

## Wirral Maternity Health Justice Partnership

### OVERVIEW OF THE PARTNERSHIP

The first of its kind, the Wirral Maternity Health Justice Partnership is a collaboration between a maternity rights advice service and a women and children's hospital, which aims to support pregnant women and new mothers with a range of work-related and welfare rights advice needs. After a successful 12-month pilot beginning in April 2022, the partnership has now been renewed and is in the process of expanding its geographical remit to support more women and families with specialist maternity rights advice.

### About the Health Justice Partnership

Funded by the Cheshire and Merseyside Women's Health and Maternity Programme, the Maternity Health Justice Partnership is a collaboration between Maternity Action and the Wirral Women and Children's Hospital. Working closely with the midwifery team at the Hospital, the Maternity Rights Advice Service delivers advice around employment rights for pregnant women and new parents, maternity pay, and benefits. The partnership is an innovative project being led by Cheshire and Merseyside Local Maternity and Neonatal System (LMNS) to respond to evidence that financial concerns and social factors have a detrimental impact on mental health for many families during the perinatal period.

With the new partnership, midwives can signpost anyone using their service who might have concerns regarding their maternity rights at work, or who may need support accessing maternity pay or to understand what benefits they might be entitled to. The advice area also covers more general issues around time off work as a new parent, for example paternity and shared parental leave for partners and fathers, as well as employment issues that arise from miscarriage and baby loss. Advisors at Maternity Action offer free telephone advice, available five days a week between 10 am and 1 pm, and email advice which can be accessed via an online contact form.

The service offers one-off advice, as well as an Employment Casework service that is assessed on a case-by-case basis and involves on-going support from a specialist lawyer. An evaluation of the 12-month pilot showed positive outcomes for service users as well as midwifery staff. Feedback from women and families using the service indicated that it helped to improve awareness of rights, increase confidence to address the situation they had contacted the service about, as well as reduce stress. The Partnership is now in the process of expanding to cover more healthcare teams and clients in Cheshire and Merseyside.



## Advocating for mothers and families' welfare rights

Maternity Action has been supporting pregnant women and new parents since 2008, by protecting and strengthening the rights of pregnant women and new parents to employment, social security, and healthcare. The in-house legal team also advises the healthcare professionals and community workers who support pregnant women and new parents.

Along with providing timely advice, Maternity Action has an active programme of research, policy, and campaigning on employment, social security, and healthcare. Their focus is particularly on issues affecting low income and marginalised women, including migrant and asylum-seeking women. In 2022, their work influenced the Health and Safety Executive, encouraging a change in the guidance that requires employers to better support pregnant employees.

The health justice partnership allows the service to increase its support work for more people at an earlier stage, so that expectant and new mothers can avoid reaching a point of crisis. For maternity teams, it saves practitioner time to focus on clinical issues by providing a referral route for non-clinical concerns around work and benefits, supporting maternity teams to address the social determinants of health.

## Considerations during implementation of the Partnership

When setting up the partnership, it was decided to simplify the referral process and signpost users of the maternity service without official referral forms. This allows users to access the service at a time most convenient for them and enables the advisors to dedicate more time to giving advice rather than processing referrals. An information leaflet about the service is sent with the antenatal booking appointment letter, reaching women at an earlier point in their pregnancy. Midwives also use stickers on maternity notes to support referrals during appointment.

There is also no exclusion criteria for patients at the Hospital's maternity service who are signposted to the advice service, as Maternity Action offer advice on a range of employment and welfare rights issues. This further benefits the users, who are able to get timely advice, as well as the healthcare staff, who may have time constraints. Healthcare staff are further supported by advisors to identify patients who may benefit from welfare advice, with information on what questions to ask their clients or signs to look out for.

The stigma around maternity rights issues – and welfare issues in general – can impede the number of mothers and families who seek advice. The establishment of the Partnership has been an opportunity for the advice service to engage with those who might not seek or know where to turn to for advice, by promoting it through posters and business cards around the hospital, as well as increased engagement through social media.

## Any takeaway tips for similar partnerships?

Having the support of a strong project champion within the maternity service is key. The project is being led by a Consultant Midwife within the maternity service, which has been crucial

for getting the service established and developing relationships with the wider maternity team. A flexible response is also needed in order to make the partnership aspect of the project work. There was a need to adapt engagement approaches throughout the project, to respond to what would work for the midwifery team.

Another important factor is outreach and engagement with the local community and service partners. As the service delivers advice by telephone and email, there is no physical service presence. The next stage of the project will now introduce an outreach and engagement role to increase the visibility of the service and engage with the maternity team, local services, and women and families to promote service uptake.

Service webpage: <https://maternityaction.org.uk/cheshire-merseyside-maternity-rights/>

### **References and Contacts:**

Maternity Action Health Justice Partnerships Manager – Laura Arrowsmith  
([lauraarrowsmith@maternityaction.org.uk](mailto:lauraarrowsmith@maternityaction.org.uk))

<https://maternityaction.org.uk/>

<https://maternityaction.org.uk/2022/06/health-justice-partnerships/>

[https://maternityaction.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Evaluating-HJPs\\_challenges-and-opportunities\\_FINAL.pdf](https://maternityaction.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Evaluating-HJPs_challenges-and-opportunities_FINAL.pdf)