

“Baby— basics”

Introduction to Baby Basics



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Baby Basics provides essential equipment, clothing and toiletries to women and families in extreme need via midwives, health visitors and other professional groups.

Baby Basics began life in the spring of 2009 after the lead midwife for displaced people groups in Sheffield approached the children's worker at The King's Centre Church asking if she knew of any families who may have some children's clothing to spare. The midwife had worked for many years with women seeking asylum and women who have been trafficked into the country, as well as other very vulnerable groups. She had been faithfully supplying her clients with some of the things they needed out of her own pocket whenever she could. One day on her rounds she encountered a small boy whose heavily pregnant mother was seeking asylum. They had recently been moved from London to Sheffield where they knew no one. Despite the snow on the ground, he had only shorts and t-shirt to wear and no shoes at all. Whilst this sadly wasn't an unusual scenario, there was something about this little boy that forced the midwife to ask for help.

On hearing this and other stories about her clients and their circumstances, a small group from The King's Centre decided to help in some small way. We were shocked that people lived in such poverty in our city. The stories were horrifying: children without clothing to wear or beds to sleep in, mothers humiliated in hospital because they were unable to buy sanitary wear for after the birth, mothers forced into sexual exploitation in order to put nappies on their babies.

We started to collect clothing and toiletries and began packing Moses baskets full of essential items for newborns and their mums.

These baskets were initially given out via this first midwife to her clients. However, word spread and we received enough donations to start supplying other midwives and health visitors. We now work with midwives, health visitors, social workers, Children's Centre support workers and other charity groups who support vulnerable families across the city.

We continue to pack and give away many of the Moses basket starter packs containing nappies, wipes, maternity towels, shampoo for both mother and baby, soap and other toiletry items, as well as baby clothing, sheets, blankets and a towel. We also run a clothing bank and supply cots, high chairs, buggies, toys and various other items.

All items given out are donated by members of the local community. We have collection points at local school, churches and community groups and many people in the local area have become familiar with Baby Basics and bring their donations directly to us.



How can you get involved for your community?

Whilst we continue to provide these essential items to families across Sheffield we have also started to work with churches and community groups across the UK, to share what we have learnt and the resources we have developed here in Sheffield to help start and sustain Baby Basics centres elsewhere. There is now a network of centres across the UK supporting thousands of families each year.

If you feel that your community would be enhanced by a Baby Basics centre we would love to help you to make that a reality.

Baby Basics can benefit a community in many ways other than simply the provision of practical help. It provides a place for preloved items to be reused rather than wasted, it brings many different people together to work alongside one another and share in the task of supporting the community and it supports the midwives, health visitors and social workers who give so much of themselves to the families they work alongside.

From the feedback we hear from some of the midwives and agencies Baby Basics gives through we know that as well as practical help the items we give also enable a connection that previously was unthinkable for some of the women and families.

One nurse practitioner in Sheffield spoke to us about the women who attend her clinic and said;

'I've known women miss appointments and not attend the clinic because they are ashamed and afraid for their babies to be seen in clothes that no longer fit, some are unable to leave the house because they don't have nappies. People can sometimes be afraid of 'the system' and afraid for their babies to be seen like this so they avoid coming in. And I've seen those same women come confidently into the clinic ready to show off their babies dressed in clean clothes, they are so proud. It's simple but for some of our mums clothes and nappies from Baby Basics is the difference between them attending clinic and not.'

The same is true of the pushchairs and slings that are given out from Baby Basics, they make it possible for women to attend appointments and to socialise. It was fed back to us that a woman had been offered English lessons but that until she had received a pushchair from Baby Basics she was unable to take up her place in this class as she was simply unable to make the journey.

We issued out a brief questionnaire to the agencies that refer clients to Baby Basics in Sheffield this year and 100% of them reported back to us that pushchairs and slings helped prevent social isolation in their clients.

Connections are enabled not just practically but also by the building of trust, a midwife working in the Vale of Glamorgan told us about a client who struggled at first to receive help, initially slamming the door on the midwife. When she did accept the help she said that she had 'never had anything so beautiful before'. For this woman previously help had often come with strings attached, and she was therefore wary about opening herself up to be helped.



We know from this story and others that these gifts can help to deepen the relationship between midwife or social worker and their client, which can mean a greater level of contact with women and families who are at risk of 'flying under the radar'. We are also told that for some women it is the start of them learning to trust again.

Sometimes clothing, pushchairs, cots etc. can seem like just basic provision of items, however when we scratch beneath the surface we discover that they can unlock much more. They can allow connections to be made, they can help to free people from the isolation that previous experience and practical circumstances trap them in. A buggy isn't just a buggy, it's the ability to shop, to attend medical appointments and it can be the difference between engaging with classes and agencies that can transform a woman and a family's life.

We would love to help you to bring this practical support and connection to your community.

On a practical note each centre is run by and accountable to an existing local community group, charity or church depending on their circumstances, working to our guidelines and best practice procedures. They receive ongoing support and guidance from us and are connected to one another creating a supportive network that brings out the best in one another.

For groups wishing to connect with us there is a joining fee of £150 and an ongoing monthly fee of £25 as a contribution towards our national overheads and the support you receive from us. Support includes

- Full operation manual
- Use of our bespoke online referral management system
- Publicity design
- 1-2-1 support up to 1 hr per month from our National Support Officer
- Induction Training, ongoing training days, retreat days
- Inclusion in our website
- Use of Baby Basics Logo and Trademark

Our aim is that any groups starting a Baby Basics centre for their local community will become a sustainable scheme providing a consistent, trustworthy and valuable service to the people it serves.

“Without a doubt we’ve become a better centre with all the input and support from Sheffield, we have been helped to deliver the best version of Baby Basics West Norfolk.”

Team leader at Baby Basics West Norfolk

“This is one of the most rewarding things I have ever done as part of my church outreach.”

Team leader at Baby Basics Sunbury

What you can expect from Baby Basics...

- Lots of help and guidance through the setting up process as well as continuing support, consultation and advice as you grow the project locally.
- Provision of marketing templates for you to use in your local area.
- Clearly defined values and proven standards to work to.
- An Operations Manual and other user guides, including a handbook for your team.
- Use of our on-line management system for requests and all necessary training.
- Use of the Baby Basics logo and trademark.
- Membership of a growing network of Baby Basics centres.
- Access to our induction, training and retreat days on key subjects areas and social time with people running the scheme in other locations.

Getting started

Baby Basics is a simple concept but in order to flourish it will need a team of people, the support of a home charity or church and, of course, the support of your community. For anyone interested in setting up a new Baby Basics centre we would advise that they firstly undertake the following steps:

- Gather a small team of people to discuss the project to see if there are other who share your vision for Baby Basics and are willing to be involved in making it a reality.
- Seek permission and advice from the leadership team of the community group or church you are wanting to work alongside.
- Investigate other projects in the local area. We don't want to replicate an existing project and would recommend that you partner with any existing projects doing a similar work, bringing people and resources to strengthen them rather than duplicating.
- Identify a space that could be used as a store room and an area for preparing the bundles. This should be easily accessible and damp free.
- Initiate contact with and start to build relationships with the midwifery services in your local area. They are a key part of Baby Basics - it is therefore vital to get to know them and the needs of their clients and also to define the vision and aim of Baby Basics.
- Have a chat with us – we'll talk you through the above and give you some ideas of how to start gathering a team around you, how to make initial contact with midwifery services local to you and why it's important to be connected in with and work as part of an existing charity.



Funding

Baby Basics is a project recognised by The Cinnamon Network and as such churches joining with Baby Basics are able to apply for a Micro Grant through The Cinnamon Network to help with start up costs.

The funding available from The Cinnamon Network is only available to churches and is subject to change so please visit their website for the most up to date information:

www.cinnamonnetwork.co.uk/micro-grants/

Who does Baby Basics help?

We have no set criteria for who can, and who cannot, receive items from Baby Basics but all requests must come from healthcare professionals and not from individuals – we believe that this allows us to get resources to the most vulnerable.

We have endeavoured to create a process for helping that does not require people to prove their need and does not necessitate team members to assess or make judgements about a persons circumstance or need.

We don't want people to have to answer probing and potentially embarrassing questions and tick the right boxes before Baby Basics is willing to help them. And on a practical note we don't think asking questions regarding the status of a person's asylum claim or what benefits they are entitled to would give us a true picture of their need. We therefore rely on the health care professionals who see their clients regularly, and know what their needs are, to make the assessment for us. We trust that they know the genuine needs of their clients. This is why building good relationships early on is vital.

Many of the women we give to are unable to speak English and are often too afraid to leave their homes. They have learnt to be very wary of people who ask questions about their personal circumstances. These women would not be able to access this service if they had to make the call themselves, and as a consequence, they and their babies would suffer. The midwives *et al* must make the request personally and collect the items on behalf of their client.



Baby Basics started at a church in Sheffield and whilst we are now an independent charity we still look to some of the teaching of the Christian faith to inform why we do things.

‘Love is patient, love is kind’
1 Corinthians 13:4

Our aim is that Baby Basics shows love; love that is patient and kind. We believe that trusting the health care professionals who work closely with the families and not trying to assess our own needs is a loving way to give that also makes sure those most in need are able to receive things from Baby Basics.

We do not require people working with Baby Basics to be of the Christian faith, although many of our centres are based within churches. We welcome as colleagues and partners all who share our values, regardless of their identity or culture.

Our four core values are:

- **Respect** for everyone as equals, regardless of their background and circumstances.
- A **faith** that small actions of love and solidarity can make a big difference in people's lives.
- An **open-minded** and open-hearted approach, ready to listen to and learn from the people we support and the people we work alongside.
- **Honesty** and integrity, recognising the importance of constant transparency and openness, and that personal agendas must not override the work we are engaged in.



If you would like more details about the work of Baby Basics and to explore whether it would be a good fit for you and your community please don't hesitate in contacting us.

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