

I JUST KNOW THAT I CAN OPEN UP IF I NEED TO

If I didn't come, I probably wouldn't know how to share, that I could share. I would be bottling it up all the time.

When I got pregnant with my first daughter, I was 22. Just turned 23 when I had her. And there was not such things as the group. We had our midwife appointments. And that was it. If I needed to talk to anyone. There was no one there.

Obviously, you could talk to your midwife. We only saw her. Like what? Every so often. Where, as with my fourth and fifth children, I saw a midwife every Wednesday when I went to the group. So, if I needed anything, if I had any questions that week, I can always ask her.

When I had my first daughter, I didn't have that. It was my first and so anything I needed it was just ask my parents, my mum, and my sisters and if they didn't know then we would be stuck as well. I didn't feel depressed when I had my first daughter. I was excited that she was a girl. I have five girls. I had three at the time. I thought maybe this was a boy because I was like, there's no way I can have a girl after having three already. And obviously it was another girl.

I must have been 16 weeks [pregnant] and that's when I found out she was a girl, so I went into a depression phase. I developed prenatal depression because she was a girl. I wanted a boy, so it was a "gender disappointment" and I couldn't bond with my 2-year-old at this point, when she was a baby or in the womb. I wouldn't want to play with them [the other children]. I didn't want to do anything with them, and I think they did notice that. I was crying. I wasn't myself, I just didn't want to do anything. And I felt really sad about it, really. My midwife recommended me going to the group.

They helped me when I was there - so you could talk about your feelings, and no one would really judge. And I needed that. With people saying, "at least you had a baby", "at least it's healthy", "don't worry about what gender it is". But when I went to the group, I was allowed to express my feelings - because I wanted a boy and I didn't get a boy.

Because I felt so low, I felt that I couldn't bond with her - because of that reason that she was a girl. I couldn't name her at this point. I couldn't really say "she" either. It was "the baby". I didn't really talk to her either, in my tummy. But gradually as I started coming to the group and my pregnancy grew on and on and on, it changed, it got a bit easier.

But obviously, at home it was hard to let my emotions come out, with the other kids and stuff. You know, you don't want them to see Mummy sad all the time. It was good to have the group and having someone that you can talk to, and talk about, and see. And them saying that it's OK to feel like you are feeling. That was really good to know that there was people there that understood what you was going through.

I just want to say that they should get a medal, these people for what they do. Because they don't need to do it. That's the problem, I know. Obviously, you've got people funding it, but these people all come out their way to go and do it for us. They take their own time to help people who are pregnant and have mental health needing help after babies are born.

And when she [fourth child] was born, it was love at first sight anyway. Because I knew this, when my fifth child was a girl, I knew that the feelings I had, which was like disappointment, still that at the end of it, I will love her anyway. I knew that, so I didn't go into that deep, deep depression. We named her, I was picking clothes out for her. And I was talking to her [in the womb] and it was totally different just because of the group, I find. It made me feel like if she did end up being a girl again, I'd have that support that I needed, just like I did to help with my fourth. I'm really grateful for that.

So, if I didn't come, I probably wouldn't know how to share, that I could share. I would be bottling it up all the time and crying all the time and not being myself. I think my depression would have got a lot worse. I think I wouldn't have been able to realise that I could bond with them.

I just know that I can open up if I need to, like even if I feel low now, because with everything going on with my other two kids, that's special needs, if I ever need to talk to people, then I have them to talk to. I think if we didn't have the group, then [midwife] would just be a midwife and you just see on the days you have an appointment. It was nice even knowing that she's here on a Monday or here on Wednesday, and you can always pop your head in and see if you can have a chat with her and she's always there to listen. I think that's really important as well because you don't really get that often when you're pregnant. It's nice to know that there is a few places that you can go to if you need any help or guidance on something.

My mental health at the moment, is it goes up and down sometimes, so sometimes I struggle with the five kids and then sometimes I feel like I can do it. Obviously, sertraline helps when my mood so I'm not very sad all the time. But I think it's good to talk as well. So, if I need to talk to anyone, I can talk to anyone. I talk to my friend a lot - I message her if I'm feeling sad or crap, or something like that.

I find that I have more people I can talk to rather than back then. The good thing about it is you make friends from these kind of groups as well. It's like when you go on a Wednesday and you're all pregnant. It's nice when they're catching up in there. Like they say, "how long have you got left?" and like, "how are you all coping?". And I like that. I like how you can just talk about anything with them. Because they're going through the same thing.

In this group that we have been to, you see the little 'uns, who's just had babies, and you could see how their journey's been different to yours. It's nice to listen and see the new babies. So, if I didn't come to the group, I don't think I would have that sort of thing as well. I had friends before but then you don't really see them any more often because, obviously, life takes over. I wouldn't have made friends that you see around, and they always come up to say "hello!" because I still have that. Like loads of people that was here in town and they're like, "Oh, hiya! How you doing? I haven't seen you a long time". It's nice to see that they do still remember you.

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To help us understand the impact of Well Together, for organisers and attendees of funded activities, we have used storytelling as a component of our evaluation framework.

Storytelling is an approach based on the Most Significant Change technique that has been used by the Old Fire Station since 2017, who now offer training and support to partners across Oxfordshire.

The Well Together stories are being gathered from organisers volunteering or working for a range of groups and organisations, and from the people who take part in the activities provided by groups. They are being collected in 2025 by the Well Together programme team who have been trained as story collectors.

By telling their stories, participants taking part in this approach, have the chance to reflect on what has changed for them through their involvement in providing activities and / or participating in them. How has it affected their life? Why has it been important to them?

The stories were recorded, transcribed and then edited down to two pages each - aiming to use the teller's own words, retaining their "voice" and reflecting the teller's insights into the impacts and the significance for them.

For more information about this methodology, and to read stories collected from a range of other projects visit the Old Fire Station's website dedicated to this approach:

[Storytelling: Human-friendly evaluation](#)

With thanks to our story tellers

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