

**The Summer edition
of BfN News**

BfN News

A fond farewell to
Shereen Fisher, CEO

Six ways to support
autistic people with their
breastfeeding goals

Scottish Breastfeeding
week round-up

Mums Supporting Mums

**JUNE 2022
SUMMER
ISSUE 84**





HELLO!

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SUMMER
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Editor's Note

Welcome to the Summer 2022 edition of BfN News.

This issue starts with a farewell wish to our CEO Shereen Fisher who left BfN in early June. She will be hugely missed but we wish her all the very best with her next steps.

We have some great stories about new projects that have recently launched as well as a great article on breastfeeding art - it's beautiful!

On pages 7-9, we have a guest article written by Dr. Aimee Grant on ways to support Autistic women achieve their breastfeeding goals - thank you for sharing this with us Aimee.

Thank you for continuing to share your stories, pictures and articles with us. Please keep them coming, we'd love to hear from you.

Contact

josie.fowler@breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk with your additions for the next newsletter.



Thank you to Shereen, CEO

By Sarah Turner, Chair of board

It is with sadness that we announce that Shereen Fisher left her role as CEO at BfN on 10th June 2022.

We want to thank Shereen Fisher for her tremendous hard work in moving the charity forward during her tenure as CEO.



"As a volunteer, it can be tricky to understand the place that the CEO has, and so the efforts put into change and evolve the governance and overall running of the charity may be unnoticed to many. That said, the near decade that Shereen has been in post has been important and transformative in shaping where the charity is and what it holds itself out to be. In particular, in the last few years, the pandemic has turned many ideas of what and how we support mothers and families on their heads, and yet, we have, on the whole adapted to the change where possible, in part because of the calm and flexible leadership that Shereen provided. Administratively, BfN has worked hard to show its desire to do the right thing for staff and volunteers as well as those it supports through being a Living Wage Employer, as well as receiving a Good Governance Award and undertaking the Investing in Volunteers Scheme. More broadly, as an organisation, we have fostered good relationships with government departments, public health bodies and other organisations working towards better infant feeding practices and maternal wellbeing. All of these have been done under Shereen's careful watch, and we are in a much better position for it.

It is, of course, extremely sad to have to see Shereen go, but equally, it is delightful to see that she is moving on to become Baby Friendly Initiative Programme Director at UNICEF UK: an important next step for her, and one that I am sure means we will stay in regular contact! More information about Shereen's replacement will be announced in due course; any questions or concerns can be directed to the Board of Directors (directors@breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk) or directly to me at sarah.turner@breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk."



I can't really put into words the amount of positive change we have seen under Shereens' leadership. To list but a few, areas such as the re-branding, the development of NBH and DIBM services, the leadership of a stable and dedicated central team and the transformation of our annual conference have been great successes. Shereen is leaving a huge legacy and will be very much missed. Thank you Shereen for all your hard work, and your support, over the years and very best wishes for the future.

From running round the park to long train journeys - Shereen and I have travelled many happy miles together. Likewise, Shereen has driven BfN forward - building relationships with so many organisations and leading us as we developed our brand and reached more families every year. Always keen to hear from the local staff and volunteers at each of our commissioned projects, Shereen really has been at the heart of our work. Her vision, determination and openness has been an inspiration and made working as part of the central team a delight.

Shereen you will be missed but we are looking forward to seeing where you take BFI!

Thank
you!

It's been a privilege working with Shereen throughout her time with BfN.

Highlights have been realising her research ideas and her passion for the inclusion and diversity work.

Shereen has been a great asset to BfN and as the first CEO has paved the way for anyone who follows on in the role. There have been so many positive changes under her leadership which have reflected the growing size of the organisation while keeping the ethos and people who work and volunteer with us as well as those we support at the heart of the changes. On a personal note I have really appreciated her support, balanced opinions and lively conversation and wish her every success in her new post.

Move in May Round-up

£400
raised

So May has been and gone, which means our annual Move in May campaign has finished!

Thank you to all of those who took part, we had an amazing 75 people signed up to join in as well as many taking part on their own or in groups.

Many of you took on the challenge of being active for 30 minutes every day, we were excited to see the huge range of activities that were undertaken!

[Take a look at our highlight round-up video here.](#)

Thank you to our community champions for encouraging us along the way and keeping us updated on your progress!

Louise shared this update with us just over half way through:

"So far this MiM I have been keeping myself accountable by sharing my progress with Mums in our services closed Facebook group. The first few days of the month were a challenge, weather locally was awful and I found it difficult to get motivated at home. As the month as been progressing I have been creating new habits for myself such as going for a walk while waiting for my little boy to finish school, distributing some of my handmade crafts for #MMHAW and we even started a fortnightly "Walk, Talk and Feed" event at one of our local parks (pictured on right).



[Take a look at our round-up video here](#)

We were lucky enough to be supported by various organisations who donated their time and energy to host live-stream or video workouts for us to take part in, all free of charge. They were great workouts, all focused on the whole family taking part. Thank you to BuggyFit, Ashford Striders CARiFit and Dance like a Mother.

For those that chose to fundraise, we are incredibly grateful. We know times are tough with rising costs and fundraising can be challenging in those circumstances - thank you to everyone who donated and helped us raise £400 - split 50/50 between BfN and DEC Ukraine appeal.



Southampton Group Launch

By Anthea Tennant-Eyles



Eleanor Johnson
Service Manager

Welcome to the Southampton staff team!

A new Breastfeeding Network commissioned service was launched in Southampton on 1st April 2022. We are really pleased to welcome the Southampton staff team – Eleanor Johnson (Service Manager) and Emma Elliott (Volunteer Coordinator) who are coordinating the service, Raisa Madden (Breastfeeding Supporter) who is covering 2 community support groups and Shona Puttkins (Breastfeeding Supporter) who will be undertaking home visits as part of the health visiting infant feeding team. They have been supported by 'South Coast' BfN Tutors and Supervisors, Sally Carter, Crystal Golding-Smith and Eleanor Johnson.

Huge thanks to all of you for making such a great success of the service launch! The team are working on transferring across current peer supporters to BfN to volunteer on postnatal wards and at community groups. We look forward to delivering Helper training and working in partnership to develop a Southampton breastfeeding friendly scheme that will be managed by the service. Exciting times ahead!

Annual Conference & AGM Update

Plans are coming together for the annual conference and AGM on Saturday 8th October 2022.

We are in the midst of arranging some exciting speakers and drafting the programme for the day, it looks set to be a great event!

The booking system will be opening soon to book your tickets, make sure you keep an eye on our social media feeds for how to secure your place.



Six ways health professionals and peer supporters can help Autistic women meet their breastfeeding goals

By Dr Aimee Grant, Centre for Lactation, Infant Feeding & Translational Research, Swansea University

If I asked you to close your eyes and think of someone who's Autistic, I imagine that you might get an image in your head of a child, probably with white skin. That image isn't your fault, but is a result of Autistic adults, and Autistic mothers in particular not featuring much in discussions around Autism.

So, before I dive into infant feeding, let me start off by saying that we know that people who are Autistic remain Autistic for their entire life, and at least 1-2% of adults are Autistic. Women are as likely to be Autistic as men. One thing that may be different, however, is that women have historically been underdiagnosed, with mental health diagnosis often common on the path to an Autism diagnosis.

We recently reviewed the existing research on Autistic women's infant feeding experiences, and came up with some recommendations for health professionals and others who provide infant feeding support to Autistic people, which I'll describe below:



Dr Aimee Grant

1. Clear, direct and respectful communication is a must

Whilst this may seem obvious, and what you would do with anybody you were supporting with infant feeding, Autistic people can find ambiguous language confusing, and small talk exhausting. For example, Autistic people might understand "How are you?" within a breastfeeding support context to mean that you should respond "fine, thanks" as is the usual social convention, and not that it was their opportunity (and maybe the only one) to describe problems. More direct language, and removing the small talk would lead to an opening question like: "Are you having any challenges with breastfeeding?" or a more gentle opener could be "How are things with the baby?"

The second part of this, focused on respectful communication, is essential. Autistic mothers reported that they did not feel listened to and sometimes even felt bullied. Active listening techniques, such as reflecting back the information the person has told you may be helpful here, to ensure a mutual understanding of the issue, for example:

Autistic person: "When he feeds on the left side it feels different to the right and hurts."

Response: "So it feels painful when you feed on the left side, but it doesn't hurt when you feed from the right?"

PTO.

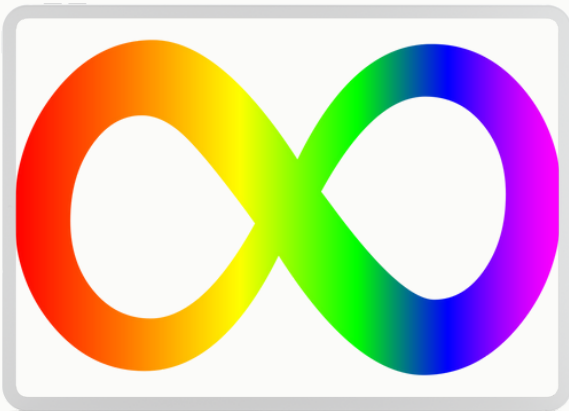
2. Consider Autistic preferences regarding touch

Autistic people are more likely to have a preference for additional space between them and you. This is because of differences in sensory perception, which can mean that somebody sitting right next to them can feel very uncomfortable. Putting up with somebody sitting very close to them, and/or other sensory issues, is a concept known as 'masking'. Masking takes an enormous amount of concentration and makes it difficult to think and to fully take part in conversations. Whilst you might routinely sit next to someone to observe their feeding, you could consider asking: "would you prefer me to sit next to you or (eg: in that chair a bit further away)."

As always, people seeking breastfeeding support should not be touched (nor their baby's head pushed into the breast), without explicitly asking if this is OK; but this is very important for Autistic people. Being touched without consent can lead Autistic people to 'shut down' (withdraw) or 'meltdown' (have explosive energy) due to overwhelm during or after the consultation; remember we are experts in 'masking' how we really feel due to understanding social expectations. Ultimately this can lead to withdrawing from using health services, and across a lifetime of ableist encounters, Autistic burnout.

(It is worth noting the BfN Code of Conduct states "If you work with a mother, helping in a 'hands off' way. If the need arises and a mother gives her permission, you may put your hands over her hands to help guide her in positioning her baby")

3. Staff and volunteers providing breastfeeding support should all have training in understanding Autism delivered by Autistic people



I'm sure I've said some things that most readers wouldn't have thought of already. This shows the importance of having specialist training in supporting Autistic people, and this should be delivered by an Autistic training provider, as many traditional (eg: neurotypical led) providers use outdated and harmful myths within their Autism training. In the UK, Autistic UK, who were partners on this research, offer training delivered by Autistic people for a small fee, as does the wonderful Monique Craine (an Autistic mother).

4. Autistic people should have a named support provider

We know that continuity of carer has all sorts of benefits for mothers. When it comes to Autistic people, there is an often said phrase: "when you've met one Autistic person, you've met one Autistic person" eg: we are not all the same. So even if the whole team has had excellent training in supporting Autistic people, there will still be a need for the individual Autistic person to repeat information about what being Autistic means in terms of how its best to provide care to them. If it is impossible for continuity of carer to be provided, guidance on communication needs and sensory processing differences (things like: if there's a flickering light, I will not be able to pay attention to what you are saying) should be contained within clinical notes, to avoid the Autistic person needing to repeat information or suffer through a consultation that is painful to them because of the sensory environment.

PTO.

5. Accommodations should be available as widely as possible

In our review of evidence, some Autistic people didn't know that they were Autistic when they had their babies, who were diagnosed as Autistic, which led to diagnosis for the birthing parent later in life. For this reason, we would suggest that the accommodations suggested above should be introduced as widely as possible, as undiagnosed Autistic people and people from other marginalised groups are also likely to benefit from them.

6. And lastly, language matters

You might also have noticed that I've used 'Autistic people' throughout this article. That's because the Autistic community prefer 'Autistic' to 'person with autism', in recognition that Autism is a neurotype, that is a normal part of cognitive diversity that is permanent and can not change. The reason I've used 'people' or 'person' is that Autistic people are less likely to be cisgendered, and there's a strong community preference for gender neutral language. You should consider asking Autistic people their preferred language to discuss Autism and never use Autistic Spectrum Condition or Autistic Spectrum Disorder (or their abbreviations of ASC / ASD) without the Autistic person saying that that is their preference. Likewise, asking pronoun preferences and consistently, trying (it's OK – everyone slips up sometimes) to get them right will really help Autistic people to feel more comfortable whilst you support them.

Stoke on Trent Launch

By Nikki Gallagher

Stoke has finally launched our face to face group after being commissioned by Stoke-on-Trent City Council back in 2020. We are all very excited to be welcoming our local parents to the beautiful diamond room in Westfield Children's Centre. It's such a warm and welcoming room, that opens out in to a play area which of course was very popular with the parents and volunteers who brought along their children! We are delighted now our second group has finished their training and we have come together as a united collective of wonderful local support for the families of Stoke.

We also piloted 2 antenatal breastfeeding workshops over Zoom, they were well attended and gave us lots and lots of laughs! It was great to have some really fun chats with local dads who were keen to support their partners to breastfeed. During our last social get together, Nikki (Volunteer coordinator) gave out packets of sunflower seeds to our volunteers to 'sow the roots of our group and always seek out the sunshine'. We are patiently waiting to see who grows the tallest sunflower!



Update from the National Breastfeeding Helpline

By Hester Schofield, NBH Manager

In June each year, we celebrate National Volunteers Week. It's a chance to highlight and say thanks to the volunteers across the country making a huge contribution. Since I started working at the National Breastfeeding Helpline earlier in the year, the thing I have been most in awe of is the contribution made by our volunteers. They keep the helpline open 365 days per year, while offering amazing support to breastfeeding families.

Whether it be a volunteer fitting the odd call in here and there in their busy lives; those volunteers who hit huge milestone (some 2500 calls and counting); those who have been committed volunteers for years; those who have just joined us and have jumped in and taken a call for the first time, it's this amazing contribution which is the foundation of the helpline! Thank you all!



The Evaluation being undertaken by the University of Central Lancashire is being finalised and we are looking forward to sharing highlights with you in the next newsletter.

Good Luck Alyson



Alyson Spicer has been part of the Breastfeeding Network for over 5 years. Starting as a volunteer, she took on the role of Social Media Officer in 2018.

Over the last 5 years, she has developed, grown and consistently managed the BfN social media accounts. Creating engagement, bold imagery and addressing lots of relevant information and support, she has been a key person bridging the gap between BfN and those we support and work with. This ranges from mums, parents and families to healthcare professionals, partner organisations and even policymakers.

She is moving on to an exciting world of hat making, but will be very missed by all at BfN. We wish her all the very best and thank her for her commitment, energy and passion for BfN.

[Click to check out the NBH website](#)



Breastfeeding Art

By **Melanie Woodward**

This beautiful mural is a new focus in the town of Greenock in the Inverclyde area of the West of Scotland. It all started with an idea from an Infant Feeding Coordinator, Catriona. Catriona said the inspiration came from her love of mermaids and fascination with Clota the ancient Celtic Goddess of the River Clyde. As for the amazing talons, remember mermaids need them to open clams and other shellfish!

The project has been made possible with a collaborative effort from Inverclyde HSCP's Infant Feeding Team, the Scottish Government's breastfeeding programme for government, Oak Tree Housing Association and of course the amazing talent of Glasgow-based Australian graffiti artist, Sam Bates aka Smug.

Greenock's history is focused on heavy industry particularly shipbuilding and the sea hence the link to this mermaid breastfeeding her merchild. This is really important to the local area because of historically very low breastfeeding rates. The aim of this piece of art is to spark conversation and to normalise breastfeeding in the community.

He recently completed his amazing mural on Nicolson Street, Greenock. Being very close to the local college, shops and on the main bus route it has made a huge impact on the community and received a lot of love online.



It mirrors a similar piece of artwork by Smug in Glasgow, found by Gemma Hamiton (Peer Support Coordinator) while out with her little one!



Scottish Breastfeeding week

By Kirstin Worsley

Scottish Breastfeeding Week took place from 13th - 19th June 2022 and there were some great celebrations and events that took place. The aim of the week is to highlight the science of breast milk, promote a child's right to breastfeed in public, encourage employers and colleagues to support lactation-friendly policies, and recognise the support that is available.

Here's a snippet of some events that took place over the week...



Western Isles

We organised a couple of events/parties to celebrate Scottish Breastfeeding Week – on Friday in Benbecula and on Saturday in Stornoway. In Stornoway, there was face painting and Bookbug. The Cruinn craft corner offered to do some demos of upcycling clothing to make them breastfeeding friendly (e.g. how to turn a regular bra into a nursing bra, how to insert hidden zips into the side of a top); and in Benbecula we had some sensory play activities from Wild Things Uist.

Forth Valley

On the Saturday, we held a gathering and celebration of Breastfeeding at the Kelpies - what a great location for a celebration!

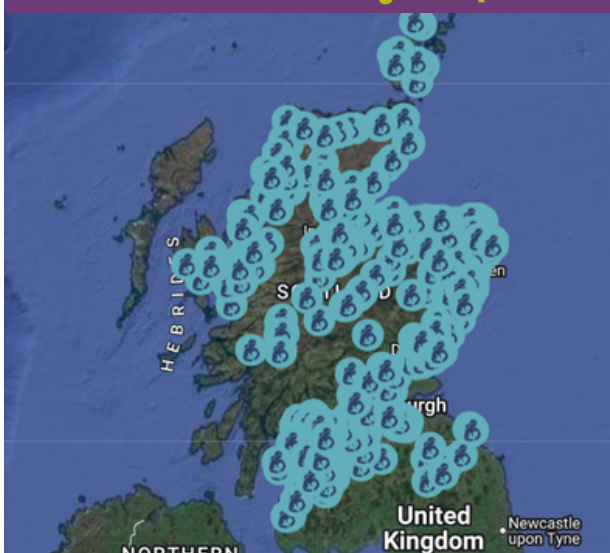


Amber Munnoch at the Kelpies

Midlothian

Midlothian volunteers met with NHS and the other third sector organisations for a picnic in Saughton Park on Monday. During the week, there were breastfeeding parties held by two of the groups: Glencorse on Thursday and Gorebridge on Friday, with lots of lovely baking and celebrations taking place.

The new BFF Google Map



Meanwhile, across Scotland, the BFF map was launched by Parent Club on Tuesday and Volunteer Appreciation Day took place on Tuesday.

This is a comprehensive list on Google Maps of all places signed up for the Scottish Breastfeeding Friendly scheme, all local breastfeeding support groups as well as online groups.

Take a look here:

[Breastfeeding Friendly Scotland](#)
[Google My Maps](#)



The Muslim Mum's Breastfeeding group

By **Natalie Martello**



Breastfeeding Online Group for Muslim Mums
First Monday every month

A confidential and safe online space for Muslim breastfeeding mothers, led by Muslim volunteers from the Breastfeeding Network

Please join us every month on the first Monday from 10-11am.
Find out more & register your place at <https://bit.ly/BreastfeedingMuslimMums>



I have lived in Lambeth all my life and also had my five children here. I had varying degrees of success when it came to breastfeeding my babies and the lack of support I felt encouraged me to support other mums in this regard.

When I was doing my Helper training in Lambeth, we were asked to share our experiences of support we'd had during breastfeeding. When I reflected on it, I realised that my faith and my covering had been a barrier for me when it came to accessing support. I felt unable to attend breastfeeding cafes or groups because as a covering Muslim woman, it felt extremely difficult and awkward to potentially breastfeed in front of men.

I asked my supervisor Anthea if there were any BfN groups running these days that would feel more accessible for Muslim women and she said there were not. I told her that I thought a Muslim mums group would be an amazing idea, a safe space where women could get breastfeeding support and demonstrate their feeding with no worry of any men being in attendance.

Additionally, it could be a space where Muslim women could discuss the cultural and social obstacles they face when it comes to breastfeeding that non Muslim women perhaps do not.

Breastfeeding is considered very important in Islam and despite this, I have many friends who cut their breastfeeding short because they didn't know where to turn for help. Anthea ran with this idea and reached out for a Supporter to help me facilitate a group, she eventually connected me with Mahmoda who is an Islington Helper.

We started an online group initially because of Covid restrictions but I have high hopes that we'll be able to put some face to face groups on soon. The women who have attended so far have been very grateful and a couple of them exchanged details and made a relationship outside the group.

I look forward to the group expanding and hopefully helping more Muslim women become informed and supported to enjoy their breastfeeding journeys for as long as they'd like to.



Natalie Martello

Congratulations

A huge thank you to everyone that makes BfN what it is

Helpers

Becky Brunt
Joanne Bickley
Issie Peel
And their tutor:
Eleanor Johnson

Sophia Procter
And her tutors:
Crystal Golding-Smith /
Eleanor Johnson

Aubane Pattar
Louise Davis
And their tutor:
Donna Ebanks

Deanna Stevenson
And her tutor:
Aurore Lasne

Jennifer Marie Richards
And their tutors:
Aurore Lasne /
Lindsey Coffey

Anna Petrac
Hannah Inman
Gemma Lee-Elliott
And their tutors:
Melanie Woodward /
Nikki Blanch

Katy Roberts
Marnie Horgan
And their tutor:
Sally Carter

Cherry Ryan-Bloor
Rose Giles
Jenny Powell
Keziah Pickford-Avery
Nikki Gallagher
And their tutor:
Lydia Murtagh

Raisa Madden
Ashley Gallimore
Sjusie Bond
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And their tutor:
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Jenna Gillies
And her tutor:
Sarah Edwards

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And her tutors:
Esther Pierce / Carolanne
Lamont / Kirstin Worsley

Clara Rutter
And her tutor:
Esther Pierce

**Thank you to all our
helpers - supporters - tutors - supervisors - staff - friends
- fundraisers - donors and funders.**

We value each and every one of you!

**If your name is missing from this list, please accept our apologies.
Contact us to ensure that you are included next time. Thank you for your understanding.**