**Kirstie Allsopp**

**Raise the Roof**

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Dear Kirstie

I have been following the Twitter and Sunday Telegraph 'conversations' with great interest over the last few days. NCT is a charity very dear to my heart. Our volunteers and our organisation really do aim to support all parents, but we're not perfect, and our image is certainly not perfect.

Please allow me to tell you a little bit about myself. Once upon a time I was very anti-NCT. I was taught to feel that way in the seventies when I did my nursing training. At that time NCT and health professionals were very much at loggerheads. All women in the unit where I worked had a shave, enema, episiotomy (unless the baby arrived too quickly!) and gave birth flat on their backs with legs up in stirrups. Babies were removed from their mothers and nursed in a nursery.

A few years later I went on to have two babies myself, the first born by emergency caesarean section and the second by elective caesarean section. I had vowed to stay away from NCT and had done no classes. A friend eventually persuaded me to try the bumps and babies group locally. I loved it! My life was transformed. I went from being a mother with a toddler, screaming new baby, four walls, no car, no job, fast sinking, to a mother with friends, places to go, people to see.

I have worked for NCT in an amazing variety of ways ever since at a local, regional and national level, I trained as a breastfeeding counsellor, and last year my baby turned 21 and I had the great honour to be elected as NCT's President.

NCT does get things wrong sometimes. There have been ups and downs in the time that I've been involved, as will happen with any organisation with 10,000 volunteers

I would love to talk with you and hear from you on how you feel our offer to mothers who have experienced caesarean birth, planned or unplanned could be improved.

Kirstie, please believe me when I say NCT is not anti-caesareans, nor is it anti-women who have had caesareans. I have never experienced anything even remotely near this. NCT offers a whole range of support and we aim to be there to support all parents.

NCT's support for parents has evolved and changed over our 55 year history and in addition to our classes we provide a whole variety of support to parents and parents-to-be right through their journey to becoming the parents they want to be.  In our classes, facilitated by diploma education antenatal teachers, parents are given additional information to that provided by their maternity care providers and classes are a chance for parents to find out more about the birth they want to experience.  If this is a caesarean birth then antenatal teachers are qualified to provide the same level of expertise as for vaginal birth.

As a major information provider NCT ensures that all types of birth are covered so parents can make informed choices, based on evidence.  We have produced an excellent book 'Caesarean Birth: Your Questions Answered’, now in its second edition, written by three Antenatal Teachers who themselves have had caesarean births (a copy of which I’ve included).  Our information centre online has a range of information on caesarean birth, vaginal birth after caesarean as well as information on a whole diverse range of topics.

Our branch support network in local areas aims to be welcoming and supportive to all families in by providing a range of events and services which all can access, usually free or at a nominal cost.  Local services do vary across the country, as they are very dependant on volunteer time.

Our pregnancy and birth, breastfeeding, postnatal and shared experiences helplines provide access to support and information, usually from someone near to your home, for the cost of a local phone call.

NCT aims to make the experience of having a caesarean birth better for mothers, fathers and babies through working with the health service locally and through campaigning and we also challenge the increasing caesarean birth rate where it is driven not by the health factors of women and their babies in local areas but often largely by the lack of sufficient care and support available in NHS maternity services.

There is still so much to do to make becoming a parent a better experience for all parents. Although there have been major changes for the better in the last 21 years, I am not at all complacent. We need to do more. I want to thank you for publicising that need and ask if we can work together to make services better.

Kirstie, I would love to talk with you. Tweeting is fun and informative but I believe we might understand each better if we had a good old-fashioned conversation. Please do contact me by email s\_saxey@nct.org.uk and we can exchange numbers and arrange a time to talk.

Very best wishes



**Sue Saxey**

**President (volunteer)**