

Devon Maternity Voices Partnership (MVP Vice Chair)

Election statement

Name	Rachel McArdell
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What skills, knowledge and experience do you have for the role of MVP chair.

My experience within the health & fitness side of pre and postnatal care puts me in a unique position for this role. I specialise in pre & post natal fitness coaching and am passionate about improving health & wellbeing. I understand how physical health relates to pregnancy, fetal development, labour & postnatal outcomes, both physically and emotionally.

I have worked in a large corporate setting, run a small business and as a freelancer, internationally and in the UK. Most of my career has been dedicated to pre & postnatal fitness coaching.

In over seven years of coaching, I have worked with people at all stages including TTC, pregnancy and into parenthood.

As a fitness coach I am a real 'people-person' and love helping others. I also understand the importance of a network of practitioners: fitness coach, doctor, midwife, physiotherapist, nutritionist, women's health specialist etc. Both are skills which are vital for a community role with Devon MVP.

Since relocating to Bideford in 2021 I launched a pregnancy fitness & wellbeing course. The first course was attended by 9 women between 12 + 36 weeks, first & second time mothers. The 5 sessions included educational talks and workouts.

Topics included: exercise, nutrition, pelvic health, labour preparation & postnatal recovery. I plan to expand with more courses, locations, and other suitable local practitioners. These are the sorts of resources I believe birthing people need access to.

I have been self-employed for 7 years and know how to work both independently, closely with clients and as part of a team. After 3 years personal training and coaching in Singapore, where I managed a gym and team of 15, I returned to the UK. In 2017, my husband and I launched an independent, community focussed fitness studio - The Fit House in Buckinghamshire (which I run remotely). We specialise in personal training and group classes. I manage a team of 8, run team meetings, management meetings, accounts, PR, marketing and social media, everything! We also work closely with the local community.

Before fitness, I spent 5 years in corporate communications covering: public relations (digital and print media), internal communications, marketing materials & events, company magazine production. I joined a fast-growing company which went through a lot of change including its initial public offering in 2014. In my role I worked with senior management to ensure effective communication both internally and externally. I also represented employees and presented their feedback to senior management. Understanding how to communicate effectively is a non-negotiable skill for this role.

My career opportunities have given me a lot of experience in pre & postnatal care, leading groups, public speaking and working with many different people. Throughout my life I've lived and worked with people from different countries and backgrounds

including London, New York, Singapore, Spain, Buckinghamshire, North Devon. These experiences put me in a great position to support the Devon MVP. I am currently pregnant with my first baby and I am confident in use of Microsoft Office.

What you would hope to achieve as MVP Vice-chair

Before setting goals, I need to understand where the MVP is currently; its short, medium and long-term goals and projects. What I hope to achieve is:

1. Improve research and feedback from users of local maternity services, and public access to that research

From my research it is not easy (as a member of the public) to find quality research and feedback on Devon NHS maternity services. Although there is data available for England (Maternity Survey 2021), local breakdown and independent local research is harder to come by.

I would like to set up, or improve, a local research process, whereby our local NHS & MVP collect adequate quantitative feedback and qualitative feedback (both at point of care and through local networking). Importantly, we would also get feedback from care providers directly. Their views, feedback and data are invaluable, to marry expectations & goals with what is possible. This data and the actions being taken because of its analysis should be provided clearly to Devon service users.

Wider knowledge of the MVP's existence would also encourage further participation and feedback. From there, we could establish goals in line with the needs of our local community. Understanding and reviewing other initiatives being implemented across the UK would also help Devon to improve its own services.

2. Improving understanding of and access to health and exercise and nutrition in pre and postnatal care

I believe birthing people need greater understanding of how beneficial these are: emotionally, physically, for their unborn child, their experience of pregnancy and their recovery. Improving this would, in my belief reduce pressure on NHS, improving the lives and experiences of those using maternity services. I would like to help Devon make this a priority, improve access to information and the available information itself, working more closely with our own community of local practitioners.

3. More preparation for and support during the postnatal period

This is not only a strong personal believe, but it was a key finding from the results of the Maternity Survey 2021. Although attention to mental health is improving only 36% of respondents felt they spent enough time talking about physical health at their 6 week check-up and only 37% received adequate information on physical recovery. Mental and physical health are not mutually exclusive. Approximately 30 per cent of all people experiencing long-term physical health conditions also have mental health problems, most commonly depression/anxiety (The Lancet, 2012). Improving a) physical health during pregnancy and b) postnatal care, would in my opinion also improve mental health.

I hope to help Devon identify key areas of postnatal care which can be addressed short term and then set longer term goals to better prepare and support parents

under NHS care. Not just about how to look after a baby, but to look after themselves.