

OUR
IMPACT
DURING COVID-19

2020/2021

Our Christian values and what they mean to us

Acacia is built on a strong Christian foundation. We enable people to flourish by experiencing and responding to the love of God which inspires and challenges us to trust steadily, hope unswervingly and love unconditionally. We place equal value on every individual; welcoming people of all faiths and of none. We aim to create supportive, inclusive and energising communities where parents and families can belong, be valued, contribute and thrive.

Reflection on the year



What a year! 2020/21 has been extremely busy and challenging for us at Acacia as we navigated delivery of services against a backdrop of COVID and multiple lockdowns and social restrictions.

Our amazing staff and volunteers very quickly adapted our services to ensure we could continue to support families; their resilience and creativity was inspiring. It meant that we were still able to support over 500 families at a very difficult time. This report shows how we have succeeded in continuing to make a difference and deliver fantastic outcomes for our families.

What makes Acacia special is the ethos of kindness, combined with a professionalism that has enabled us to develop a reputation as specialists in the field both locally and nationally. As we moved all of our services online and to telephone support, this ethos of kindness and love was never lost. In fact, it only got stronger. Going the extra mile time and time again for pregnant mothers and new parents with mental health issues, our team offered the hand of friendship, love and kindness at a time when it was never more needed.

We have learnt so much from the previous 12 months. We work with inspirational families, whose lived experiences and stories of courage and hope inspire us to do more and be the very best that we can be.

I am so proud of what the team have achieved this year and I thank you for your support. We look forward to helping more families flourish over the next 12 months.

Georgina Dean

Chair of the board of trustees

“ At the beginning, it was just heaven to offload about everything that was happening. It was something to look forward to, I felt I had someone that was genuinely concerned about me. She was lovely, not judgmental at all, just really kind. ”

About Acacia Family Support

Our vision

A world where every family affected by pre or postnatal mental illness receives timely and effective support close to home.

Our mission

To improve the lives of mothers and families affected by pre and postnatal depression and/or anxiety.

Acacia Family Support is a Christian charity, now in its 18th year, offering specialist support for families living with pre and postnatal depression and anxiety across Birmingham. Our services are delivered by a team of paid staff and over 50 volunteers, the majority of whom have lived experience of perinatal mental health issues. We deliver a range of individual and group support services with a central ethos of love, kindness and going the extra mile for families.

2020-21 Reporting our impact during a very difficult year



The COVID-19 pandemic has presented challenges to almost all charities. This report explores how Acacia responded to these challenges by adapting our existing service model and exploring new ways of working to support families remotely.

This Impact Report draws on an external evaluation and analysis of our impact data undertaken in September 2021 by Dr Nahid Ahmad, an independent research consultant and chartered psychologist.

The mental health outcomes data in this report comes from two clinical measures of depression and anxiety – the PHQ-9 and GAD7 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 210 mothers completed these 'before' and 'after' clinical measures. Data is also taken from 296 mothers who received telephone support and responded to an evaluation questionnaire at the end of the phone call.





The pandemic has worsened perinatal mental health for pregnant women and new parents

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

The pandemic has made this worse. For pregnant mothers and new parents, national lockdowns and social distancing means supportive friends, family and parent-baby groups disappeared and intensified feelings of stress, anxiety, loneliness and isolation. Research by University College London suggests that rates of postnatal depression almost doubled during the first lockdown to 47.5% of those with a baby aged six months or younger.

“ Not a lot of people saw me pregnant. My partner was not able to go to scans, I felt for him that he was missing out. I ended up having to stay in hospital for a few days and everything happened very quickly and my partner wasn't there for a lot of it. When I was getting certain bits of news, it was difficult to digest that and hear that on my own. ”

“ As well as feeling like you're now a prisoner in your own home, I definitely felt more trapped than ever, it was suffocating. ”

“ I was expecting to be able to take her out and do social things, and have support from family and friends. It was that thing of being on your own at home. I felt very alone. Because I was expecting to be able to go to coffee mornings and baby classes. And then when we were allowed to go out, I didn't know what I was doing. I didn't have any confidence in safely taking a child out for the day. ”

Research

Research (Pierce et al 2020) has shown that women, particularly women in the perinatal period were disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Women living with small children showed some of the highest increases in mental distress.



 Gena

“ Thank you for walking with me through this difficult year and never giving up on me. You have made such a difference to our family. I feel like a good mum again. I have two very happy children who know they are loved and I am full of hope. Thank you for believing it was possible for me to get better when I felt so lost. You are amazing. ”



Adapting our services during the Covid-19 pandemic

All of our face-to-face services, centres and home-visiting services had to be immediately closed when UK lockdown was first announced in March 2020.

We are extremely proud of the way our volunteers, staff and trustees worked together to quickly adapt our services and move to online and telephone support.

“ It’s holistic support, which makes people feel loved and valued, delivered by a friend, someone that cares about them. ”

Who accessed our support in 2020-2021?

 Laura Swinburn,
Acacia beneficiary

554

families were supported by Acacia during the year

Referrals

12

referrals were for men/partners

47%

were self-referrals

31%

were from health professionals¹

21%

were from other agencies²

30

years was the average age

24%

of mothers were under 25 years old

37%

were mothers from minority ethnic backgrounds³

79%

of mothers entering the service had moderate to severe depression⁴

83%

of mothers entering the service had moderate to severe anxiety⁴

1. Health visitors, midwives and GPs / 2. Family support workers, Forward Thinking Birmingham, specialist perinatal teams

3. The largest minority ethnic groups were Pakistani and Caribbean / 4. Based on 2 IAPT and NICE recommended clinical tools for measuring depression and anxiety: PHQ-9 and GAD-7 questionnaires

Our adapted services

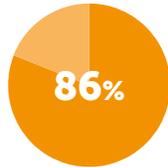


Highlights included...

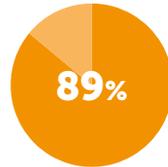
- The average **length of time** in service rose to **6 months**
- Each beneficiary received an average of **8 telephone support** sessions
- We delivered **86 CBT based group support sessions** online
- Our **Young Parents** group met **18 times** online or face-to-face
- **37 volunteers** hand delivered **238 lockdown care packages** to our families
- We arranged **24 walk and talks and doorstep chats** with mums.



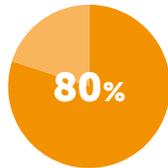
Last year, we saw the **highest rates of recovery** for families accessing our support



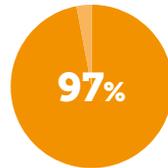
of women had **reduced depression**



of women had **reduced anxiety**



of women had **reduced depression and anxiety**



felt they'd been **treated with respect and dignity**



would **recommend Acacia** to friends and family



of users felt Acacia's support had **helped them to feel:**

- more **optimistic** and less anxious
- better **able to cope**
- more **supported**

“ Acacia's new service models that emerged during the multiple lockdowns of 2020-2021 have not negatively impacted outcomes for mums and, on the contrary, have produced better outcomes than in previous years. ”

Dr Nahid Ahmad Acacia external evaluation 2020-2021

“ It's the listening, it's someone who sits down and gives you their undivided attention without any judgement and they just listen, empathise and encourage. ”

Our impact is in line with the expected standard of recovery for NHS statutory mental health services.

Acacia is a voluntary sector organisation, relying heavily on a volunteer workforce. Staff and volunteers are not clinically trained, nor are they delivering a clinical service. Yet, Acacia's services are having an impact which is equivalent to the national standard for recovery set by the NHS IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies) service. This demonstrates the quality of support, as well as the value for money provided by Acacia.

Four key messages were identified from interviews with service users. Mums said they:

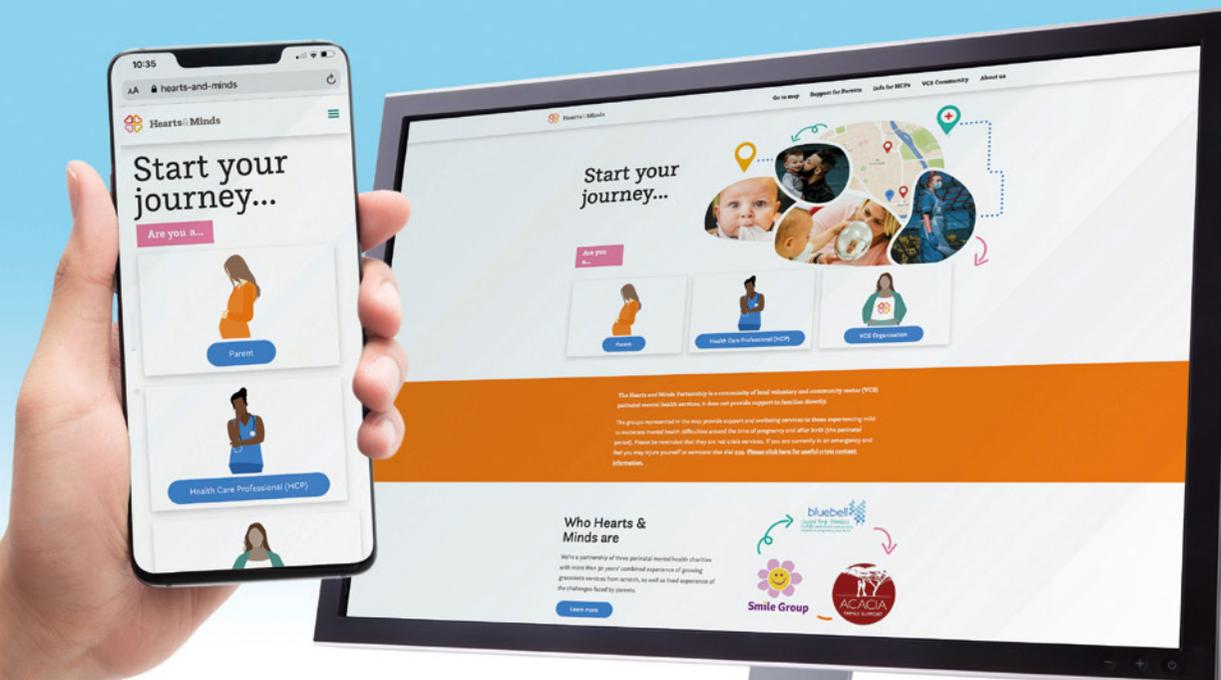
- Felt listened to and understood
- Were not the only one in their situation
- Were able to learn new coping skills
- Felt Acacia staff and volunteers were willing to go the extra mile.

Our impact supporting the wider perinatal mental health sector

As a well-established leader in the field of third sector perinatal mental health care, we believe good quality, local, grassroots perinatal mental health services should be available to everyone. During the year, our work towards achieving this vision included:

Working alongside two other perinatal mental health charities, Bluebell (South West) and Smile (North West) we have developed a national partnership that aims to connect and support community-led perinatal mental health services across England. We have created an online digital map of safe, good quality grassroots services across England.

- Extending our provision beyond Birmingham, we have developed a new project to support young people, BAME communities and dads/partners across Bedford, Luton and Milton Keynes
- Working in partnership with Birmingham's NHS specialist perinatal mental health teams to develop a BAME and Dads'/Partners' Peer Support Worker project
- Increasing and improving our online information and resources for dads/partners
- Delivering cultural awareness training workshops for specialist perinatal mental health teams.



Hearts & Minds

www.heartsandmindpartnership.org

A very different year for our team of volunteers

Our services are delivered by an incredible team of over 50 volunteers.

During the year, due to Covid-19, our volunteering programme looked very different, however we worked very hard to develop new volunteering opportunities, keep volunteers connected to each other, offer training opportunities and show volunteers how valued they are.

Our 2020 volunteer survey showed that during the pandemic:

- **93%** said volunteering at Acacia was **good/excellent**
- **100%** felt **valued**
- **97%** had an increased **ability to support families** affected by perinatal mental health issues
- **93%** felt very **connected to each other**/part of the team
- **86%** said our volunteer **training** was **good/excellent**
- **97%** had an increase in their own **self confidence**.



In 2020, our volunteers received recognition for their work by receiving a **Queen's Award for Voluntary Service**. This award is the MBE for voluntary groups.



“ Due to Covid restrictions, and the nature of my role within Acacia (crèche work), I have been unable to do much. However, the Acacia team have continued to make me feel involved and part of the team. ”

Acacia volunteer

 Amelie High, Acacia volunteer

Fundraising highlights

The year that virtual challenges became BIG!

In a year dominated by the pandemic where all face-to-face fundraising events were cancelled, and trusts and foundations diverted much of their funding to emergency support for charities through the pandemic, the team worked creatively to generate income and increase awareness.

A fantastic team of 10 people took part in the first ever virtual London Marathon. Running/walking 26 miles across Birmingham for Acacia, they raised an enormous £6,000.

Emma's Big Springtime Walk was launched in March, in memory of our founder, Emma Borg. The challenge encouraged people to get their wellies on and get outdoors to lift their spirits – something Emma strongly believed in. Lots of people took part and donated, raising over £600 and we hope to make this an annual event, in future years.



Lauren Seale raised £500 by challenging herself to give up social media and alcohol in the middle of lockdown!



Conor Pendergrast took part in a participant only triathlon and raised a whopping £3,320 – our highest fundraising total yet!

Our first ever family cookery class online, our Pudding and Pie Eggcacia Easter Event was a huge hit and raised an egg-xtraordinary £660!



Nearly 50 'Acacia Angels' continued to make monthly donations to us including those who signed up during our '12 Angels of Christmas campaign' We are so incredibly thankful for each and every one of our angels.

Chester Road Baptist Church brought festive cheer to all via their 'Doorstep Carols' event, raising over £500 in donations to Acacia!

Our Afternoon Tea events went down a 'treat', raising over £700! Boxes of handmade cakes were made by volunteers, ready for people to collect and enjoy in the comfort (and safety) of their own home.



Colin Wood signed up to row the distance of a marathon on his indoor rowing machine at home, raising over £1,100 for Acacia.





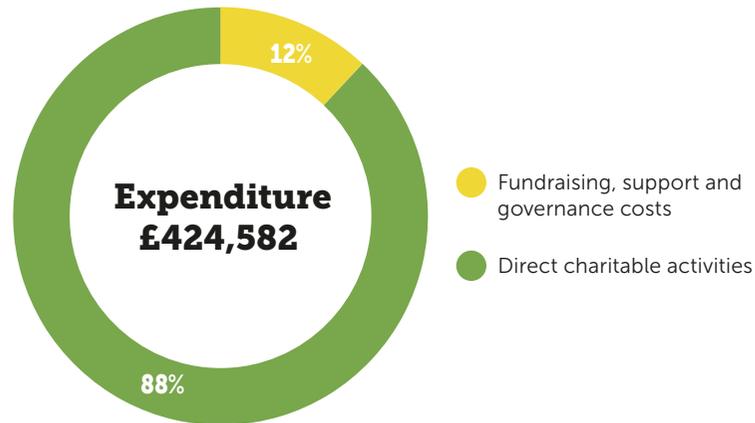
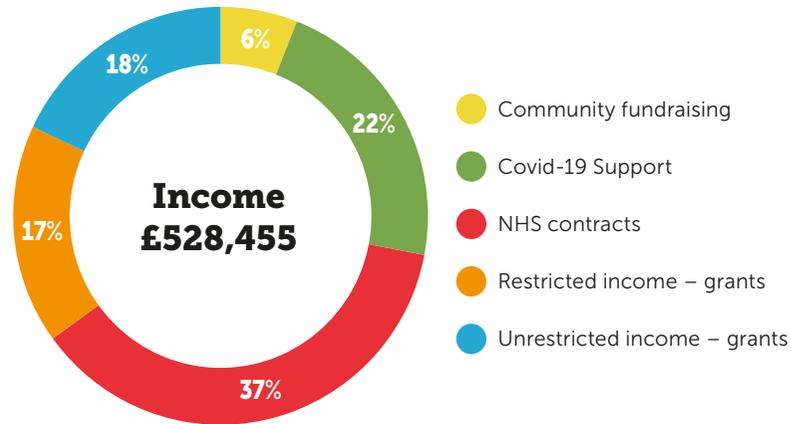
Lots of people signed up to virtual walking challenges, including Vijaya Beard who signed up to walk the distance of the UK, from Lands End to John O'Groats – covering a total of 874 miles over the year! Helen Kelcey also signed up to a walking challenge, committing to 5k a day throughout August, raising £500!



“ And then when I left I got an angel, which I have upstairs next to my mirror, and I do look at that and it makes me think about my befriender ... that reminder to take a step back, take a breath and think ... they are perpetual mementos of the support and care, and that message of hope, and opportunity, and sunshine, they make you feel positive. ”

“ Those sort of little personal thoughts, at a time when people were being extremely cautious, to have someone come out and actually bother and come and give you a little gift, was quite phenomenal really. ”

Financial summary



Thank you

In a year that has been dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic, we have never been more proud of the Acacia team, both staff and volunteers.

Their dedication has been remarkable. Their commitment and passion meant that we could adapt quickly and keep our services open, ensuring that the families we support continued to receive the friendship, love and care they need and deserve. We aim to always go the extra mile, and this year the Acacia team have certainly done that!

In many ways, the pandemic has presented an opportunity for Acacia to show what we do best, keeping families' needs the centre of our focus, leading us to explore new service models and the constant development and expansion of our repertoire to meet the needs head on.

As a well-established leader in the field of third sector perinatal care, we are also marking out a national presence and have much to offer in terms of supporting smaller grassroots organisations, extending our service delivery beyond Birmingham. This includes a stronger focus on our web presence. We have significantly expanded our provision of website based information, help and support, not only for Birmingham residents but for families who are struggling across the country.

The pressure on all charities in the coming year will be even greater as competition for funding from all sources is greater than we have ever experienced. Despite this, we move forward confidently and with your help and support we can together achieve our vision of a world where every family affected by pre or postnatal illness receives timely and effective support close to home.

Vicki and Rob
Acacia Directors

Georgina, David, Rachel, Hayley and David
Acacia Board of Trustees





A huge thank you to all of our funding partners

Thanks go to all the Trusts and Foundations and NHS teams who have supported us through the financial year. With so many sources of income being negatively impacted by the pandemic, we are hugely grateful for the support we continue to receive from so many. We couldn't do it without you. Thank you.



The Pilgrim Trust



The Eveson Charitable Trust



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