



The Impact of
Akwaaba

Breaking Barriers

Research shows that mental health difficulties are 13% higher in mothers from racialised communities compared to white mothers. Black women are least likely to initiate treatment or receive follow-up treatment and are 2.9 times likely to die in pregnancy, childbirth and 6 weeks after in the UK. MumsAid's own research, undertaken in 2021 and quoted overleaf, identified a clear need for specialist services tailored to the needs of B&GM women.



**Dr. Miriam Donaghy,
Founder & CEO**

“Targeted outreach is required to ensure accessibility for mothers from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. NHS services need to work collaboratively with local faith communities and groups from different ethnic backgrounds to de-stigmatise mental illness and promote conversations about perinatal wellbeing. Representatives from services need to form strong relationships with local faith and community leaders and earn their trust. Women from these communities who have accessed perinatal mental health care should be supported to share their stories, if they wish to do so. Peer support initiatives within communities should be encouraged and nurtured, functioning independently while maintaining links with the NHS.


This will promote access to services, but it is equally important that, when women do access services, the care they receive is therapeutic and effective. This requires services to be culturally relevant. Research shows that healthcare professionals in the UK lack the training and the confidence to identify the specific needs of black women and that this causes black mothers to ‘fall through the net’.”

[**Read Full Report Here**](#)

Listening and Responding

In response to these findings, MumsAid established the Akwaaba mental health service in Greenwich. The service, now in its third year, provides culturally-sensitive specialist perinatal mental health care pre and post birth. It is designed and delivered by Black and Global Majority (B&GM) staff, with feedback from service users shaping ongoing services.

Through this service we address the stark disparities in mental health outcomes, where B&GM mothers face challenges such as cultural stigma and language barriers, by creating an environment where they feel safe and understood. Our approach is both proactive and community-driven, leveraging the lived experiences of our B&GM staff and clients to inform the services we provide.



Mercy Browne
Specialist Mental Health Nurse

MumsAid
Supporting Mums and their Families

"Akwaaba itself means welcome and most of us, wherever we are, want to be welcomed"

By offering support from Black and global majority counsellors, we help all mothers to feel safe and understood. This trauma-informed service is designed to be flexible, accessible and non-judgemental, so that no mother is excluded from the care she needs.

Outcomes for the Akwaaba service over 12 months reflect that it provides effective support, and recognises and addresses the challenges of this community, ultimately improving mental health outcomes for B&GM mothers and their families.

Measuring impact

We track and measure the impact of all our work – making sure that what we do makes a real difference for mums, babies and their families. We use a variety of methods to do this, including:

- Social connections questionnaire
- Nationally-recognised clinical measures for mental health outcomes e.g. the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS) and Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)
- Mother-baby observations during group sessions
- Case studies
- Client and referrer testimonials
- Focus groups facilitated by a lived-experience researcher

89% of mums reported improvements in depression and anxiety

63% reported a good bond with their baby

80% reported improved resilience

98% reported feeling better able to cope, less isolated & more positive

75% reported improved confidence and well-being

100% Felt they have benefitted from the support received

45 women
supported with

12
counselling
sessions

318
advocacy sessions
were delivered to

81 mums

Towards Confidence

Sarah's Story

Sarah is a pseudonym used to protect identity.

Sarah is a 27-year-old Black African mother navigating early parenthood while managing significant personal challenges. When she first came to us, she was living apart from her partner, who was unable to work while awaiting a Home Office decision. Sarah has no family in the UK. She was trafficked as a child and later experienced a breakdown in her long-term foster placement. Sarah was facing motherhood with very limited support.

At the same time, Sarah was in the final year of her degree. Financial pressures were intense; her student loan was not enough to cover basic living costs, and she was experiencing food insecurity. Alongside this, she was living with severe, undiagnosed back pain linked to past trauma, which had worsened after giving birth and was affecting both her physical and emotional wellbeing.

Emotionally, Sarah described a persistent low mood following the birth of her baby. This was deepened during her pregnancy when she learned that her birth mother had died while giving birth to another child. This loss resurfaced complex feelings about motherhood, grief and identity.

Building confidence and boundaries

Sarah engaged in 15 counselling sessions, focusing on her anxieties around motherhood and developing practical coping strategies. One of the most significant areas of growth was her understanding of personal boundaries.

At the start, Sarah often placed others' needs ahead of her own and found it difficult to recognise her right to rest, ask for help, or prioritise her wellbeing. Through consistent therapeutic support, and by experiencing clear, reliable boundaries within sessions themselves, Sarah began to understand how essential boundaries are for emotional safety and self-care.

Over time, she grew more confident in asserting her needs, particularly within her relationship. She began to recognise that asking for support was not a weakness, but a necessary and healthy step.

Reducing isolation and accessing wider support

To combat isolation, Sarah joined the Akwaaba group, where she connected with other mothers and began to rebuild a sense of community. Through this group, she also accessed advocacy support, which helped her take the important step of contacting her GP about her ongoing back pain - an issue she had previously felt unable to pursue. She also began to access practical resources, including using a food bank towards the end of her student loan period. This marked an important shift from feelings of shame and avoidance to proactive problem-solving.

A foundation for the future

Sarah's journey reflects growing confidence, resilience and self-awareness. By the end of her support, she had developed stronger boundaries, increased her ability to advocate for herself, and taken meaningful steps to access both emotional and practical support.

“The best thing about the service is that it’s free, flexible, and I can speak openly without feeling judged. I found it useful and liked it was for Black and Brown Women. We need more places like this.”



With thanks to our funders and donors

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The Mayor of London's New Deal for Young People
The Royal Borough of Greenwich for Akwaaba, Mighty Acorns and YoungMumsAid through Family Hubs Funding
The Royal Borough of Greenwich Commissioning for Perinatal Counselling
The Royal Borough of Greenwich Winter Support Grant