

THE HOPE PROJECT

THE HOPE PROJECT

A programme for birth mother's

The charity **Pause** states that birth mothers who have had multiple children removed into the care system are **“typically young, disadvantaged with emotional, environmental and health-related problems. Many grew up in care themselves and their children face a disproportionate risk of becoming vulnerable adults, at risk of becoming pregnant and having a child taken into care.”**

Birth mothers are likely to have experienced one or more of the following:

Drug and alcohol addiction
Domestic violence
Street sex work
History of being in the care system
Chronic mental health issues
Criminal proceedings against them
Learning difficulties
Personality disorder

The key for the Hope Project to be a success will be based upon the relationship we are able to develop with birth mothers. We will work directly with birth mothers who are at risk of becoming pregnant and having their children taken in to care.

We want to offer a one-to one programme to our birth mothers as set out below, signpost them to relevant services and resources and offer additional support through Achieving for Children Strengthening Families, Youth Resilience and in-house psychologists and therapists. This programme will develop over time and will need to be flexible based on individual needs. Initially a six week programme will be put in place however the programme will be developed based on the individual needs of each birth mother.

The six-week programme will consist of six 1-2 hour meetings between a birth mother and a social worker, in a non-social services, confidential setting. The worker will seek to build a relationship of trust with the birth mother, and seek to encourage and enhance her support network. It will be delivered in a non-judgemental, kind, empowering, strengths-based way by the practitioner (who may introduce other practitioners where appropriate), providing space for the birth mother to share and be listened to, and time for reflection. This will be reviewed throughout with a view to extending the number of sessions.

The programme will potentially help link her to other birth mothers who may be further on in their journeys, through encouraging engagement with the monthly birth mother support group Links, provided by Adopt London South. It can potentially help lift her into new ways of thinking and acting and encourage her to engage with those who can offer support and accountability.

It can potentially help her gain insight into her past decisions and circumstances and build her confidence, so she is more equipped to make positive, life-affirming decisions and understand that she can shape her life rather than allow life to shape her.

It can also provide the practitioner with an insight into the birth mother's history and life and perhaps identify issues that have been buried, overlooked or framed in unhelpful ways. It essentially gives the birth mother a voice when she has likely felt for example judged, angry, crushed, inadequate and invisible through circumstances and her own inner critic. She is most likely isolated and self-medicating her mental and emotional pain to survive day to day.

This programme can potentially offer a lifeline to her if there is positive engagement and encourage her to believe that she can rebuild her life and work towards a positive future, and even possibly, when the time is right, have a child and be able to keep that child - not to replace the child or children that have been lost, but add to her children as a stronger, more resilient, insightful woman who has overcome many difficulties.

However, it is vitally important to remember that birth mothers are particularly vulnerable and many will have entrenched coping strategies such as denial or reliance on medication for depression to numb feelings that enable her to survive day to day. Some will have created beliefs around the removal of their child/ren that are not rooted in reality, in order to survive. Some birth mothers are not able to accept responsibility for their part in the loss of their child/ren and project blame onto social workers and the legal system. Many will have experienced abuse as children and have had multiple placements in the care system. A number will have experienced sexual abuse. In some situations, a birth mother will create chaos around her and make poor choices in order to avoid deep self-reflection, so care needs to be taken in addressing that "chaos." What is the safety net?

Great care and sensitivity needs to be taken in addressing deep-rooted issues with birth mothers, especially as it could increase the risk of suicidal ideation, trigger or increase self-harm behaviours. Mental health can be very fragile. Insensitive questioning on topics that are deeply painful such as loss of a child to adoption, past childhood abuse or domestic violence, could place the birth mother at increased risk if these meetings are not conducted with the greatest care and additional support not provided such as counselling/therapy. Some birth mother's will resist counselling and choose not to engage/take-up support offered. In some cases, it will be too dangerous to explore a past history with a birth mother due to her vulnerability, but focus on what is going well, new opportunities and practical problem solving will be of great value.

The order of the proposed programme can be moved around, as a birth mother may not want to open up about her history until she has established trust with the social worker - so a need for flexibility to build the relationship.

To summarise, the six-week programme proposed for a birth mother aims to:

- help break a cycle or possible future cycle of having children removed from their care
- help women reflect on their histories and gain clarity and insight
- help women regain control of their lives - emotionally and practically
- help women recognise they can overcome problems and challenges
- help women reflect on past and present relationships
- help women access therapeutic support
- help women focus on self-care and identify present and future goals
- Help women identify successes, achievements, strengths and talents
- help women identify isolation and sabotaging behaviours and engage with others who can support her - friends, family, practitioners
- help women to keep any future, planned children and raise them to be happy and healthy

PROGRAMME **HOPE**

A six-week (or more) programme for women who have experienced a pregnancy or pregnancies resulting in children being removed from their care through court proceedings or relinquishment

Holistic - a holistic approach means thinking about the big picture, holistic refers to addressing the whole person, including their physical, mental, and emotional health and life journey, while taking social factors into consideration.

Opportunity - a condition favourable for attainment of a goal, a good position, chance, or prospect, as for advancement or success.

Pause - to cease or suspend an action e.g. **pregnancy**. Key words: *Stop, cessation, break, halt, standstill, interruption, check, lull, rest, respite, time-out, breathing space, gap, interlude, and interval.*

Engage - participate in, take part in, join in, become involved in, go for, partake in, occupy oneself with, throw oneself into, and establish meaningful contact or connection with.

Introduction:
Why we want you to engage in the HOPE programme

- Time out for you in a safe space
- Space to tell your story, your journey, without being judged
- Time for you to explore links between your past and present
- Safe space to understand why your child was removed
- Space to review your health - body, mind, heart and make good choices
- Space to explore patterns and new ways of thinking and acting
- Time to evaluate your support network - family, friends, advocates
- Time to consider new opportunities and connections
- Space to explore being a birth mother - e.g. the value of letter-box, memory boxes, getting your life in order. Space to think about the value of planned pregnancies, within an established, positive relationship

Session 1: My **journey** (past)

My journey - (if not placing her at further risk) explore **life history and journey** to help her gain understanding and insight into why she became pregnant and why the child/ren were removed/relinquished and placed for adoption/long-term foster care/SG. Helping her to see and make connections. "The present can often be understood by the past" (history, events, circumstances). Were there emotional or physical triggers? Was the pregnancy planned? If so by whom? Did she feel under pressure from a partner? What needs did she think the baby would fulfil? What is her understanding of what a child needs? Was she in a stable situation - housing, financial, relationship? Does she want to have future children? Helping her to understand that she can make changes and plans to prepare her life for future, planned children.

My **birth child** - opportunity to talk about her child/children if she is able, and how she felt/feels about the adoption/long-term fostering/SG and contact plan/letterbox. Allow space to express feelings e.g. anger, fears, regrets, hopes, questions. Acknowledge that she will always be a mother.

Was the quality of the **relationship with the father** of the child/ren (healthy/toxic?). What elements of the relationship worked well, were healthy and life-giving, what elements were destructive, upsetting? Are there patterns in her relationship history? Help her make connections between significant events in childhood, and low self-esteem, current circumstances, cyclical patterns and poor choices. Has she felt powerless?

Session 2: My life today

Gather information on her current situation - build a holistic picture of her well-being, circumstances and needs through dialogue and listening (use questionnaire as a guide):

- **Housing/accommodation** - temporary or permanent? Condition? Any issues - e.g. damp, vulnerable tenure, conflict with neighbours etc. Signpost if advocacy or action needed.
- **Financial situation** - benefits? Income, outgoings, debt? Signpost re money advice - help with budgeting, debt repayment etc. Refer to local debt charities for debt management/support such as Crosslight <https://www.crosslightadvice.org>
Step Change <https://www.stepchange.org>
- Signpost where additional help needed e.g.
- Charity – RUILS <https://www.ruils.co.uk/services/> - **Pathways:** If there is a disability and or have a mental health condition, she may be struggling with housing or benefits issues. Pathways can help to put her on the right path with information, advice and advocacy, including professional representation at appeals and tribunals.
- **Physical, mental, emotional health** - how has she dealt with loss and grief? Any mental health diagnoses? Addictive behaviours - alcohol, drugs, self-harm, eating disorders, vulnerability to CSE, promiscuity, sexting etc.? Who is she seeing/talking to that is helping her (health professionals etc.)?
- **Relationships** - in a relationship? Status - living together? Quality of that relationship. Review of previous relationships. DV? On contraception?
- **Support network** - who is in her life that is kind and supportive (friendships and professionals)? How well supported is she? Has she isolated herself?

Session 3: Analysis: my **health**: body, mind, heart

- **Physical health** review and signposting. Are there any physical issues? Dental, drugs and alcohol, fitness. Signpost to relevant agencies re diet, healthy eating advice etc. (e.g. further education centres offer courses). Explore gym. Is she on contraception? Talk about **pausing** pregnancy to focus on herself. Is there anyone who can accompany her to sexual health clinic?
- **Emotional wellbeing and mental health:**
- Looking at grief and loss - different stages of bereavement etc.
- Assessing mental and emotional health by using online tools etc. and signpost to GP etc. if necessary.
- Confidence and self-esteem - assess and sign-post
- Therapeutic life-story work - refer to Achieving for Children psychologists/therapists or trained social workers or external providers if funding available.
- Signpost to counselling services via GP or such as Relate, relevant books, websites etc.
- Explore how she can build a healthy mind-set, a healthy identity, forgive herself where she feels she has failed. Encourage attendance at monthly Birth Mother Group **LINKS**.
- Offer/engage support to receive/write letters to the adopters. Letterbox has likely lapsed but can be re-started. Explain clearly why letterbox (usually) benefits all parts of the adoption triangle especially the child.
- Ensure she has a trusted someone who can attend appointments with GP, sexual health clinic and offer support and gentle accountability.
- Psychologists/therapists.
- Link to voluntary agencies such as:

Richmond Fellowship e.g. <https://www.richmondfellowship.org.uk/our-range-of-support/community-based/peer-support/>

Straight Talking re teenage pregnancy -<https://www.straighttalking.org/how-we-work>

Advocacy project

<http://www.kagadvocacy.org.uk/helping-hands/>

Becoming your true self - healing from trauma

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6y1eNsLLIq&feature=youtu.be>

https://www.amazon.co.uk/Becoming-Your-True-Vivian-Broughton/dp/0955968356/ref=olp_product_details?encoding=UTF8&me=

Session 4: Analysis: my education & employment

Explore:

- Educational journey, and dreams, hopes and aspirations
- Employment journey, and dreams, hopes and aspirations

Recognition and encouragement for past and current progress and achievements.

Can she read and write? Signpost to assess help/support.

Use icould tool -

<https://icould.com/buzz/>

- Signpost to careers service, advice and guidance from job centre, access to a career coach, training, further education, linking with employers etc.
- Provide employment pack of relevant brochures/prospectuses, training and volunteer opportunities (e.g. Heart Foundation), apprenticeship schemes etc.
- Tailor advice to interests, gifts, past achievements/qualifications, local opportunities etc.

-Suggest **opportunities** for her to think about

E.g. Charity Spear/Resurgo for 18-24 year olds -

<https://www.rhacc.ac.uk/http://www.resurgo.org.uk/spear/Spear>

<https://www.rhacc.ac.uk/> - a community college offering a wide range of courses in a supportive environment that can include Maths and English, including women's courses (especially geared towards vulnerable women) that can be residential. Bursaries can be available.

Think about mentoring/volunteer opportunities such as -

<http://bethechangeproject.org/>

<https://meetamentor.co.uk/>

Support to achieve success at interviews e.g.

Two hour dressing and coaching service for unemployed women with confirmed job interviews.

<https://smartworks.org.uk/>

Encouragement that she can achieve her goals - use YouTube videos to inspire.

Interests and hobbies - explore and encourage e.g. book club, choir, and fitness.
What does she enjoy doing?

Session 5: Analysis: my relationships

Explore Relationship History

Circle of love/support - use signs of safety tools

Making friends and developing friendships. Investing in/receiving from family and friends where positive. Engaging with professionals.

- Who is in her family and friendship group, are these positive relationships, is she isolated, who does she go to for advice, does she have anyone who is mentoring her - someone who she can trust and be accountable to?
- Does she know any other birth mothers? Are these relationships positive and helpful? Encourage attendance to Birth Mother Group **LINKS**, a support and friendship group. Help to realise she is not alone. Sharing feelings and experiences confidentially in a safe, accepting space. Making friends and developing friendships.
- Who is in her circle of support e.g. social worker, family worker, key worker, psychiatrist, therapist, mentor etc.? Identify individuals/services actively involved in offering support and accountability. Is she communicating with them? How often does she see them? Are they sharing information within the “circle” that is important to share? How does she perceive this support?

Sessions 6: Plan: my future

Exploring positive change and new hopes, dreams and aspirations

My decisions - what do I need to decide now? What decisions have been made regards contraception, pregnancy, future child-rearing hopes? What necessary changes have been identified? What attitudes have shifted? Am I more ready to take up the offer of counselling? Attend Links Birth Mother group? Begin voluntary work? What decisions have been made regarding letter-box engagement? What have I learned about myself through reflection? What can I practically do to achieve the future that I aspire to? What can I do to establish strong foundations in my life? What can I do to grow and develop as a healthy woman/partner/present birth mother and future mother?

Ideas:

Make a dream board based on identified, achievable hopes and goals.

Write a letter to your past and future self.

Resources:

The Aurora Foundation

<https://www.aurorafoundation.org.uk/>

The Aurora Foundation for People Abused in Childhood is a Specialist Therapy Centre, therapeutic community founded in late 2006 by Susannah Faithfull to help people like herself whose lives have been blighted by childhood abuse. Aurora was created from her experiences as a survivor of childhood abuse and her professional work with other adult victims. We were registered as a charity in 2007 and started supporting survivors the same year.

One in Four

<https://www.oneinfour.org.uk/>

Support people who have experienced child sexual abuse and trauma - group and workshops, survivor advocacy, survivor counselling, resources, voices. Workshop themes - The Body keeps the Score etc.

The Truth Project

<https://www.truthproject.org.uk/i-will-be-heard>

RUILS charity for those with disabilities and mental health conditions: For further information, contact Dawn Levy on 020 8831 6084 or email dawnlevy@ruils.co.uk

Pathways

'Our Pathways service provides information, advice, advocacy and professional representation for disabled people in the Richmond Borough. We can work with you to navigate complex information and address a range of issues, including:

Housing - help with rent arrears, disrepair, homelessness, re-housing, antisocial behaviour, disputes, challenging discrimination, adaptations, possessions, discretionary housing payments and others.

Benefits – support for appeals and tribunals in relation to benefits such as Job Seekers Allowance, Universal Credit, Personal Independence Payments, Housing Benefits
Health and Social Care – advice around the health and social care system, community care charges, disputes with professionals and support for medical assessments'.

'Our support might include:

- Explaining processes and timescales.
- Making referrals or writing letters on your behalf.
- Helping you to complete forms and making requests for extended deadlines
- Providing information and resources e.g. guides and top tips to enable you to access services yourself.
- Gathering necessary information and evidence including writing to GPs / other professionals
- Preparing appeals and attending meetings and tribunals with you and speaking on your behalf (if required)

'Our aim is to provide you with options, advice, information and guidance to empower you to access services. We work in a very personalised way to provide the support you need at a pace that suits you, step by step'.