



# OUR IMPACT

**IMPACT REPORT** 2019/2020

# Chair's report

“ We have continued to grow, with **604 families** accessing our services in 2019/20. ”



**2019/20 has been another exciting and successful year for Acacia and it has been an honour for me to step into the role of chair of trustees during this time. We have continued to grow, with 604 families accessing our services in 2019/20.**

Acacia continues to be seen as an expert in this field and we were privileged to host a conference to look at BAME parents and perinatal mental health services, specifically looking at accessibility and suitability of services. This was attended by a range of healthcare professionals, commissioners and parents and we were able to share experience and learning from our own services.

Our wonderful volunteers, who are at the heart of Acacia, were recognised this year with a nomination for the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. It is an honour to receive this award and an emotional day when we were able to share the news with volunteers old and new. We hope that we will be able to come together at some point to properly celebrate this wonderful group!

I have been so proud of the energy, enthusiasm and creativity of our staff and volunteers over the last six months, they have ensured that families have still received the support they need despite the current restrictions.

We recognise that there is still so much to do to ensure that everyone can have support when they need it and we will keep working to make this a reality.

**Georgina Dean**  
Chair of trustees, Acacia

## About this report

This Impact Report draws on an external evaluation and analysis of our impact data undertaken in October 2020 by Dr Nahid Ahmad, an independent research consultant and chartered psychologist.

### How we collect our data

Our mental health outcomes data comes from two clinical measures of depression and anxiety – the PHQ-9 and GAD-7 questionnaires. These are the IAPT recommended tools for measuring these conditions (IAPT manual, 2019), and are also amongst the tools recommended by NICE (NICE, 2011b; NICE, 2012; NICE, 2014). During the year 165 mums and 7 dads completed these 'before' and 'after' clinical measures.

Telephone support is crucial to Acacia's services, being the main entry point for referred service-users. Assessment and support are combined in an initial call lasting up to 1.5 hours. Evaluation questions are asked at the end of the phone call. During the year, we have collected evaluation question responses from 299 parents.



## The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service

### **Our volunteers receive the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service**

In September 2019 our volunteers were successfully nominated for the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service by one of our previous beneficiaries. This is the highest voluntary award for volunteers in the UK and the equivalent of an MBE for their work. Receiving the award is a wonderful honour. Our committed and passionate volunteers are at the very heart of our work. There would be no Acacia without them.



# Why we exist

## Acacia is a Christian charity with a vision of a world where every family affected by pre or postnatal mental illness receives timely and effective support close to home.

Our mission is to improve the lives of mothers and families affected by pre and postnatal depression and anxiety. All of our work is underpinned and motivated by our Christian ethos and values.

Starting a family is a milestone in many people's lives. It can also be a stressful time and many parents experience mental ill health.

Up to **20% of women develop a mental health condition at some point during pregnancy or in the first year following birth.**

Examples of these conditions include antenatal depression, postnatal depression, anxiety, perinatal obsessive compulsive disorder, postpartum psychosis and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These illnesses can be mild, moderate or severe, requiring different kinds of care or treatment.

The costs and consequences of perinatal depression and anxiety (PND) are well documented, and far-reaching. These include physical and developmental outcomes, effects on parenting and bonding, future mental health issues, and employment and productivity. Longer term impacts for children also include poor educational achievement and productivity in adulthood.

## Worrying inequalities

In the UK, we take it for granted that all women will receive the support they need to look after their own physical health and that of their babies during pregnancy and after birth. However we also know that a woman's mental health will be treated very differently. Some mothers also face additional inequalities:

- **Teenage mothers** are **3 times more likely** to develop postnatal depression in the first year after birth.
- Postnatal depression or anxiety in **BAME mothers** is **13% higher** than in white mothers yet black women are the group least likely to initiate treatment for postnatal mental illness, and the least likely to receive follow-up treatment.
- **Black women** have more than **five times the risk of dying** in pregnancy or up to six weeks postpartum compared to white women.

“ The support I have received from Acacia over the last 11 months has been invaluable. I was provided with a friendly listening ear during my anxious pregnancy, following a previous traumatic birth experience. It was reassuring to meet other mums in similar positions to me both in person and face-to-face at the centre and then, in recent months, via the Zoom groupwork/coffee mornings and WhatsApp groups. ”



## Adapting our services during Covid-19

Although this report covers the time period April 2019 to March 2020 it is important to recognise the impact that the pandemic has had on the families we support beyond this date.

The issues they face have been made worse by Covid-19 and the social restrictions and many are now tipped to breaking point. They are pregnant or have a new baby and yet feel trapped and isolated.

The effects of social distancing mean that supportive friends and family networks have disappeared and intensified feelings of stress, anxiety, uncertainty and apprehension.

Like so many others, we have had to make significant changes as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

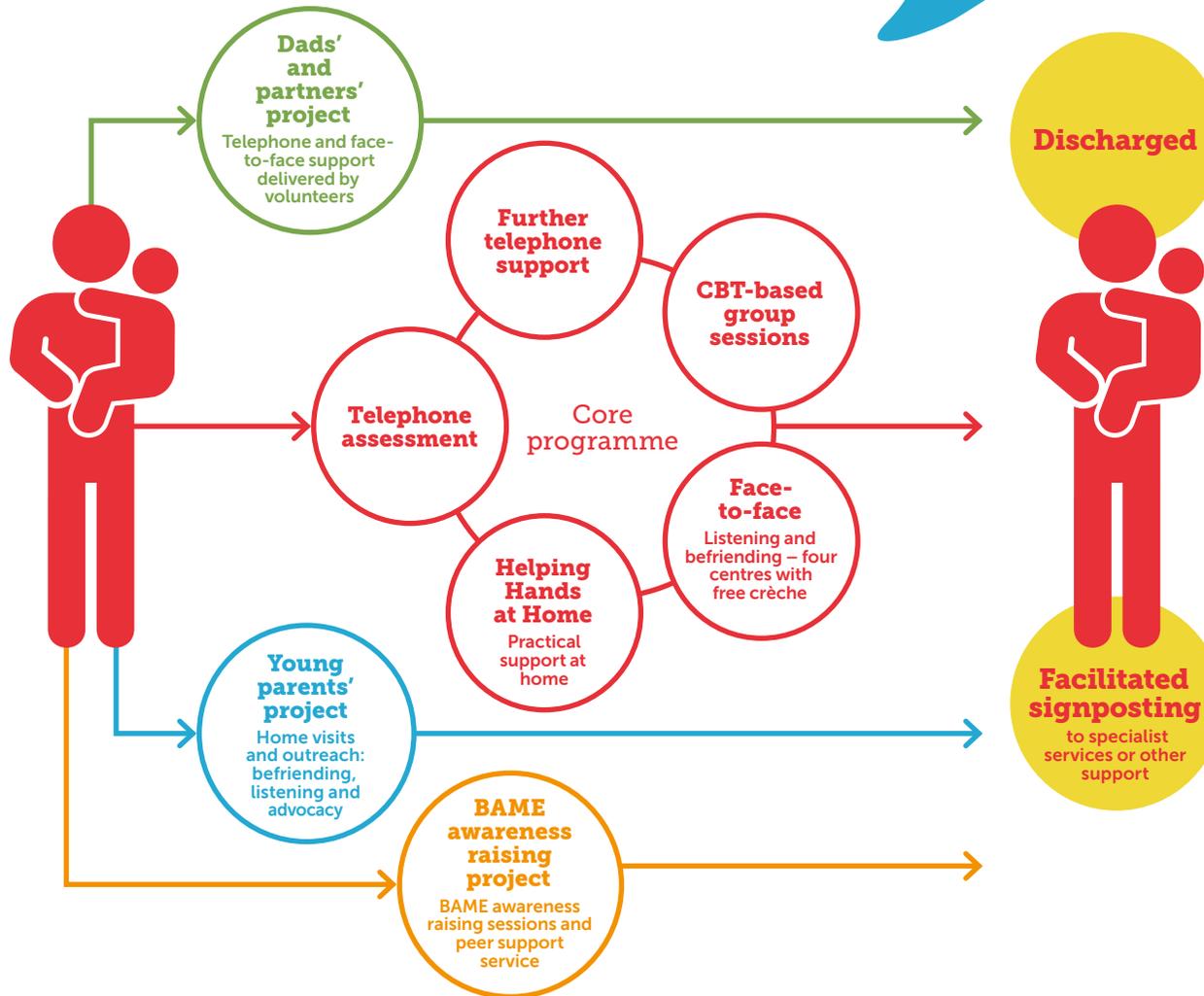
All of our face-to-face services, drop-in centres and home-visiting services were suspended at the end of March 2020. We have been able to quickly adapt our model of support and we are extremely proud of the way our volunteers, staff and trustees worked together to move individual befriending and group work services online and over the phone/via text.

**We stand together through this challenging period and continue to support more and more families in need.**

# What we do

## Our services

Referrals



“ I was feeling down, depressed and numb to my pregnancy which I waited many years for. Acacia support restored my hope for life and future. ”

## The families we support



\* e.g. Forward Thinking Birmingham, GPs, Birmingham Healthy Minds (IAPT) and family support workers

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A high proportion of those entering the service had moderate or severe mental health issues:

**85%**  
of mothers had moderate or severe **ANXIETY\*\***

**77%**  
of mothers had moderate, moderately severe, or severe **DEPRESSION\*\***

**36%**  
were from **BAME** backgrounds

**25%**  
were **young mothers** (school age to 24)

**15%**  
were **dads**

On average, service users **started** receiving support **within 3 weeks** of referral

**12 weeks** was the average **length of service** provided



## Our impact



After receiving telephone support:



“ It was refreshing to feel that people wanted to genuinely help. I found the little things like gift bags and cards in the post made a huge difference. It felt like I was getting a hug. ”

\*\* Based on PHQ9 and GAD7 criteria from 172 mothers' entry scores during the year



## NICE recommended care

### Our support services align with NICE recommended care:

1. Service users are given person-centred care which conveys messages of hope for recovery
2. Support models are consistent with the recommendation for mild/moderate mental illness
3. Communication with other agencies in the health and social care sector is strong
4. Acacia has contributed to, and is embedded in local pathways
5. We use validated tools to monitor service user symptoms and progress.

## Our incredible volunteers help us deliver our services

**During the year, our volunteers received recognition for their work by being nominated for and receiving a Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. This award is the MBE for voluntary groups.**

Our exceptional team of volunteers fulfilled a variety of different roles including: weekly befriending sessions, home visits, crèche support, admin, fundraising, hospitality, supporting group work sessions.

**50+ volunteers** gave over **6,000 hours** of their time to help us deliver our services in the following different roles:

- **93% rated** volunteering at Acacia as an **8, 9 or 10**
- **100%** felt **appreciated** in their role
- **96%** felt a **sense of belonging**
- **88%** said their **self confidence** had improved as a result of volunteering for Acacia
- **65%** of our volunteers have **lived experience** of PND or other mental health issues

Throughout the year, our volunteers have been supported by a comprehensive programme of accredited training and regular appreciation events.

# New developments

## During the year we have developed four new exciting projects...



### **Emma's Gift**

Set up in memory of Emma Borg, Acacia's co-founder, and supported by Emma's family – Kevin, Hannah, Lydia and Connie – Emma's Gift is a project that offers our families 'small acts of kindness with big love'. This includes sending a welcome card with a tea bag in the post to every new referral and a hand delivered 'bag of love' filled with nourishing treats for mum/dad and baby.

### **BAME Peer Support Project in partnership with Birmingham's Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Teams**

We have employed a full-time worker who sits within Birmingham's Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Team and provides peer support to BAME mothers.

### **A new weekly support group for young mums and dads**

In January 2020, we launched a new weekly support group for young parents referred to Acacia – school age to 24. Working in partnership with Birmingham Careers Service and the Young Parents' Midwives' team, the group offers a safe space for friendship and support. Between January and March 2020, we delivered weekly sessions on a variety of different topics such as music, immunisations, infant feeding, birth planning, housing, careers and mental health.

### **The Hearts and Minds Partnership: a national partnership that aims to connect and support community-led perinatal mental health services across England**

Our partnership is made up of three perinatal mental health charities who will deliver partnership activities across the following areas; Acacia Family Support (West Midlands), Bluebell Care (South West) and Smile Group (North West). We are planning to host a series of regional and national workshops and events to enable people to come together as well as develop and deliver bespoke training to support emerging groups. We will also create an England-wide map of safe, good quality, user-led perinatal mental health services.



**Hearts&Minds**

# Our 2020 conference

## BAME Parents and Perinatal Mental Health Services

In January 2020, 130 health professionals, policy makers, commissioners and parents attended our conference at Aston Villa Football Club that shared, discussed and reflected on the experiences of BAME parents affected by perinatal mental health issues and the accessibility and suitability of current perinatal mental health services.

The conference offered a varied programme of lived-experience speakers, workshops and an excerpt from Birmingham's BEDLAM and SAMPAD festival show, 'No Bond So Strong'.

- **91% enjoyed** the conference
- **96% learnt** something new
- **80%** found the conference **beneficial to their work.**

**“ Fabulous event with a lot of different events and activities - the inclusion of lived experience talks brought a richness and directness to an issue that is too often given lip-service. ”**

Conference attendee



# A caring and responsible employer

The way we treat, support and care for our workforce (staff and volunteers) is extremely important to us.

In August 2019 Acacia became an official Living Wage Employer because we believe that all workers deserve respect, dignity and a fair living wage.

In April 2019 we also signed up to and are working towards the Government's Disability Confident Employer Scheme as we aim to make the most of the talents that disabled people can bring to our organisation.

In May 2019 our staff survey showed that:

- **100%** of staff were either **very satisfied** or **satisfied** working for Acacia
- **88% felt supported** at work (on a personal and/or professional level)
- **94% felt valued**
- **76%** of staff have their own **lived experience** of perinatal and/or other mental health issues.



# Thank you and the year ahead

2019/2020 has been another year of significant change, both for Acacia and for the world. The impact we have achieved should not be under-estimated.

Our provision is being delivered in a challenging context of public sector service provision and we are seeing more and more parents who fall within the 'severe' category for depression and anxiety.

“ I've taken big steps with you behind me and I'll always be thankful for that. I'll miss you and Claire and our chats. You're both just the loveliest people doing an amazing job and I don't know where I'd be if it wasn't for the help you've given me and I really mean that I actually cried when I put the phone down because it feels like I've lost a friend! Anyway I know I can always get in touch and I'm looking forward to the next chapter in my life. Thank you so much for everything you've done for both of us. I'll definitely be telling Violet about you one day when she's old enough and I've written about you in her memory book. ”

Given this context, and as this report shows, we are especially proud of the valuable contribution we are making to mental health provision for Birmingham parents and the positive difference we are making to families' lives. Without a doubt, this could not have happened without Acacia's incredible team of passionate volunteers, staff and trustees. We cannot thank you enough for all that you do.

The road ahead is challenging and uncertain however we stand shoulder to shoulder with pregnant mothers and new parents who need us, offering them a hand of friendship and hope for a positive future.



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