

MSLC Good Practice

Case study - A better birth environment and a new birth centre in Surrey

What has been achieved?

A beautiful birth centre at Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust with three rooms, providing birthing care for up to 100 women a month. Local parents describe the birth centre as looking like a spa. There is now also a pool room on the obstetric unit which is used frequently by higher risk women. The facilities are shown on the Trust website, and an increasing number of bookings come from women living out of area, now that they can see what is available here. Women are voting with their feet! We carried out a really effective parent and public engagement activity which was pivotal in securing the necessary funding.

What made the change happen?

The Head of Midwifery and the managers knew my views, and those of other service users about the lack of birth pool availability. We had also received letters from expectant mothers concerned about not having a pool when they went into labour. In November 2012, the Department of Health announced a fund of £25M was available to make changes to the birth environment. All maternity units were eligible to bid, provided that the application reflected the wishes of local women. The turnaround time was very tight and it was just before Christmas. It was a condition of funding that successful applicants must use the money before the end of the financial year, so any bid had to be achievable and realistic. Our bid was successful; we were awarded the full £400,000 requested.

How did you achieve public and parent involvement (PPI)?

Without an MSLC meeting before the deadline we had to work by email. We decided the most effective way to collect views of parents was to carry out a survey. We worked with the Head of Midwifery and the Comms Department to produce a questionnaire asking local women their views about priorities for improving the birth environment. The MSLC user representatives were all asked to contact the parents they represented and warn them that this was coming and ask for a quick response to meet the deadline. We sent the link out to all the user reps on the MSLC who in turn cascaded it to all the users they were in contact with. The link went up on websites and on Facebook across our two counties. The next day we had 100+ responses, and 500+ by the end of the week.

What did local women say they wanted?

The feedback showed beyond doubt that women wanted a midwife-led birth centre. The high risk women wanted a birth centre style room on the obstetric unit so they could use water for labour, making sure that we weren't just providing a new birth environment for the low risk women.

What happened next?

Meetings were held between the Lead Midwife for the birthing unit, Head of Midwifery, Matrons, Estates Department, architects and builders and users. I visited the unit and used the NCT Birth Environment Assessment Tool to guide my input, as well as the women's feedback. Anne said:

'The Trust wanted as much user involvement as possible. Jude Palmer (Vice Chair) and I went through stock photos selecting lovely relaxing views. We asked women at our NCT antenatal classes to choose the pictures they felt were most relaxing and would like to see on the walls of the birthing rooms. We chose a different mural for each room plus one for the midwives' station,

giving the birth centre a non-clinical look as women first arrive. We wanted three-sided cots to go alongside the pull down double beds, and were involved in the look and feel of the whole unit.'

<http://www.surreyandsussex.nhs.uk/our-services/a-z-of-services/maternity-services/the-birthingunit/>

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