



News Release

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More support for mums with depression and anxiety

A support group for women with postnatal and antenatal depression and anxiety in West Dorset is celebrating its one-year anniversary by opening two more groups in Weymouth and Bridport.

West Dorset PANDAS (Pre and Postnatal Depression Advice and Support), run by Dorset County Hospital student midwife and maternity support worker Charlie Francis-Pape was set up last August in an effort to support women across the county who suffer from postnatal depression.

It is estimated that one in four women suffer from postnatal depression, which could equate to more than 500 women who give birth at Dorset County Hospital each year.

Charlie set up the group after she herself suffered from various forms of perinatal mental illness.

“Being depressed or anxious when you are pregnant or have a baby is so debilitating, embarrassing and you feel so alone,” said Charlie. “You think that becoming a mother will be the best time in your life but for me it was the worst.”

Charlie suffered from antenatal and postnatal depression and PTSD following a traumatic labour. She also spent two months in a mother and baby unit when she was severely ill.

“I so desperately wanted to know that I wasn’t the only woman feeling like this. I was scared of being alone with my baby, I felt so guilty that I didn’t love her and felt like I couldn’t be the mother that she deserved,” she said.

The group, currently run each week at DCH’s Children’s Centre on Damers Road in Dorchester, has helped many women over the past year with various forms of perinatal mental illness.

“It’s so incredible to see how far some of the women have come,” said Charlie. “One woman started coming when her baby was just a few weeks old. She came with her mother-in-law and didn’t want to pick her baby up and felt she couldn’t look after her.

“She now comes on her own and last week I saw her holding her baby in her arms and beaming with pride. You could see the love on her face. It is incredible. I felt so proud.”

Sam Bartlett has been going to the group for four months. She said that she doesn't know where she would be without the support of PANDAS.

"Pandas has saved me. I was on the verge of giving up. Giving up not only on trying to be a mother but on life in general," she said. "Being able to go to a place where people understand what I'm going through and don't judge me or my decisions really has honestly been a life saver."

Emma Jury was one of West Dorset PANDAS' first members. She now comes every week with her two children. She said that West Dorset PANDAS gave her strength to carry on: "West Dorset PANDAS saved my life. It's given me support and also made me feel like I wasn't alone."

Charlie has now been joined by two others who have volunteered to help run the group so that she can start groups in other localities across the county - midwife and trained psychotherapist Andrea Chrustawczuk and one of the women who first came to West Dorset PANDAS at the start Ruth Palmer.

New groups in Weymouth and Bridport will run once a month starting in September.

Charlie said: "My aim was always to create enough groups so that women county-wide have somewhere to go to support each other and to not feel so alone.

"The aim of the new groups is creative therapy. We will be having a picnic lunch and getting messy with our children. So far we are going to make slime, paint baby hand prints onto bags and sensory play."

For more information please visit www.westdorsetpandas.co.uk or www.facebook.com/westdorsetpandas

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PHOTO: West Dorset PANDAS group founder Charlie Francis-Pape with members of the group and their children.

For more information please contact Communications Manager Susie Palmer on 01305 254683 or susie.palmer@dchft.nhs.uk