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Consultant Perinatal Psychiatrist

Clinical Advisor Regional Perinatal Implementation Team PHA

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REFRESHMENTS - THANK YOU LOCAL WOMEN MAGAZINE!

- **Spotlighting CVS support & their ongoing work**

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Head of Regional Implementation Team
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- **'The Joyful Noise' Choir**

The Parent Rooms

Overview of the event - 2nd Oct 2026 - The Great Hall, Stormont

Welcome and Introductions

Lindsay Robinson MBE

- It was my **pleasure to welcome everyone** who joined us including Local Representatives - Cllr's, MLA's, MP's - with both the **current Health Minister, Robbie Butler MLA and former Robin Swann MP** in attendance.
- Special thanks to **David Brooks MLA for sponsoring the use of the venue, to Local Women Magazine for sponsoring the event and to the Maternal Mental Health Alliance our event partner.**
- Reflecting on the variety of people in the room including lived experience and those who work in perinatal mental health, I suggested **our common reason for being together was a passion and belief in the continued need to support the wellbeing of parents and families.**
- I noted my reasons for hosting the event came from my **personal experience of perinatal mental illness** and how **I joined the campaign in 2015**, as I spoke publicly about my recovery. I shared about establishing **Have you seen that girl?** and working for MMHA as their NI **#EveryoneBusiness Co-ordinator** for a number of years. **I concluded that 13 years ago I desperately needed access to support and services, so it has been an absolute privilege to play my part, these last 11 years, in our collective work to secure Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Services for Northern Ireland.**
- When we got the news, back in April, that the MBU was coming my phone lit up with messages and emails from across NI (and beyond) from those delighted to finally see it progressing. It was that afternoon when I mentioned, in passing, to Julie Anderson and Janine Lynch that "we should do something to celebrate" and from that this event was born!

The history of #SpecialistPerinatalNI Campaign

Dr Janine Lynch

Dr Janine Lynch has been **advocating and campaigning for Perinatal Mental Health services for the last 25 years. Without her work, wisdom and dedication we would not be here today.** We asked Janine to try to trace the history of the campaign, over the last 25 years, and in doing so she recalled:

- Many **dedicated colleagues**, from a variety of clinical professions, including **Geraldine Scott Heyes (Scotty), Shona Hamilton, Mary Duggan, Karen Murray, Caroline Bryson, Tom McEnaney, Julie Anderson and Deirdre Webb OBE.**
- Janine talked about value of lived experience and how **the campaign took on a new life when women began sharing publicly.**
- Key moments included **The Bamford Review, The RQIA Review, RCPsych NI Training, The Consensus Statement 2019 with MMHA** and many meetings with the **All Party Groups at Stormont.**
- In **2021, Health Minister Robin Swann announced the 5 Specialist Perinatal Community Teams** and in **April 2026 Health Minister Mike Nesbitt the MBU.**
- It's taken a long time to get here, there is still work to do in order to see the MBU open.
- **So many people made this possible and without them all we wouldn't be at this point today.**

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Lived Experience Panel

Alex, Danielle and Laura

- Before welcoming the panel to take the stage, I emphasised, again, that **Lived Experience has even critical and central to the success of the campaign**. Over the years many, many mums have shared their stories and experiences to **raise awareness, offer hope and call for change**.
- This has happened in so places and spaces - online networks; peer support groups; in print - magazines, books, journals, blogs, websites; at events and conferences; and via the media including BBC, UTV, Belfast Telegraph, Irish News, Newsletter, Belfast Live and many more.
- **We are thankful to everyone who has done so. Every single person has been part of bringing change.** There are too many to mention by name, in fact it just wouldn't be possible to do so.
- However we did want to put on record, at the event, our thanks to all who took part in the one of the most recent - the **BBC Spotlight "Mums in Crisis"** investigative programme with **Marie Louise Connolly** and pay tribute to everyone who took part including **Siobhan, Shelley and Danielle**.
- The panel, made up of mums **Laura, Danielle and Alex**, was expertly and sensitively chaired by **Maria Bavetta from MMHA**.
- Each women spoke with such **honesty about some of their most difficult days in the midst of perinatal mental illness**. Each story was unique but also **pointed so clearly to the importance of specialist services and the MBU**, which are vital for mums, and their families, when they are faced with such challenging and life changing circumstances. Everyone in the room was, and remains, **extremely thankful to each of them for joining us and being willing to share in this way**.

Update on the Mother & Baby Unit (MBU)

Karen Brookes, Belfast Trust

Following the announcement of the Mother & Baby Unit in April. Work on design and implementation is well underway by the Belfast Trust. A team dedicated to delivering this unit for NI has been established and is being led by Karen Brookes and others. Karen shared the following:

- The **Belfast City Hospital** site was selected following an independent review and scoping process.
- Update on **Stakeholder Engagement Group Wednesday 23 September 2026** with 50 attendees including: users with **lived experience, family members, charitable representatives**.
- Attendees were asked to complete three activities during the day - all results were recorded.
- First in a series of meetings over the life of the project.
- The **key themes** from this for the MBU were -
- **Support & Care**: Continuity, communication and practical support for mothers and families throughout admission and the transition home
- **Families & Visitors**: family-centred, supportive environment that promotes patient wellbeing and recovery.
- **Space**: Homely, flexible and family-focused environment.
- Karen finished by asking that as many as possible share their idea on all the above which can be done via this link: <https://s.surveylegend.com/s/6bjp>

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Spotlight: Local Women Magazine

Lindsay Robinson MBE

- Our event was made possible thanks to our **sponsor Local Women Magazine**. I thanked **Jude Dixon** (Owner) and **Kim Kelly** (Editor) for their kind and generous support over the last 5 months.
- Over the summer Kim invited me to join the **Local Women Podcast** where we talked about maternal mental health and Kim shared very openly and together about her own experience of perinatal mental ill-health. Thank you, Kim!
- We also worked together to highlight **maternal mental health** in their **Local Women Magazines available 1st October**. Five local women have shared some of their personal experiences, along with the support they received from a local organisation. We'd like to put on record our huge thanks to **Sorcha & Blooming Kids, Nadine & Support2Gether, Michelle from The Parent Rooms and Rosemary from Seasons**. Each woman's story is raw, honest and unique but not unfamiliar for those of who know the struggle of mental ill-health. Thank you all for raising awareness, breaking stigma and sharing hope
- Along with providing the **refreshments** for the evening, Local Women also provided everyone with a **copy of the magazine to take home**.
- Thank you to Jude, Kim (who also joined us at the event) and Mandi Millar (who was the journalist for the magazine stories) **the night would not have been possible without their support**.

Spotlight: Community & Voluntary Sector

Lindsay Robinson MBE

- At many times during the evening we stressed that **the campaign is credited to many, many people and many organisations**, some of who were able to join us. **At the heart of it has been the CVS**. Right from the start they have played a very central role in spreading the message, supporting mums and raising their voices to bring about change.
- We highlighted the collective work of **MMHA and Aware** who have led and administered the core campaign for the last 10+ years and bring together a group, every month, to share, plan and push for change.
- In more recent days, as we have journeyed towards the news of the MBU, we thanked and credited **APP and The Mas Project** for their campaigning work and all of the mums, who are part of these groups, who have shared their lived experience.
- **We know that working together, sharing, planning and collectively calling for change has delivered a clear message, consistently, to those who needed to hear it.**
- We recognised that while the focus of the event was on specialist services, there are many mums who do not meet the threshold for these. When that happens, it is the **CVS who provide the support so desperately needed**. We realise they do so with **dedication and expertise** and thanked them for the huge difference they are making, day to day, in the lives of mums and families.
- We thanked **Brian Pelan**, and his team at **VIEW**. In 2018, Brian dedicated a whole edition of his magazine to MMH and our campaign for Specialist Services. 30 pages packed with stories from mums with lived experience, HCPs and those in the CVS. It was key, at a critical point in the campaign, and helped us to raise our voices louder and spread the message of the work wider.

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Establishing Community Perinatal MH Teams

Deirdre Webb OBE

When Former Health Minister Robin Swann announced the funding for Community Teams, they did not simply just appear! **Planning and hours of work went into establishing them. Deirdre Webb was the person with responsibility** for doing so.

Deirdre shared with us the process which herself, and the team, took to developing these, highlighting it was a story of many people including:

- **Women and families** who have **experienced loss/death due to perinatal mental illness**
- Women and families who **shared their experiences**.
- **Clinicians and advocates** who kept making the case.
- **Leaders, commissioners** and teams who **turned commitment into services**.
- **Everyone who stayed with the work over more than two decades**.

We thank Deirdre for how she went about the work - she was always clear that **co-production was key to getting this right. Many of our voices were not only heard but helped to shape the Community Teams**, as they are today. The Community Teams are up and running in each of the 5 Health Trusts and have been for the last 4 years. **Many of the staff joined us for the event**. We thanked them for the **wonderful work they do**. I hear from Mums, regularly, who have accessed these services and **they always talk about the difference they make at very difficult points in the their lives**. Thank you to everyone for this continued vital work!

Maternal Mental Health Alliance

Maria Bavetta

We were delighted to have **Maternal Mental Health Alliance** partner with us for this special event. As an organisation, MMHA have played a central role in the campaign and **Maria Bavetta**, personally, has been at the heart of that.

Maria passionately reminded us all that **people made this progress possible**, that behind every big step forward are people who believed change was possible, and kept going until it happened. Celebrating with us, she said **there is so much to be proud of**, but there is also much more to do.

We need to sustain the momentum behind specialist services and ensure families can access the support they need now. That means **continuing to listen to lived experience** and **clinical expertise**, and **keeping perinatal mental health firmly on the agenda for decision-makers**. The real legacy will be the families whose lives are different because specialist support was there when they needed it most. **And that is a future worth continuing to fight for!**

We all agreed! **Thank you to Maria for making the journey to be with us**. Thank you to **everyone at MMHA** who makes the work possible and **supports perinatal mental health, locally and nationally**.

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‘The Joyful Noise’ Choir

The Parent Rooms

I think all of us were **absolutely blown away by the choir**, who well and truly completed the night. It would not have been the same without them. They brought **fun, light, joy, warmth, music and energy** and had us all singing along, some of us were even out of our seats!

The Choir are part of **The Parent Rooms** charity, which is **based in North Belfast** and was founded by **Michelle Bradley**. Michelle is a mum with lived experience of perinatal mental illness who has been an active part of the campaign for the last 10 years. The **Parent Rooms supports parents from all over Northern Ireland with their mental and emotional wellbeing** in a variety of ways - there is something for everyone - the choir being one of them!

Singing three pieces at the event :

- **Dreams by Fleetwood Mac**
- **Truly, Madly, Deeply by Savage Garden**
- **Dreams by the Cranberries**

It was made up of **Mairead, Gail, Ciara, Stacey, Danielle and Rachel** led by **Choir Master Dave!**

They were **honestly amazing** - **we can't thank or praise them enough!**

By the way, **all are welcome to join!** They currently meet on a Wednesday morning and you can pop along and give it a go.

Get in touch with Michelle, and the team, if you'd like more info about the Choir or The Parent Rooms!

