

# Encouraging Teenage Mothers to Breastfeed

## Project details

**Sponsor:** NHS Bristol

**BSMC team:** [Alan Tapp](#), [Celia Rhodes](#) and [Stella Warren](#)

## Background

UK teenage mothers are particularly prone to low levels of breastfeeding and there has been a lack of response to traditional health education approaches. Bristol NHS asked us to provide in-depth qualitative research to help uncover the drivers and motivations behind infant feeding decisions, and the cultural, family and peer group dynamics that influence these young mothers.

## The research

We conducted an in-depth, qualitative exploration into the use of social marketing to address the problem, interviewing teenage mothers, influencers and sector professionals. The research aimed to understand the barriers and enablers not only to trying breast feeding but to sustaining feeding for as long as possible for the benefit of both mother and baby.

## Results

Combining the research findings with key principles of the discipline enabled us to recommend specific strategies. A close match between the findings and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) enabled a behaviour change framework to be created that guided the deployment of social marketing. The most important findings were that the decision to breast or bottle feed was not a high priority for most teenage mothers. Although the health benefits of breastfeeding were accepted, these messages were not seen as a strong motivator by this age group. Breastfeeding was a rather 'low involvement' decision for most teenage mums although a positive consequence of this was the opportunity for breastfeeding to become a default 'norm'. It was also found that tone and attitude of service contact from midwives was critical in subsequent breastfeeding uptake. Thus, social marketing strategies can be deployed in three key roles mapped against the TPB: to help redesign more user friendly clinical pathways; focusing on motivating new mothers by repositioning breastfeeding as something that would benefit them personally; and ultimately, to encourage breastfeeding generally by creating a social norm.

In 2010, an additional piece of research was commissioned by NHS Bristol to create and test marketing materials to encourage teenage mothers to breastfeed. Launched in December 2010, the intervention created was a combination of targeted information packs, a magazine specifically designed to appeal to young mothers, free nursing bras and travel incentives in addition to a [NHS Bristol website on breastfeeding](#).

Bristol is the first Baby Friendly city in the UK and NHS Bristol is the first PCT to achieve UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative community accreditation.

## **Publications**

**Tapp, A., Rhodes, C., Withall, J. and Warren, S.** (2009). Research Leading to Social Marketing Solutions to Encourage Breastfeeding Amongst Teenage Mothers in Hard to Reach Communities. *Report prepared for NHS Bristol.*

**Tapp, A., Warren, S., Rhodes, C., Condon, L. And Withall, J.** (2011) Using social marketing to encourage teenage mums to breastfeed, *Paper presented at the World Social Marketing Conference , Dublin, 11-12 April*