

Accessible mental health support

Dr Miriam Donaghy, CEO and Founder of MumsAid, discusses the charity's work to transform lives by providing mental health support for mothers

Early identification of perinatal mental health difficulties is critical, but access to appropriate support remains a significant challenge. Up to 10 000 mothers each year may miss out on essential mental health support (Campbell, 2023), with demand for perinatal mental health services increasing by 40% while access has grown by only 8% (Tubb, 2023).

MumsAid was founded in 2012 in southeast London, and is a multi-award-winning charity dedicated to making maternal mental health support accessible to all who need it. With a proven track record of reaching women from marginalised communities who often struggle to access mainstream provision, MumsAid has also witnessed this huge increase in demand for support.

'Mothers who go through MumsAid's counselling programme show significant improvements in their mental health. These improvements mean better immediate quality of life for the mother, better bonds between mother and child, and as a result, better long-term emotional, developmental and educational outcomes for the child'. Hughson, 2024

Comprehensive support that works

MumsAid's commitment to accessibility and inclusion has remained central to its delivery through its growth from a small grassroots initiative offering perinatal counselling to an organisation that has supported over 5000 women and developed a number of different innovative services. The charity offers a holistic and flexible approach using

Miriam Donaghy
Founder and CEO, MumsAid

a therapeutic model, STARK©, developed by the founder and CEO, Dr Miriam Donaghy (2021), drawing on her 25 years' experience of delivering perinatal mental health support in the community.

STARK is a proven and effective framework that uses a biopsychosocial approach to deliver transformative and accessible care to meet diverse needs in maternal mental health (Donaghy, 2021). The current service provision offered includes:

- Specialist perinatal counselling delivered by clinically supervised and trained counsellors
- Young MumsAid: a trauma-informed wrap-around service for mothers under 21 years old (up to 25 years old with special educational needs)
- Therapeutic and peer support groups that build vital connections
- Outreach and Advocacy, offering practical support with housing, benefits, health appointments and safeguarding
- Mighty Acorns Plus: supporting parents of babies with disabilities or complex medical needs
- Akwaaba: culturally sensitive support for Black and global majority mothers
- Restore trauma service: supporting mothers who have experienced birth trauma
- Art therapy groups: creating space for creative expression
- 24-hour text service: providing crisis support

Making a measurable difference

MumsAid robustly evaluates the effectiveness of its services and monitors outcomes with pre- and post-service questionnaires using several recognised clinical scales. In its most recent internal evaluation, significant positive outcomes were demonstrated across all measures, which included:

- 93% of mothers were less depressed as measured by scores on the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale
- 87% reported improved bonding with their baby
- 85% reported marked improvement in confidence
- 94% saw improvements in their perceived stress scale scores
- 100% said they would recommend the service.

Behind these statistics are real stories of transformation.

'I was going through a really difficult time when I first looked for help and found your service by chance from a poster at my GP clinic. The support and insight I have gained through counselling has made such a difference to my mental health and also given me tools to move forward. It's helped set me up to be a happier and more confident mum and I really can't thank the MumsAid team enough for their help'. Mother and service user

Responsive approach

The organisation's development of services has been shaped through identifying and being responsive to unmet need. One example is its pioneering work with teenage mothers (Young MumsAid), ongoing since 2014. This was recognised as a best practice example by the Maternal Mental Health Alliance (Bavetta and Rayner, 2023), which has clearly demonstrated how targeted, specialised support can transform outcomes for both mothers and babies from underserved groups.

Internal evaluation remains part of MumsAid's commitment to an 'action research' approach to service development, where a cyclical process of planning, action, observation and reflection is used

to continuously improve services. External evaluations by the McPin Foundation in 2020 (Robotham et al, 2020) and more recently by Pro Bono Economics in 2024 (Hughson, 2024) have also played a key role in providing clear evidence of the effectiveness of MumsAid's provision to effect long-term change.

Evidence of lasting change

The recently published independent economic analysis by Pro Bono Economics, 'Pregnant then blue? The value of MumsAid counselling for new and expectant mothers' (Hughson, 2024), examined data from more than 300 mothers who participated in MumsAid's counselling programme over 5 years, revealing impressive outcomes. In particular, the analysis showed that 76% of the mothers who completed counselling experienced significant improvement in their mental health (Hughson, 2024).

Hughson (2024) quantified the economic value of MumsAid counselling, stating that even taking a very conservative estimate of the benefits, the improved quality of life achieved through MumsAid's counselling service amounted to over £10 000 per mother supported. Further, the analysis shows that even if only 1 in 7 mothers' recoveries can be attributed to MumsAid's intervention, the economic benefits outweigh the costs of the programme, indicating excellent value for money in healthcare spending (Hughson, 2024).

Putting this achievement into context, the report noted that NHS (2024) talking therapies (previously known as improving access to psychological therapies) demonstrated that for those who completed treatment, 47% had a reliable recovery and 67% showed reliable improvement. MumsAid's results (56% showing recovery, 76% reliable improvement), are comparable or indeed favourable (Hughson, 2024).

Building on experience

Since its inception, MumsAid's work has gained significant recognition with national and local awards in acknowledgement of its contribution and innovation. The MumsAid team are delighted that the Pro Bono Economics analysis offered further validation.

'This relatively small organisation is achieving so much and supporting so many and is still able to demonstrate impressive outcomes for both mother and baby'. Kings Fund Judge, GSK Impact Award

Over the past year, in addition to service delivery, MumsAid has expanded its impact by supporting ongoing research projects through membership of steering groups and input into safeguarding and other considerations. These include an ongoing young mums study at York University (Naughton-Doe et al, 2024) and the GABI study with the Royal London Hospital and Kings College, London University (Anderson et al, 2025).

MumsAid has also delivered perinatal mental health awareness training to corporate organisations and provided

‘[MumsAid’s] pioneering work ... has clearly demonstrated how targeted, specialised support can transform outcomes’

monthly clinical supervision to a team of 11 specialist midwives who carry caseloads of women with high and complex needs. This extension of sharing expertise helps ensure that more practitioners working with vulnerable mothers can benefit from the organisation's accumulated knowledge and experience.

Looking forward

Highlighting the benefit achieved through the accessibility of MumsAid's service for marginalised groups compared to mainstream services, the Pro Bono Economics report (Hughson, 2024) reinforced the value of the charity's approach to make a profound difference in the lives of mothers and their children.

'By helping mothers who might otherwise not receive the assistance they need, MumsAid's counselling program plays a critical role in supporting mothers and

children, with benefits which are likely to spread wider and endure far longer than is shown in this report'. Hughson, 2024

Looking to the future, the charity intends to focus on expanding this proven model of delivering long-term impact, continuing to develop innovative responses to emerging needs, and sharing its expertise more widely through increased training and clinical supervision provision across the maternal health sector and beyond. **BJM**

For further information about MumsAid's services, please visit www.mums-aid.org or email info@mums-aid.org

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