, forgotten or never valued. It is like a hidden treasure.”

PARTICIPANT, MANCHESTER

Conclusion

By the end of 2016, we had trained 46 peer Mentor Mothers who were each ready to provide support to at least five other women living with HIV. Longer term evaluation is on-going. This network of Mentor Mothers is an invaluable resource, complementing the clinical care and management of HIV and pregnancy across the UK.

Project Design and Coordination: Angelina Namiba
Creative Writing Coordinator: Nell Osborne
Evaluation Coordinator: Longret Kwardem
Project Support: Rebecca Mbewe

“The training was fantastic. I am glad I participated. I have come to understand that there is help out there. I don't have to suffer alone. I just have to know where to go and what to do.”

MENTOR MOTHER, LEICESTER

1. French CE et al. 'Presentation for care and antenatal management of HIV in the UK, 2009–2014'. *HIV Medicine*. 2017; 18(3).

2. McLeish J, Redshaw M. 'We have beaten HIV a bit': a qualitative study of experiences of peer support during pregnancy with an HIV Mentor Mother project in England. *BMJ Open*. 2016;6(6).



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Salamander Trust
<http://salamandertrust.net/project/4m-health-choice-child-life-perinatal-peer-mentoring-project-women-living-hiv/>
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Participating local organisations:

