

Jenny A family's story

Jenny was living and working overseas when she became pregnant. Sadly, her partner informed her that he did not want to support her or her baby. Jenny realised that she would be unable to support herself and her baby whilst living abroad, so she returned to UK during her first trimester. She was forced to live with her parents initially. Unfortunately, Jenny's relationship with them had been strained for some time. During the pregnancy she developed depression which worsened as the pregnancy continued. Eventually she needed support from the Perinatal Psychiatric Services. Her mother was, herself, suffering from mental health difficulties and as her relationship with her parents deteriorated further, she was asked to leave her parents' home. When she was 36 weeks, she was forced to find somewhere else to live. After the birth of the son Jenny remained in hospital for ten days whilst receiving help from Mental Health Services. On release from hospital, however, she struggled with the continuing depression and coping with a newborn baby. She felt extremely isolated as she had no friends in the area. Eventually she joined a mother and baby group at a local church, and she was recommended to ask Home-Start Nottingham for help by another service user at the group.

Her co-ordinator immediately recognised that she was missing a mother figure in her life and carefully selected an appropriate volunteer. Initially the volunteer, Wendy, who was a mother and grandmother herself, visited regularly for two hours per week. For the first hour they talked about the difficulties that Jenny was experiencing with her sense of isolation, mental health issues, coping with a young baby and also the problems that she was having with the father of her baby, her parents and landlord.

Wendy was a calming influence, non-judgemental, encouraging and gave her impartial and sensible advice, whilst always allowing and supporting her to make her own decisions. She was also able to help her look at situations from a different perspective, whilst always having the family's best interests at heart. Through this support Jenny was able to cope very much better with her problems.

Wendy was particularly good with her little boy, so that for the second hour of her visit Jenny was able to do small things for herself, such as taking a shower or washing her hair, confident that her child was in capable hands. They also gardened, had outings and visited mother and baby groups together.

Eventually, Jenny was coping effectively so that they were able to reduce visits to once a fortnight. Finally, they both Jenny and Wendy agreed that she was doing so well that the support offered by the volunteer was no longer needed.

The family is now flourishing. Jenny is no longer under the Mental Health Services and is in stable accommodation with a good social network through her church. Her little boy is three, happy and settled and benefiting from the statutory free hours of childcare. she is about to embark on a two year Master's degree course, which, if successfully completed, means that she will be a State Registered Nurse at the end of it. Jenny is now both optimistic and excited about the future for her and her son. Whilst her ex-partner and family relationships are still difficult, she feels able to cope adequately.