

## Devon Maternity Voices Partnership (MVP) Chair Candidate Statements.

### Candidate 1

<b>Name</b>	Abigail Beach
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<b>What skills, knowledge and experience do you have for the role of MVP Chair.</b>
<p>In recent years as a Mother of six children aging from 3 to 12, I have experienced a variety of different trials and tribulations. As I go along I continue to develop skills to use within my home life and my work life. Determination and Perseverance and Patience to name a few.</p> <p>I took part in a Communication Skills development workshop recently of which there are two further parts to attend, Reflective listening and Conscious/gentle communication were some things which we covered and which I practise using on a daily basis. Prioritising, planning and Crisis Management are things which I have also taught myself during Motherhood, coming from a calm grounded position before deciding what to do next.</p> <p>Negotiation and project management are also especially valuable . I hold a Pregnancy Support Meeting at a local library, keeping a positive space where Pregnant Women come together to find support and meet other pregnant women and new mother. They have the opportunity to talk about their experiences, hopes and dreams. Currently this is running via zoom although fortunately more regularly. Reaching people all over the world.</p> <p>I recently prepared a presentation for Virtual International Day of the Midwife which was live over the internet where I talked about my own experiences of Pregnancy Birth and Midwifery care.</p> <p>I also hold a meeting which gives Medical students the opportunity to meet Pregnant Women/ New Mothers and other Health Care Professionals ,Breastfeeding counsellors and other Local support groups where they can share experiences of using the services available and it gives all sides a voice.</p> <p>I am currently training towards becoming a La Leche League Leader to support Women on their Breastfeeding journey. I am also beginning an Access to Nursing and Midwifery Course next week with the Hope of becoming a Midwife.</p> <p>These things above are mostly voluntary positions , usually I offer Pregnancy, Birth and Post Natal services to support women having empowered Birth experiences and to signpost them support them as they adjust to life with a Little Baby. I also work part time as a passenger assistant, chaperoning children with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities from their home to school</p>

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and then back again. The training which I experienced for this was extremely beneficial and interesting in helping me understand how needs vary from person to person.

I enjoy singing in my church choir and spending time with my family.

### **What you would hope to achieve as MVP chair.**

My Hope is to bring awareness to what it is that Pregnant women and New Mothers crave. Which for the most part is to help them have their voices heard. Which means making networks between Pregnant Women and Health Care Professionals

If Midwives don't have enough time and Health Visitors don't have enough time to listen to a pregnant Woman's concerns or a New Mother's Birth story then creating something, a group of people who can and who are available so that women have an opportunity to talk and can hopefully feel more positive about their pregnancies, about their ability to give birth, having had their questions answered. With knowledge of what will happen during the Birth Process they can come into Motherhood feeling empowered and feeling excited to have a little baby, strong in their decisions and supported in her choices. Information being readily available for Women to be able to make informed decisions about what is right for her and her baby and her family is also paramount.

From what I have heard from Mothers at my meetings and in day to day life, this is what I hear across the board. They feel like their Midwife doesn't have time for them, they feel they are on a conveyor belt with not much conscientious practise being experienced. Not in all cases I hasten to add, but in some cases and it feels like too much. Women should be able to experience pregnancy for the wonderful experience that it can be with positive memories which do last a lifetime knowing that she made the best choice with the information that she had at the time. Instead of an experience which may haunt her for her lifetime.

### **Candidate 2**

<b>Name</b>	Nikita Higginson
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### **What skills, knowledge and experience do you have for the role of MVP Chair.**

I believe I would be a suitable candidate for the role of the chairperson due to my personal and professional knowledge and experience.

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I am a qualified paramedic and completed my degree in the last year, during university I was voted into the position of peer supporter. The role required me to consider everyone's individual points, listening to everyone in the group, portraying all their views, and presenting them accordingly.

Being able to take on board multiple views and present them so they are heard requires great organisation and exceptional listening skills which I have learnt and improved on over the years.

Going through antenatal and giving birth during lockdown was a huge challenge due to the lack of professional contact. Having been a first time mother to a premature baby at 17, to doing it all again 10 years later was like starting from scratch. This time I was more aware of my care, and let down on several aspects within the maternity services, although my care was not directly affected, it noted some cracks which as a paramedic, seeing parents in their own environment and behind closed doors, I am keen to help fix so that others do not struggle like I did. A problem shared is a problem halved.

Having been through a rollercoaster journey of being a teenage mum, suffering from baby loss, training whilst being a single mum to be a paramedic, to having the most perfect baby boy born during a pandemic. I feel I can listen to other mothers and families and portray their views in the correct way. Empathising with parents and understanding what they are going through will be a strength in itself.

I run a mothers blog, on social media, providing a platform to listen to other mums and dads views, from local maternity services to what nappies are best to just being there to normalise that a wobbly day is ok. Locally I have worked with a company to set up baby groups of socially distancing with mums and dads. Getting things done is top of my list, whilst keeping people safe and happy. Dads are as important as mums in maternity, so ensuring their views are heard is equally as important.

My computer skills are varied with use of google mail, Microsoft office, zoom and Microsoft teams and social media. Having a high level of education and computer-based knowledge is certainly an advantage. As a HCPC registrant, I keep myself updated on new guidance. I am approachable dealing with a wide range of patients daily whilst maintaining professionalism, in sensitive situations. Patient confidentiality is key to this role whilst portraying the views of others and knowing when to ensure that those in dire need of some help are supported whilst keeping professionalism.

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I manage my time well and work hard on any project I take on which is why I feel I would be suitable for the role.

### **What you would hope to achieve as MVP chair.**

My main focus will be reducing health inequalities with a focus on preventing domestic abuse, reducing smoking in pregnancy and ensuring equality of service for hard to reach groups such as teenage mums, those with disabilities, BAME community, single sex parents and those going through the IVF process.

I would focus on patient feedback learning from mistakes and sharing best practice.

I am passionate about being the voice for those unable or lacking the confidence to speak out.

I would look to form strong working relationships across a range of partner organisations including public and voluntary services while ensuring mother and family voices are heard.

During COVID the maternity and parenting world has changed dramatically, the support of mother and baby groups and health visitor appointments have been reduced. Parents can feel isolated, suffer from poor mental health, and look for inappropriate coping mechanisms such as smoking, and abusing alcohol and drugs.

Domestic abuse rates have increased, with safe places such as schools and workplaces no longer available for victims.

One of my priorities would be to work with local authority public health teams, NHS, and Public Health England to ensure our maternity services introduce routine public health enquiry across all services. I would engage with patients through social media, local community groups, maternity services, and GP surgeries.

Ensuring all patients voices are heard, is even more important during the current COVID pandemic and any future incidences. It is vital health inequalities aren't increased in such times. We must focus on inclusion for the most vulnerable in our society, ensuring parents feeling isolated are supported and can access good quality compassionate maternity services.

I aim to achieve a good platform to help mums and families have a healthy pregnancy, by partnership working, engaging patients with the help of our wider family maternity team.

## Devon Maternity Voices Partnership (MVP) Chair Candidate Statements.

### Candidate 3

<b>Name</b>	Gillian Houlton
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#### **What skills, knowledge and experience do you have for the role of MVP Chair.**

For the last 10 years I have supported families in a variety of ways, from pregnancy, to the postnatal period and beyond. I am a perinatal practitioner that includes knowledge around infant feeding and general support for families, in a variety of ways. I have also spent that time volunteering for both the local children's centre and local trust as breastfeeding peer supporter and have built some sound professional relationships as a result.

For the last 2 years I have been a Vice Chair for the Devon MVP for the Torbay/South Devon area, and as a result, I am aware already of how the MVP works and the expectations around that.

I am used to leading groups and committees as I have had experience serving as a chair for a local Parents Advisory Board as well as a local coordinator for my local NCT branch, and have successfully driven projects forward.

A few years ago I was also involved (as a service user) as a panellist for professional interviews, for both midwives and maternity workers.

I have a huge passion for helping to support families and building a lasting relationship between families and local maternity services.

#### **What you would hope to achieve as MVP chair.**

As I have mentioned, I am passionate about supporting families with what they need with regards to maternity services, but also helping to build and sustain that relationship between service users and local maternity services.

I hope to carry on the existing projects that have already been started by the Devon MVP and continue to build on ideas from the members, so that we have a flourishing MVP, that continues to support families and professionals, in a robust way.

I also hope to help grow the membership of the local MVP and increase awareness, so that a good range of feedback over different themes is available and to help drive any projects or ideas that come up due that feedback from parents.

I will also carry on the inclusive nature of the MVP, so that all feel welcome and supported.

## Devon Maternity Voices Partnership (MVP) Chair Candidate Statements.

### Candidate 4

<b>Name</b>	Jenny South
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<b>What skills, knowledge and experience do you have for the role of MVP Chair.</b>
<p>As a newborn photographer, I am used to working with maternity clients as well as newborn clients. I can consult with them in a formal manner but also of a friendly approachable level. I've had many families, and mothers tell me stories of their Pregnancy, Labour and Breastfeeding Journeys.</p> <p>Also in my business I have knowledge of accounting, it systems and extensive knowledge of social media and Wordpress websites.</p> <p>I've recently been part of the healthy start scheme in Plymouth and have been part of them launching on social media channels. Through this work I've worked with different departments in both the NHS and local council.</p> <p>I've also completed my peer support breastfeeding training with Plymouth latch on.</p> <p>In the past I've been a board member of the Plymouth branch on the NCT (national childbirth trust)</p> <p>I have my own public liability insurance and D&amp;B</p> <p>I'm currently a secretary for my local residents association and was chair of my previous residents association where I used to live.</p>

<b>What you would hope to achieve as MVP chair.</b>
<p>I'd hope to continue pushing forward the standard of care for expectant families. Listening to peoples stories and struggles for years, I've heard so many innovative ideas from families on things that could have been improved for them, some small tweaks, some big. I've also worked with professionals in this time and know the struggles and targets they two are under. But I'm confident that there is a better way to move forward for all concerned.</p>

### Candidate 5

<b>Name</b>	Louise Webster
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## Devon Maternity Voices Partnership (MVP) Chair Candidate Statements.

### **What skills, knowledge and experience do you have for the role of MVP Chair.**

I feel I am a suitable candidate for the role of MVP chair/vice chair as I am passionate about continuous improvement and helping others. As a new mum myself, I would love the opportunity to be able to apply my current skills and knowledge into the maternity services. I pride myself on being approachable, trustworthy and attentive. I enjoy new challenges and actively look for ways to reshape and improve processes in order to provide more efficient and user friendly services.

Having welcomed my baby daughter in July this year, I am currently on maternity leave from my role as a 24/7 Operations Manager for BT. As a manager, it is my responsibility to hold engaging and compelling meetings, complete monthly and annual reports, liaise with service users and key stake holders and provide coaching and training to my team of 15 shift workers.

During my 10 year career with BT I have been fortunate enough to be able to implement many changes to procedures and policies with the aim of improving the overall experience for our service users. I have applied this in a variety of settings including complaint management, fault reporting and in my current role, assisting 999 services. In doing so, I've learned that it is vital to engage well, be personable and accountable. Listening to feedback from service users, team members and key stakeholders was imperative for me to be able map out and shape these changes. Working within the ever changing technology industry has also allowed me to be creative and innovative with the way I communicate with my team and peers.

Pregnancy and parenthood is an experience like no other. The majority of my antenatal and postnatal care took place during the current coronavirus pandemic and it has made me realise just how important the support of maternity services are for women, their babies and their families. Now more than ever, engagement is vital. We are fortunate enough to have a variety of communication channels at our disposal and I feel these should be utilised to their full potential. I believe the experience and knowledge I have in this area is a great asset.

### **What you would hope to achieve as MVP chair.**

At a time where restrictions dictate the manner of how maternity services are currently run, I would like to be the voice for women and their families. I would use this as a platform to help develop and create safe alternatives to in-person services they feel would be beneficial to them, such as live virtual antenatal classes which they can do with their partner. I feel this would also allow me to gather constructive feedback on how current services are viewed so that they can be altered to help drive improvements.

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Longer term, I would like to work on developing channels of communication that work well for families of all backgrounds. This could be via strengthening current social media platforms, or creating something new, like an app. As a new mum, I know how challenging it can be to find reliable, accurate and trustworthy resources online. With lots of contrasting information, it can often be difficult to determine what the correct solution to a simple problem may be. Having spoken with many of first time mums who feel the same, the term 'winging it' often comes up during discussion which I believe indicates how much uncertainty there is behind their decisions. To combat some of these doubt filled worries, I would like to help develop an online library of approved resources that parents can turn to for support and reassurance. I feel this should be easy to locate, all in one place and presented in a simple yet engaging way.