



NCT Stars Awards 2018 – regional winners

The annual NCT Stars Awards recognise and celebrate the achievements, hard work and dedication of our volunteers, practitioners and staff. They all make a fantastic contribution to the charity's work by providing services and supporting parents across the UK at an incredibly important time in their lives.

After a round of online voting, with nearly 7,000 votes cast, we're delighted to announce the regional winners for the 2018 NCT Stars Awards.

Nominations for NCT Team of the Year and the Prunella Briance Award for Making it Happen have gone straight through to national judging and were not included in the online voting process.

East Midlands

Volunteer of the Year 2018 – *Georgina Clements, Loughborough*

Without Georgina, the branch would cease to function. As well as holding numerous roles including Membership Secretary, coordinator for two parent support groups and Advertising coordinator, she also does all the bits and bobs that don't always get noticed but which are absolutely essential to ensuring the success and reach of the branch. She also has a massive role in publicising the branches Community Fund, where the branch can donate more than £1,000 in vouchers to local parents in need. Georgina is blind with other health problems but very little gets in the way of her giving time to NCT.

Practitioner of the Year 2018 – *Rebecca Cumming, Derby & District*

Rebecca is a fabulous Antenatal Teacher especially when it comes to dealing with tricky characters with the potential to upset the group. She ensures everyone bonds well, encouraging classes to arrange social meet-ups and to start a WhatsApp group for keeping in touch. This is so useful when it comes to those first lonely days and sleepless nights after birth. She also supports new mums with feeding and Mother and Baby Yoga classes where she checks in with everyone to make sure that they and their little ones are OK.

Volunteer Team of the Year 2018 – *NCT Loughborough branch team*

Loughborough's Nearly New Sales are very well run and make a significant amount of money for the branch and for the charity. They also benefit the community with a scheme whereby some of the proceeds are distributed in vouchers to local families in need. The team also welcomes these families to the sales before the official opening time to ensure that they get what they need. The knock-on effect is that the families are then much more likely to give the branch groups a try, which is helping to reduce social isolation in the area.

East of England

Volunteer of the Year 2018 – *Nina Wainwright, North Beds*

There isn't a role that Nina hasn't filled for the branch: Branch Coordinator, Treasurer, Secretary, Nearly New Sale Coordinator, Newsletter Editor - you name it she's done it or doing it. She supports the committee tirelessly, volunteers at Bumps and Babies, promotes NCT Baby and Child First Aid courses, all while researching, via NCT social media groups, how the branch can improve the way it runs.

Practitioner of the Year 2018 – *Zoe Jarvis, Thurrock*

Zoe is brilliant at putting parents-to-be at ease – and providing the best biscuits! It sounds like a small detail but a tiny treat can make all the difference when you are heavily pregnant and exhausted after a day at work. Parents consistently rate her classes 'good' or 'excellent' with many going on to book her Baby Massage classes. Zoe's colleagues also value her highly, saying that she is an absolute pleasure to work with, reliable, responsive to emails and happy to provide cover if required.

London

Volunteer of the Year 2018 – *Roya Haghighat-Khah and Sinead Walker, North West London*

Roya and Sinead have resurrected a long-dormant branch. Their passion, commitment and warmth has helped it to grow quickly. Using excellent social media skills, they have breathed new life into it and made it accessible and appealing to all. Now, they hosts meet-ups, encourage others to run groups and have even organised a Nearly New Sale. They have demonstrated their commitment to providing informed, caring support to parents at a particularly isolating time. The volunteers at the branch are all great but nothing would have happened without Roya and Sinead who started all.

Practitioner of the Year 2018 – *Claire Maguire, Chiswick & Hammersmith*

Claire is more than just a Postnatal Practitioner. For many women who attend her Early Days courses, she is the family member they don't have to support them through the transition to parenthood. She treats everyone as an individual, responding to their particular queries and concerns calmly and with empathy. Women who attend her Early Days courses say she helps them to be more confident without feeling that they have to be a 'supermum'. Many remain in touch with her. She allows NCT students to observe her, ensuring that they will also have the skills to support parents.

Volunteer Team of the Year 2018 – *NCT North West London branch team*

This time last year the branch was dormant. Fast forward only six months and it has blossomed, reaching first tens and then hundreds of new parents in the area. This transformation has included launching two local coffee mornings (one needing to be relocated after just one month due to high demand), another coffee morning for parents with multiple children, several Bumps and Babies groups, dads' groups and meet-ups, popular buy, sell and swap WhatsApp groups and some great, fun socials. It is a truly fantastic team that reaches out proactively and also works behind the scenes to ensure, for example, that it is on top of GDPR.

North East

Volunteer of the Year 2018 – Alison Stephenson, North East Regional Coordinator

Alison's dedication to the region and NCT nationally is truly astounding. As Regional Coordinator she supports and develops eight branches. She has organised volunteer training, a Big Push event, and is also involved in the Hidden Half campaign. She is an active participant in the regional volunteer support network and an enthusiastic Deputy Chair. Nothing holds Alison back. It is a pleasure and privilege to work with her.

Practitioner of the Year 2018 – Emma Craggs, Sunderland & South Tyneside

Though newly qualified as an Antenatal Teacher and Breastfeeding Counsellor, Emma is already an essential member of the local NCT team. She is willing to travel long distances to ensure as many families as possible are supported and is always the first to offer cover if a Practitioner has to pull out of a class or course at the last minute. If there is an issue with a venue, Emma will try to sort it out so sessions can still run to meet the needs of expectant and new parents.

Volunteer Team of the Year 2018 – NCT Sunderland & South Tyneside branch team

Over the past year, the branch has reached hundreds of mums and dads. It ran many successful events and used the money to spearhead projects like Baby Bundles, distributing nearly 40 bundles through a domestic violence charity. The Treasurer posted a video to social media in support of the Hidden Half campaign and encouraged local MPs to get behind the cause. It hosted around 180 Bumps and Babies sessions and began Baby First Aid Courses as well as winning an award for engaging with GDPR.

North West

Volunteer of the Year 2018 – Amanda McCarthy, North Liverpool

Despite her children now being in their teens, Mandy continues to support NCT as a key member of the Nearly New Sale team. She not only volunteers herself but involves her husband and children as well as her Scout group and Lions International who help with fliers and any heavy lifting. She is happy to share her knowledge about how to put on a successful sale via Facebook and even acts as a fire marshal and first aider on the day. Plus, she was behind our first feeding and changing tent at a local carnival.

Practitioner of the Year 2018 – Alex Davies, East Lancashire

Alex is well known for providing structured Antenatal classes that are popular with expectant parents. She is relaxed with an easy teaching style and good at making everyone feel included. She also makes herself available out of class time to help with any worries around labour, birth, breastfeeding and early days parenting. Her colleagues at NCT are full of praise for her professionalism and willingness to step in and cover classes if a practitioner is unwell.

Volunteer Team of the Year 2018 – NCT Chester branch Breastfeeding Friendly team

The team has worked in collaboration with Marks and Spencer to organise monthly meet-ups and a safe place for mums to breastfeed, to access professional support and to meet other families. The team has also created a local directory of breastfeeding-friendly businesses. This has raised awareness of the benefits of breastfeeding and feedback so far has been very positive with mums saying they feel more understood when feeding in the city. The team is doing a fantastic job to support families to continue breastfeeding.

Northern Ireland

Volunteer of the Year 2018 – Christina Clarke, Tyrone, Armagh & Down

Christina runs two buggy walks a week come rain, hail or shine including picking up mums who need transport and creating a WhatsApp group so walkers can keep in touch in between outings. She is so positive and bubbly and makes a huge effort to introduce new people to the rest of the group, making sure they know how to access help and support. She also volunteers at a weekly breastfeeding group and is an all-round credit to NCT.

Practitioner of the Year 2018 – Áine Fegan, Belfast

Áine is welcoming, warm and knowledgeable. There isn't a question anybody has that she can't or won't answer. Parents say her realistic but optimistic approach is useful and empowering, particularly when it comes to issues like choosing pain relief. She is kind, caring and an excellent ambassador for NCT.

Volunteer Team of the Year 2018 – NCT Tyrone, Armagh & Down branch team

It's a bit of a joke but people in Northern Ireland used to think that NCT stood for National Car Test until this team raised awareness of the charity. They are incredibly dedicated, often driving for more than an hour to run activities and fundraising events over a wide geographical area. They campaign on behalf of the charity and sit on three MSLCs and several working groups to help shape maternity services for all parents. The team is an inspiration for others especially considering it is a relatively new branch.

Scotland

Volunteer of the Year 2018 – Alexis Brown, Perth

Lexi faithfully attends branch meetings and volunteers at Nearly New Sales. She identified that there wasn't a group that catered for parents with more than just one child and got NCTeenies off the ground – leading a wonderful team of volunteers who support each other, welcome newcomers and who are constantly looking for new ways to help local parents. She is very nurturing and volunteers blossom under guidance. The branch couldn't do without her.

Practitioner of the Year 2018 – Lorraine Rettie and Kirsty Nicol, East Lothian

Kirsty, who is a Breastfeeding Counsellor, and Lorraine, a Postnatal Leader, have set up a new NCT model for Scotland. The content of their sessions is similar to the Early Days courses but attendance is free (funding comes from external sources like the Big Lottery) and no booking is required. Having two facilitators on hand means that one can offer more focussed support to individual mums while the other moves the group discussions forward. Feedback from the mums who come credits the two for their sensitivity, inclusivity and confidence-inspiring support. This is great news in an area where attitudes to NCT are mixed.

Volunteer Team of the Year 2018 – NCT Perth branch team

The team runs several fantastic parent and child groups, mums' nights out and taster sessions. It has grown from 16 volunteers to 36 in the past year and is also running Baby First Aid courses. The Nearly New Sales have been very successful – helping local parents manage the costs of having a baby and doubling income since 2016. They've used social media to spread the word and it is wonderful to see what a difference they are making in Perth.

South Central

Volunteer of the Year 2018 – Lindsey Lawman, Basingstoke

Lindsey has come up with some really innovative ideas to support NCT's breastfeeding support services in the area. Instead of being disheartened when the county council declined to provide funding she set about raising money with 'Jug-Life', a two-woman show described as "an evening of monologues on mammaries with a spot of booby bingo". She also came up with a 'Secret Art' event where people bought art that had been donated by artists and celebrities without knowing who until after they had paid. It was an amazing feat that raised more than £8,000.

Practitioner of the Year 2018 – Sarah Crowdy, Basingstoke

Sarah radiates warmth, compassion and kindness. Her unwavering support as a Breastfeeding Counsellor has helped numerous women to breastfeed and saved the sanity of many others! Her text messages after birth inviting new mums to attend the local breastfeeding drop-in can be just the thing to help them get out and ask for help if they need it. She is quick to pick up on mood and spot if someone is feeling low or in need of extra help.

Volunteer Team of the Year 2018 – NCT Woking branch Baby Bundles team

Since a new team of volunteers came on board in 2014, the branch has gone from being almost dormant to vibrant with seasonal events, Baby First Aid courses, Nearly New Sales, a newsletter and a toddler group. But it is the Baby Bundles Scheme, set up in 2016, that takes pride of place. It started off small but has recently expanded with a dedicated team of volunteers. In particular, it is an incentive to grow fundraising events – no one minds lugging marquees, sweating in the kitchen or ringing round for donations knowing that the money is going to such a good cause.

South East

Volunteer of the Year 2018 – Laura Walker, Redhill, Reigate & Horley

Laura has volunteered tirelessly for the past year, revitalising existing events and getting a team of volunteers together to keep the branch going. She also set up CAKE, a free support group for new mums with plenty of cake that she baked herself. It's a great addition to the support services in the area that is hugely popular for making people feel less alone.

Practitioner of the Year 2018 – Hannah Appelgren, Sevenoaks & Tonbridge

Hannah combines being an Antenatal Teacher with Yoga for Pregnancy and Mother and Baby Yoga. She's dedicated, happy, positive, reliable, a great communicator and has a can-do attitude. She puts a huge amount of effort into making everyone feel welcome at her sessions whether they are parents-to-be or new mums with babies. Last year, NCT received feedback from 119 of Hannah's Signature Antenatal course parents, and every one rated the service she provides as good or excellent.

Volunteer Team of the Year 2018 – NCT Mid Sussex branch team

The team has shown resilience and determination to ensure that key activities continue during a period where it has been difficult to attract and retain volunteers. Antenatal courses, Bumps and Babies, toddler groups and Nearly New Sales are all still running despite the lack of people to help. Breastfeeding support is also offered on a monthly basis. Some things have had to go, but the team is committed to restarting them. In the meantime, fundraising is ongoing and social media active and up to date. An NCT Practitioner recently praised the team for the service it offers to parents.

South West

Volunteer of the Year 2018 – Jo Woodman, Salisbury & South Wiltshire

Jo works tirelessly as Branch Coordinator, Nearly New Sale Coordinator, Area Link and a Trainer for the regional team. She is eager, dedicated and passionate about what NCT does and attends every regional meeting and training day. She contributes to the regional newsletter and is always on hand to support any volunteer who requires help or support.

Practitioner of the Year 2018 – Amanda Chapman, Plymouth & West Devon

Mandy has been an important part of Plymouth & West Devon branch for around 10 years and her dedication and commitment is seemingly without limits. She is kind, sympathetic and caring and always prepared to go the extra mile to support new mums. As the only Breastfeeding Counsellor in the area, she answers all the emails and never refuses a call-out. She also supports the helpline and delivers breastfeeding workshops at all the Antenatal classes. In addition, she is training a new cohort of Breastfeeding Peer Supporters so that more women in the South West can be supported on their breastfeeding journey.

Volunteer Team of the Year 2018 – NCT Frome branch Sling Library team

The team provides demonstrations of different sling styles and helps parents to understand the importance of safety guidelines. They have also held pop-ups at the branch toddler group so parents know more about carrying older babies. They have embraced the new sling standards and make it easy for parents to reserve slings via a system on Facebook. They also raise money each month to keep the Sling Library going and are always looking for ways to improve it. It is one of the branch's most valued services with parents regularly giving very positive feedback.

Wales

Volunteer of the Year 2018 – Beth Hughes, Denbighshire

Beth wanted to see more support for parents in the area and was instrumental in restarting the branch, leading the drive to recruit enough volunteers. She set up a weekly Bumps and Babies group in Ruthin and got more volunteers on board to open another in Denbigh. It has been fantastic to see how these two groups are helping parents in a very rural area and raising awareness of NCT.

Practitioner of the Year 2018 – Rachel Webster, Flintshire & Wrexham

Rachel deserves an award for two reasons. Firstly, she is fantastic Birth and Beyond Practitioner who is happy to give extra sessions and answer questions and queries by email. Secondly, she voluntarily set up a postnatal mother and baby group in an area where there was nothing previously. This has proved to be a huge source of support for new mums, whether they are struggling or just want to get out and meet people. She is an absolutely lovely person for whom nothing is too much.

Volunteer Team of the Year 2018 – NCT Swansea & District branch Nearly New Sale team

The team has consistently provided two very successful Nearly New Sales every year for some time now. It has raised thousands of pounds for NCT and helped to create a very positive image of the charity in the area. Their commitment and enthusiasm are outstanding.

West Midlands

Volunteer of the Year 2018 – Lucy Wright, Lichfield & Tamworth

Every branch should have a Lucy. When the branch was struggling she stepped in as Branch Coordinator despite having rheumatoid arthritis. Since then, it has gone from strength to strength offering a pioneering Birth Experiences group, Nappy and Sling Libraries, regular Nearly New Sales, two Buggy Walks and an inspiring link with a retirement community. Most recently she has launched a monthly Breastfeeding Brunch that recognises that new mums can find it hard to master feeding while out and about.

Practitioner of the Year 2018 – Bridget Supple, Telford, Wrekin & District

Bridget is a very friendly and knowledgeable Antenatal Teacher. She is brilliant at preparing parents-to-be for birth but also spends time talking about parenting in general, including how to care for a newborn and building a positive and loving relationship with your baby. Her women-only sessions are very useful for helping expectant mums ease their fears. She always makes it clear that she is available beyond the classroom and stays in contact with her groups.

Volunteer Team of the Year 2018 – NCT Stourbridge & Halesowen branch team

Over the past year, the branch has grown and developed despite difficulties. In particular it has restarted Nearly New Sales and increased reach via social media. This meant that when numbers at open-house coffee mornings were dwindling, the team could ask people via Facebook what was stopping them from coming. Common themes that emerged were shyness, worries about parking and concerns about accepting hospitality that they couldn't reciprocate. This led to looking for a public space and ultimately starting 'Bridging the Generations', a group in a local care home that brings great joy to residents and young families alike.

Yorkshire & the Humber

Volunteer of the Year 2018 – Caroline Legg, Bradford & Airedale

Caroline is 100% committed to the branch and always looking for ways to extend its reach, including trialling new groups. She is efficient but also very considerate and caring – going the extra mile to provide TLC where it is needed. She has dealt with some tricky volunteer situations very well and led the branch's Hidden Half Campaign superbly. She is a role model and an asset.

Practitioner of the Year 2018 – Sarah Powell, Wakefield

Sarah is fabulous. She has made a huge difference for many women preparing for birth in the area and also helped them on their breastfeeding journeys. Her calm, supportive and unbiased approach is often noted in feedback from her Antenatal classes while other new mums say they would have given up on breastfeeding without her support.

Volunteer Team of the Year 2018 – NCT Bradford & Airedale branch team

This team works incredibly hard to provide a warm welcome to all families while looking for innovative ways to reach more people. It holds meetings in different locations so more people have access and attends local events. It listens to families and works with local leisure and health visitor and midwife teams. It engages with NCT projects, such as Hidden Half and successfully raises funds through groups, Nearly New Sales and a Cheeky Monkeys Tea Party. The team is proud of what it has achieved from being on the brink of collapse in 2016 to receiving amazing feedback in 2018.

NCT Team of the Year 2018

NCT Birth and Beyond Community Support (BBCS) project team
NCT National Baby Show team
NCT Parents in Mind (PiM) team
NCT Regional Volunteer Support Network (RVSN) team
NCT Volunteer Support Team & Co-Production Crew
NCT Peterborough branch, Baby Café and BBCS
NCT West Norfolk branch team
NCT Newham Breastfeeding Peer Support team
NCT Commissioned Services Southampton team
NCT Crowthorne & Sandhurst Revival team
NCT Frome Baby Café team
NCT Wolverhampton Breastfeeding Peer Support team
NCT Nuneaton Hospital Breastfeeding team

Prunella Briance Award for Making it Happen 2018

Belinda Ngugi, Newham
NCT Hidden Half Champions team
Alison Stephenson, North East Regional Coordinator
NCT Bridging the Generations team
Jo Doherty, Caterham & Oxted
Leanne Stamp, Milton Keynes
NCT Mid Sussex Saturday Family Group team
Sally Hogg, Caterham & Oxted

All regional winners and nominees for NCT Team of the Year and the Prunella Briance Award for Making it Happen are now through to the next stage, where their nominations will be reviewed by a panel of judges. The national winners will be announced at our NCT Stars Awards 2018 celebration on 7 March 2019 at The National Space Centre in Leicester.

Thank you to everyone who has taken part so far in NCT Stars 2018.