

**OBS**  
OXFORDSHIRE  
BREASTFEEDING  
SUPPORT



# OXFORDSHIRE BREASTFEEDING SUPPORT

Annual Report 2023/24



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## Administrative Information

### Registered Name

Oxfordshire Breastfeeding Support

### Registered Address

2 Wytham Street,  
Oxford  
OX1 4SU

**Email:** team@oxbreastfeedingsupport.org

**Registered charity no.** 1176948

### Trustees

Laura Prentice - Deputy Chair  
Dr Ashvina Segaran - Secretary and Safeguarding  
Hannah Marshall - Fundraising  
Zoe Townsend - Team Liaison  
Dr Rain Irshad - Equality Diversity and Inclusion  
Khatsha Ali - External Communications

Louise Ellis ACA (Left November 2023)

Dr Juliet Rayment (Left October 2023)

### Non-clinical Staff

Karin Chandler - Charity Director (left November 2023)  
Hannah Torrence - Clinical Director (joined April 2023)  
Catriana McKie - Systems and Safeguarding Lead  
Hannah Dingwall-Jones - Administration

### Clinical Facilitators

Lisa Mansour (also EDI Lead)  
Charlotte Gilman  
Cathy Berry  
Ruth Viella  
Julie Gallegos (left September 2023)

## Introduction from the Board of Trustees

Change and development continued for Oxfordshire Breastfeeding Support (OBS) in 2023-2024. We have successfully moved towards employing staff, rather than solely relying on contractor relationships. Additionally our Charity Director left in November, and this departure has coincided with a closer focus on our core services in their current form.

Despite these changes to the structure of our organisation, we have continued to offer consistent and high-quality breastfeeding support, and are continuing to adjust the balance of our services depending on community need. The cost of living crisis continued to have a significant impact on families across Oxfordshire and as pandemic restrictions and uncertainties have receded, the needs and expectations of our service users have changed.

While we continue to develop more social models for sessions, we are also mindful that we are currently supporting a high level of clinical need that many of the families presenting at our sessions are experiencing. Families have come to us with much more complex breastfeeding concerns than before the pandemic. It is therefore taking us longer to work out how to re-introduce the social element of our work.

Overall, 2024 has been a year of laying new foundations for providing consistent and high-quality breastfeeding support in Oxfordshire and reaching a wider section of our community through a combination of social and in person sessions.



Ashvina Segaran, on behalf of the Board of Trustees  
Secretary of the Board of Trustees of Oxfordshire Breastfeeding Support

## Aims and Objectives

At OBS we believe that breastfeeding, and breastmilk, are deeply important. Our mission is to increase breastfeeding, provision of breastmilk and responsive feeding for babies in Oxfordshire by:

- Educating and empowering Oxfordshire families to define and achieve their feeding goals.
- Taking a lead role in developing an integrated network of breastfeeding support throughout Oxfordshire, so that all parents can access skilled, timely, local breastfeeding help.



*A facilitator's bag at a session with a doll and knitted boobs*

## Overview of OBS 2023-24

OBS has continued to offer consistent and high-quality breastfeeding support with :

- 592 first visits, 670 return visits
  - 985 in person visits in 210 sessions
  - 146 individual online consultations
  - 21 Virtual Group visits
  - 53 families seen at antenatal sessions
  - 56 contacts with 29 Family Nurse Partnership families
- In person sessions run in five locations in Oxfordshire every week, including the new session in the Blackbird and Greater Leys, reaching 440 unique families over 985 visits in the year.
- Monthly virtual Preparing to Breastfeed antenatal breastfeeding education sessions, supporting 53 families.
- Moderated Facebook group with 3,200 members (1,400 active) who are supported by a dedicated breastfeeding specialist responding to posts, and by volunteers peer supporters
- One to one remote consultations online with 146 sessions provided in 2023-24

There have been several key areas where our work has developed this year:

- We have continued to adjust the balance of our services depending on community need, with more emphasis on providing face to face sessions in areas of need and targeting our remaining online provision.
- A new in person support session, targeted to an area of specific need in the Blackbird and Greater Leys area, beginning in October 2023.
- Changes to the shape of the organisation, including leadership and staff employment.
- A focus on increasing the accessibility of our sessions.

Overall, 2023 has been a year of laying new foundations for providing consistent and high-quality breastfeeding support in a post-pandemic Oxfordshire and reaching a wider section of our community.

*"OBS saved my breastfeeding journey. Without them, I would have given up. Thanks to their amazing support, I went on to breastfeed for 2 years."*

- Alessandra, OBS Service User

## Achievements and Performance

In April 2023, OBS received the [Little Ankle Bitters award](#) for **Best Local Charity**, a momentous achievement for our team. Cathy, one of our facilitators, was interviewed by *That TV*, helping to bring further attention to our cause.



### A royal stamp of approval!

In April 2023, Pat Smith was selected as one of the **Royal Voluntary Service's (RVS) 500 Coronation Champions**. The entry standard was very high and they received almost 5,000 nominations. For Pat to be selected was a huge validation and recognition of all she has given OBS over the years.

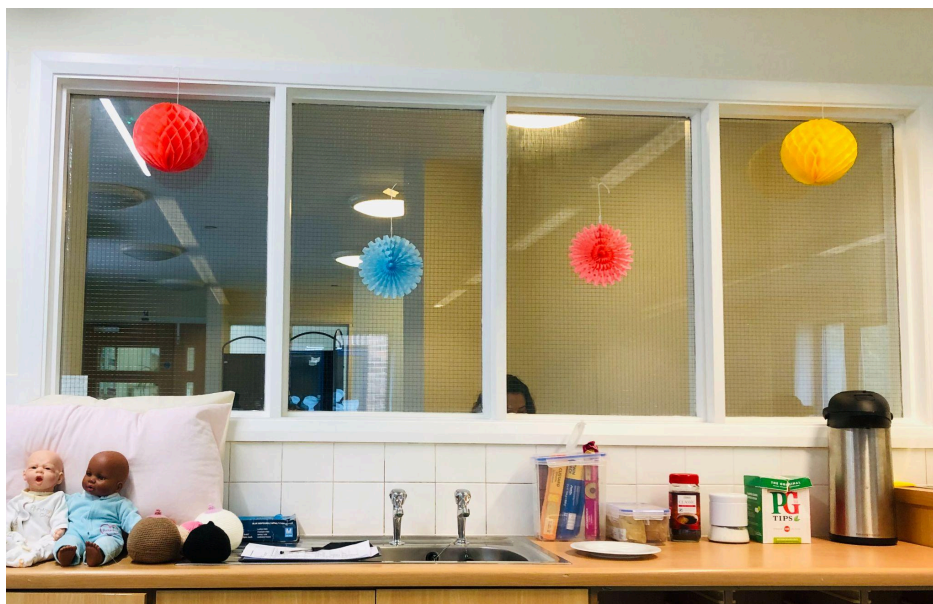


## In Person Sessions

Throughout 2023-24, OBS continued to provide vital in person breastfeeding support across Oxfordshire. We held weekly sessions at **Barton, Donnington, Kidlington and Donnington Doorstep**. The **Donnington Doorstep** session was relocated to Comper Foundation School in September 2023, and was renamed **the East Oxford session**. These sessions continued to be well attended throughout the year.

In addition, facilitator Lisa continued her groundwork in The Leys area, which received funding in July 2023. The subsequent introduction of **The Leys drop in session** in October 2023, a departure from our usual booking model, was a notable addition to our outreach efforts. This drop in session for families living in Blackbird Leys and Greater Leys is based at the Oxford Hub, Windale Primary school in The Leys, supported by funding from the [Blackbird Leys Community Fund](#). The Leys are amongst the 20% most deprived areas in England and families living there experience multiple levels of deprivation. It has some of the lowest breastfeeding initiation rates in Oxfordshire.

As this is an historically underserved area with multiple levels of deprivation and marginalisation, it has understandably taken time to build community trust and buy in to our and other services. Getting the session off the ground involved significant networking and connection building with local health services and support organisations to establish OBS as a presence in the community that families felt comfortable reaching out to for support. The session now regularly welcomes families each week and continues to work closely with other local groups including Oxford Hub Parent Power, AFiUK, Early Lives, Equal Start, Peeple, Ivy Midwives, Health Visitors and GPs.

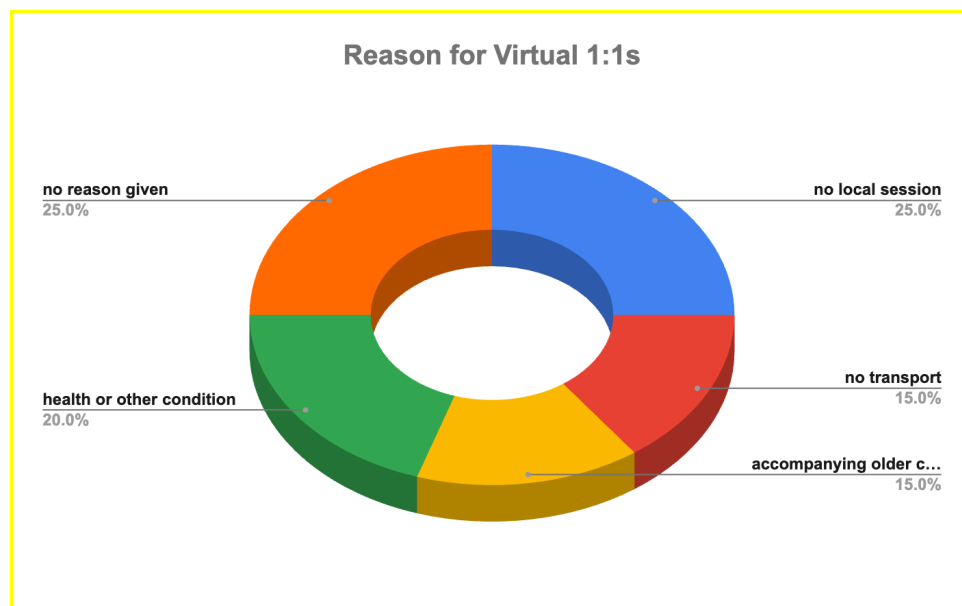


*The worktop at our new Leys venue, Windale School, with session equipment and supplies*



## Virtual 1 to 1 Consultations

Virtual consultations remained a critical component of our service, particularly for those unable to attend in person. As part of the reorganisation of services in the summer of 2023, we started collecting data on reasons for accessing the virtual consultations. Initial numbers indicated that having no local session and having health or other conditions that would prevent them from attending an in person session were the biggest reasons for accessing virtual support, followed by transport issues and other caring responsibilities.



*Reasons given for accessing virtual 1 to 1 support after changes to the service in 2023*

## Facebook Group

Our private Facebook group continues to be widely used and is a resource for parents seeking breastfeeding support online. Service users value the ability to post anonymously if they so choose, which is one of the few settings in which this is possible. We know that this is valuable as many families face many barriers to breastfeeding, including cultural stigma, meaning that anonymity can help them access support they would otherwise feel unavailable to them. Our archived topic threads on breastfeeding issues remain popular and are regularly searched and referred to, with Facilitators adding new information as needed.

From September 2023-September 2024 we have had 1,933 active members, with a total membership of 3.3k. This year we have responded to 253 posts, which have generated 1,724 comments on the group.

Some quotes from our Facebook group this year:

*"I would recommend going to an in person obs session if you can, they are so helpful at helping you figure it all out."*

*"Thank you very much for the reassurance and resources"*

*"This group was so helpful with my daughter"*

*"Thank you, this is really helpful. I really appreciate you taking the time to go through this in so much detail."*

*"A massive thank you to everyone who commented on my post below...You really gave me the confidence to do this without feeling guilty. Thank you again."*

We also use our Facebook group to raise awareness around new research and initiatives in lactation, such as highlighting the [Spectrum Lactation project](#), diverse image library of the lactating breast, Black Breastfeeding Week, and updates to guidance on breastfeeding specific issues more generally.

## Collaboration with the Family Nurse Partnership

We also continued to collaborate with the **Family Nurse Partnership (FNP)** to run specialist individualised support sessions for teen parents, between the age of 14-19 years, antenatal and postnatally.

One of our facilitators presented at the local FNP AGM on the theme being the Cost of Living Crisis which is hugely impacting many families due to the rising cost of formula and the fact that it is not reliably found in food banks. We have found that many young families are motivated to breastfeed as it is free, and we are working hard to inform them in our informal, tailor-made online "Preparing to Breastfeed" chats on what to expect in the first few days and weeks with breastfeeding to get them off to the best start.

The difficulty that many parents find - and particularly our younger clients - is that breastfeeding is so different from formula feeding. We provide 24 hour support via WhatsApp to our clients so that they can get timely and instant support and online antenatal chats about what to expect in the first few weeks. In 2023-24, we offered 49 instances of support by WhatsApp, 8 by phone, and 14 by 1:1 video calls.

While first contacts in 2023-24 were roughly 60% private message, 25% video and 11% phone, follow-up contacts were 75% PM, 14% video and 11% phone. After that initial video/voice contact, many FNP clients were comfortable following up by private message. Many more were comfortable getting support this way from the start. Some

We have also delivered some face to face antenatal support. Our facilitator met with an FNP nurse and two school age clients in Costa Coffee in Bicester and we did a lovely session on preparing to breastfeed. The facilitator had a knitted boob and doll in her

bag just in case it might be helpful to do some demonstrations of positioning and attachment but wasn't sure if it would be too embarrassing to take them out but they were more than happy to and everyone had a go at modelling breastfeeding with lots of giggling about it too! They have both gone on to successfully breastfeed.

## Breastfeeding Grief and Trauma sessions

A new initiative launched this year, our **Breastfeeding Grief and Trauma (BFG&T)** sessions, has been a resounding success. These sessions, which took place across Barton, Kidlington, and Didcot, as well as online, provided a safe and supportive space for parents to process their emotions around breastfeeding challenges. Our online session proved to be particularly popular as many of the parents joining these sessions were not able to attend sessions during the working day.

Did breastfeeding not go how you wanted or hoped?

**Breastfeeding Grief and Trauma Support Sessions**

13 March, 10 - 11:30 am  
Barton Neighbourhood Centre

19 March, 12 - 1:30 pm Online  
Book at: [bit.ly/OBSbfgt](https://bit.ly/OBSbfgt)

**OBS**  
OXFORDSHIRE  
BREASTFEEDING  
SUPPORT

Supporting your family from pregnancy to weaning  
Registered charity 1176948

These session received very positive feedback:

*"[The session was a] space where I felt held, where I did not feel judged, where it was "comforting" to see that I was not the only one who struggled (and sometimes still struggles)."*

- Becky

*"My feelings felt validated. I felt I had been dismissed as 'hormonal' by family and friends (not unkindly), so was relieved to see my thoughts and feelings reflected in the session. Felt like a big step towards acceptance and healing. Resources for future pregnancies / babies were helpful...I will seek support if I have any more babies to*

*understand what went wrong the first time and to establish breastfeeding. I'm unsure who could diagnose / if a diagnosis is possible, but know where to start now."*

- Anonymous service user

*"I felt less alone in my grief and more ready forgive myself"*

- Anonymous service user

## Ending of OBS Group Sessions

After three years of offering online OBS Group sessions, we made the difficult decision to discontinue these in June 2023. These sessions had supported nearly 950 people since their inception at the start of the pandemic, providing vital breastfeeding advice. However, with the return of face-to-face support, demand for the virtual group waned, and we decided to focus on in person clinical support going forward.

OBS | OXFORD BREASTFEEDING SUPPORT | Registered Charity 1176948

Breakout Rooms at OBS Group  
Thursday, 15th June  
12:30 - 1:30pm

RETURNING TO WORK  
Managing your return to work while breastfeeding

NORMAL NEWBORN SLEEP  
What to expect from your newborn's sleep

Register at: [calendly.com/oxbreastfeeding](https://calendly.com/oxbreastfeeding)

## OBS Volunteers

We brought on four new volunteers during 2023, who are all former service users. One of these volunteers is at our Didcot session, her local knowledge and connections have been hugely beneficial in supporting the families that attend. Another is a host volunteer at the East Oxford session.

We have changed our volunteer programme to include host volunteers that aren't specially trained in feeding but are able to welcome families to the session and give them tea and talk to them more generally. This is helping us to make the sessions feel more sociable again and we are noticing that families have started to make friends, swapping numbers and meeting up outside of our sessions for more support.

This has also allowed our facilitators and peer supporters to focus on providing support and guidance to the families attending the sessions, especially in light of the greatly increased clinical need amongst our users. The introduction of host volunteers has also helped us to diversify our volunteer base.

## Supporting Students, Health Professionals and Research

We also welcomed 71 observers at our session: 8 online and 63 in person. These observers are primarily drawn from midwifery and nursing students at Oxford Brookes, but also include health visitors, child health workers, and potential volunteers.

<b>Observers 23-24</b>	<b>Total</b>
Barton	23
Kidlington	15
Donnington/East Oxford	8
Didcot	17
Preparing to Breastfeed	4
OBS Group	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>

## Widening Access

OBS has continued to expand the accessibility of its services. The Team and a number of our volunteers completed a Deaf Awareness course and an Introduction to British Sign Language course to allow us to confidently support D/deaf and hard of hearing service users.

## British Sign Language for Beginners



Welcome to **British Sign Language for Beginners**, throughout this course you will begin to learn the basics of British Sign Language (BSL).

*A screenshot of the British Sign Language for Beginners course the team did in 2023*

All facilitators have completed the LGCB course on Supporting Autistic families to Breastfeed by Dr Amy Grant. Volunteers are also encouraged to do the training and a volunteer session on the topic was held just after the period of this report, facilitated by Anna Lawrence (a previous OBS volunteer) from Oxford Neurodivergent Education.

## Personnel and Trustee Changes

This year saw several significant changes in our personnel and trustee team:

- **Hannah Torrance** joined as Clinical Director in April 2023, bringing with her extensive experience in the UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative.
- **Julie Gallegos** left in September 2023, after many years of invaluable service as a Facilitator and team member.
- **Karin Chandler**, our Charity Director, departed in November 2023, after guiding OBS through a period of growth and change.
- **Lee Mathers**, our bookkeeper was welcomed on board helping with the lengthy process of reconciling finances and developing post-Lottery budget
- **Dr Juliet Rayment and Louise Ellis**, both founding trustees, stepped down in late 2023, after seven years with OBS.



*Trustees Juliet Rayment and Louise Ellis, who have been with us since before we became our own charity in 2018, celebrate their retirement in January 2024*

## Fundraising

Our fundraising efforts were bolstered by the participation of service users and volunteers in various activities. In October, our Facilitator **Charlotte** ran the **Bournemouth Half Marathon**, raising £756.25, while one of our service users **Ed** ran the **Oxford Half Marathon**, raising £1,262.51.



*OBS team members & trustees cheering on Ed running the Oxford Half Marathon in October 2023*

These community-led initiatives, alongside the **Big Give Campaign**, which raised £1,706.75 in December, exemplify the widespread support we receive from individuals and organisations alike.

OBS continues to benefit from the generosity of its supporters. Over the course of the year, we raised almost £7,000 via **Local Giving**, with an additional £1,200 in Gift Aid. Furthermore, we secured several significant donations from individuals which have been crucial in helping us meet our operating costs and expand our service offerings.

In March the Family Choir club held a concert in Abingdon and raised £300 each for OBS and for another local charity SSNAP.



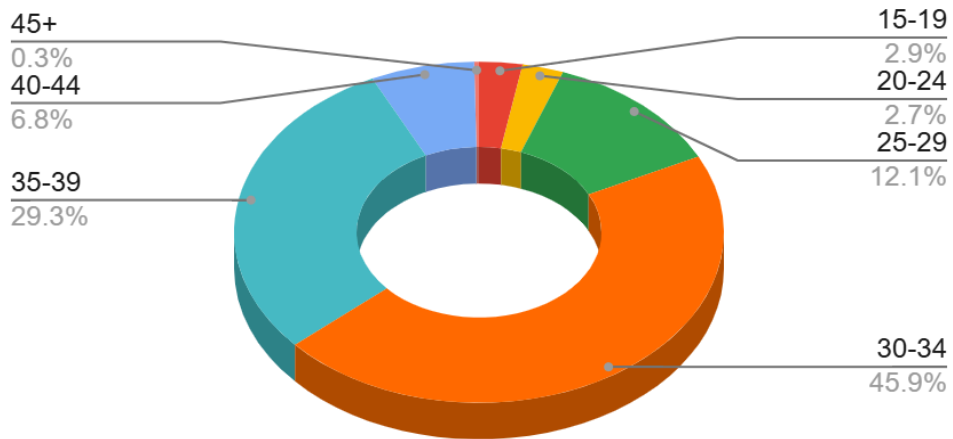
*OBS trustee Ashivna Segaran (right) at the Family Choir Club concert in March 2024*



## About our Service Users

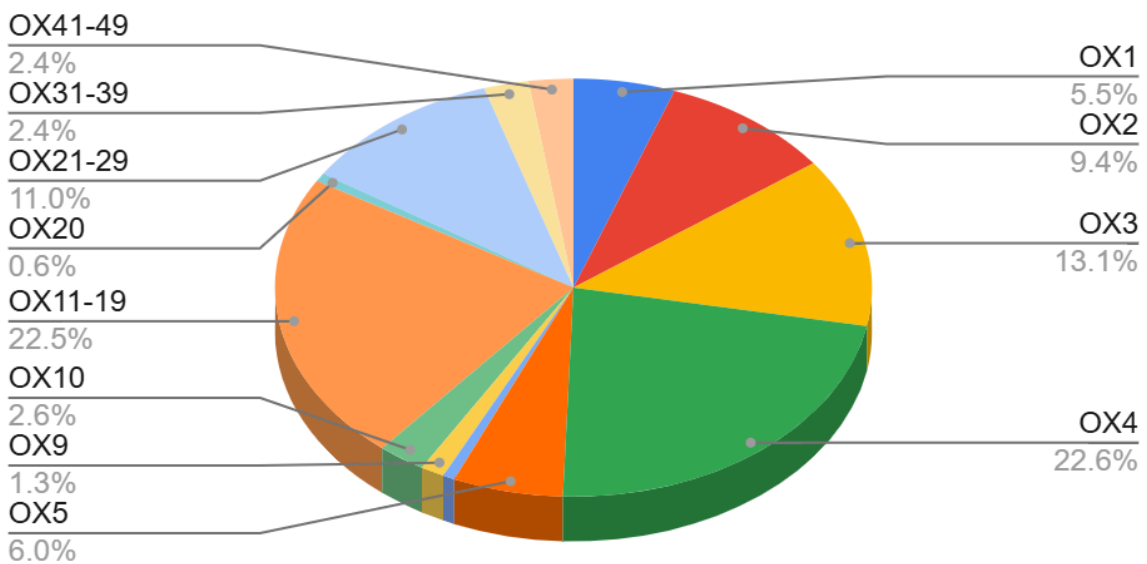
### Service User Profile 2023-24

#### Mother's age at first visit 2023



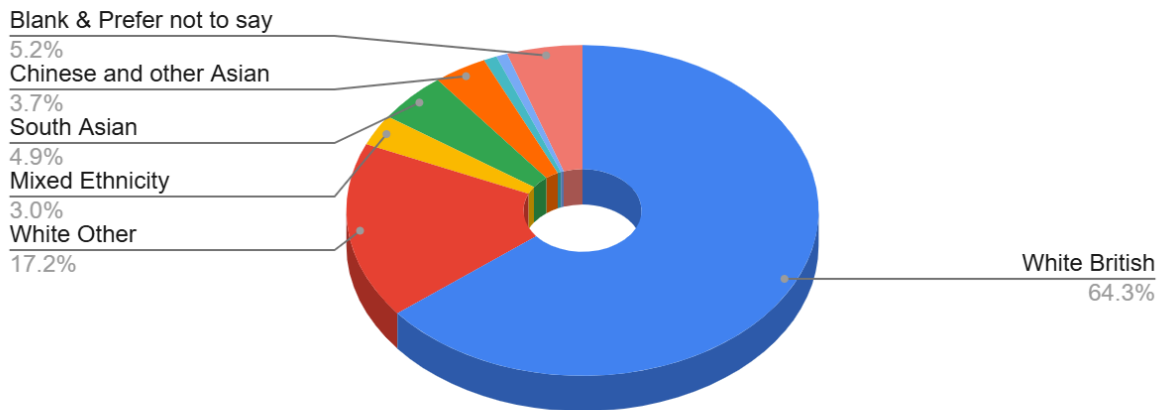
*Mother's age at first visit in 2023-24*

#### Postcodes 2023 first visitors



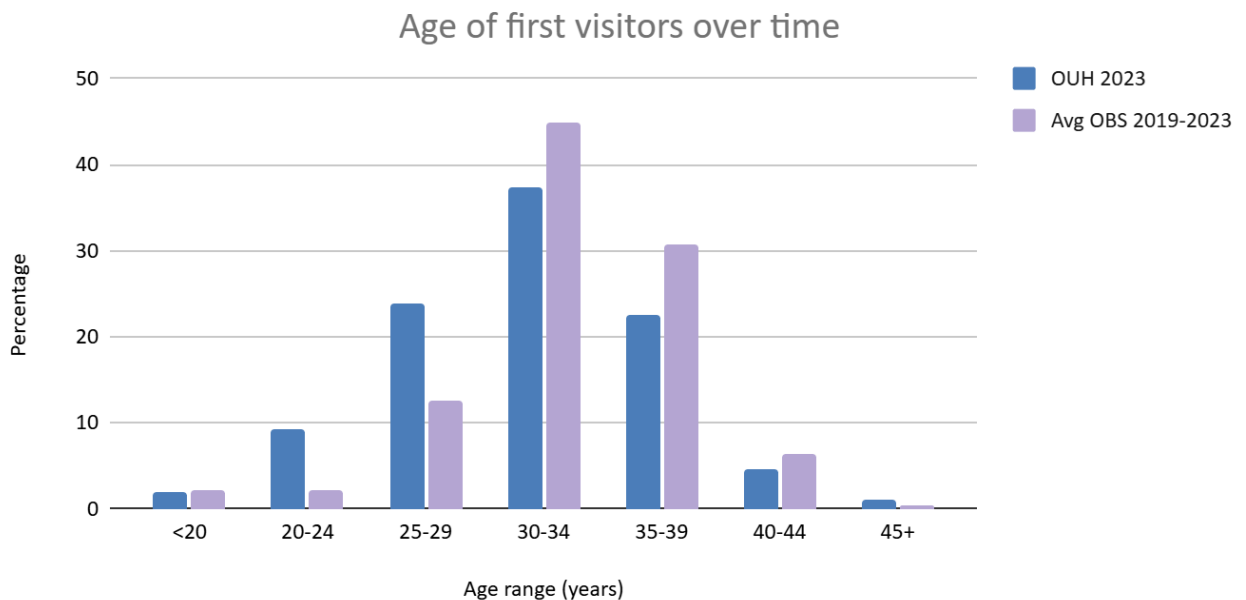
*Postcodes of first time visitors, showing about half come from central Oxford and the rest from surrounding areas*

## Ethnicity of OBS users 2023



*Ethnicity of OBS service users in 2023-24*

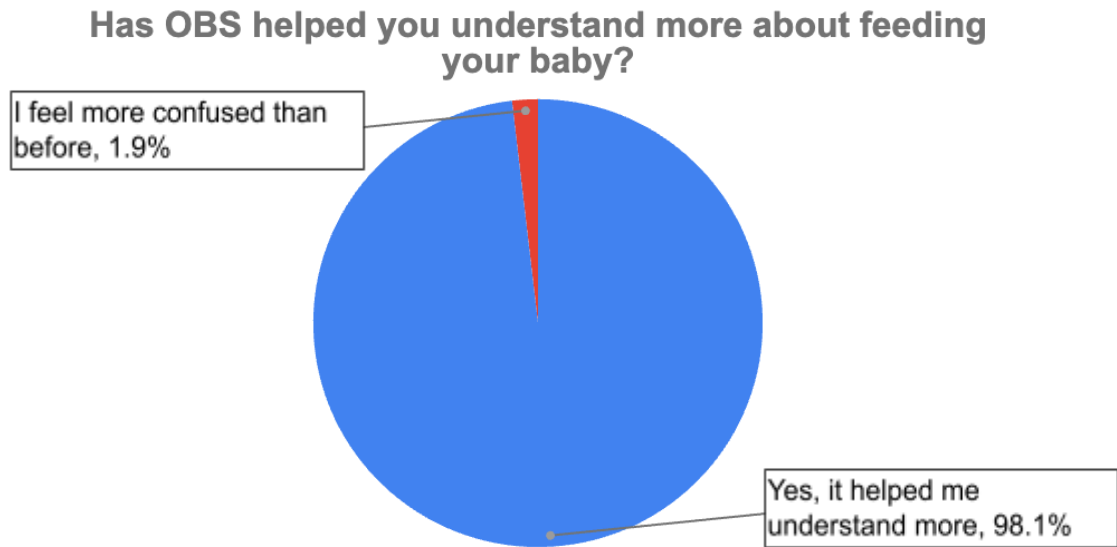
Age of first visitors to OBS over time (2019 - 2023) compared against the average for the local NHS hospital trust in 2023. Below shows how we stack up against the local community over the last few years. The development of the FNP programmes continues to engage younger mothers with OBS.



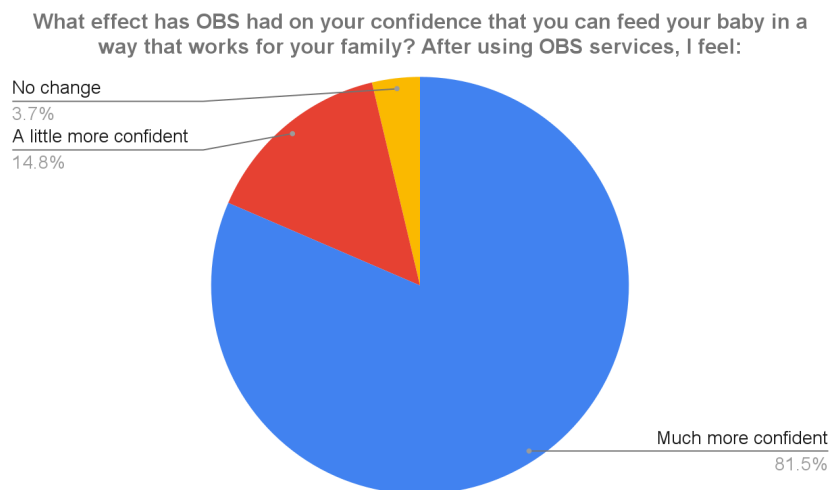
*Mother's age at first visit to OBS in 2023-24 compared with the OBS average from 2019-23*

## Impact Survey

In August and September of 2023, we conducted an anonymous satisfaction survey of those who used our services between July 2022 and July 2023. The results showed that our service users are overwhelmingly happy with our services and feel well supported to continue breastfeeding:

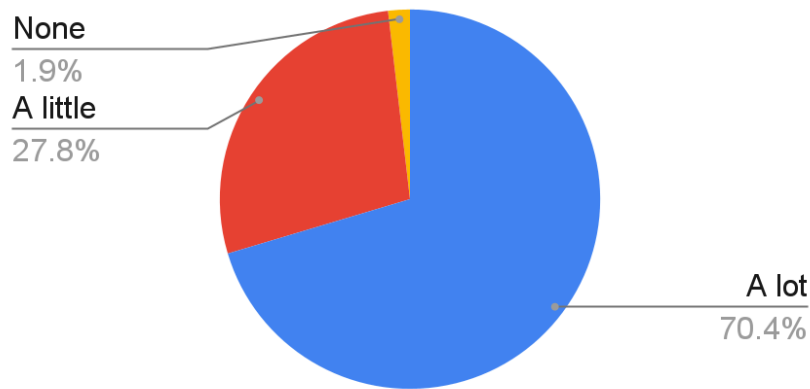


*Percentage of service users who report feeling better able to understand feeding their baby*



*Effect of OBS on service user's confidence to feed their baby in a way that works for them*

### Has using OBS services had a positive impact on your mental health?



Positive effect of OBS on service user's mental health

Some anonymous feedback from survey respondents:

*"I have been hugely impressed with the support I received from OBS. The volunteers and consultants are so knowledgeable and empathetic. Their advice was always very practical and tailored to my needs. But I think what I have appreciated most of all is the moral support and encouragement, especially in those early days. Walking into an OBS session with a newborn was like being given a warm hug at a time when I was really struggling. Thank you!"*

*"OBS has empowered me with a wealth of knowledge and the help I have received has enabled me to continue to breastfeed in the face of difficulties, when I would doubtless have stopped otherwise."*

*"You provided a safe space for me, my partner and daughter when we were struggling in the early days. You spotted we were having a tough time and invited us back weekly for support not only with feeding but a place we felt safe and cared for. It helped build our confidence as new parents. Thank you so much!"*

*"OBS saved my breastfeeding journey without a doubt and provided the best support I've received after a very difficult start. The support was expert and efficient - extremely effective but also delivered very thoughtfully with kindness and compassion. My partner and I are incredibly grateful to you and I recommend your services to every new parent I meet. Thank you for what you do! "*

# Financial Report

## Financial Review

This year OBS brought in an income of £78,307 (22/23, £77,851) and spent £70,249 (22/23, £79,325), leaving the charity with a small surplus in funds at the end of the period. This was mainly due to the charity's income generation plan to build other sources of income. The lottery grant entered its fifth and final year. The charity used the final £21k to continue to fund the Didcot face to face sessions as well as some of the online services. At the end of the grant, the charity carried over £864 to be used for the continuing online services. This financial period saw OBS receive £8,850 from the Oxford County Council Cost of Living Funds which went towards funding the Kidlington and Donnington face to face sessions and helped provide further online support sessions. The charity also received £2,562 from the Oxford Hub Fund to help the charity offer face to face sessions in Blackbird Leys and £1,000 from the Pye Settlement Trust to fund the venue hire costs for the Didcot Sessions. The migration of the freelance workers to employees has been successful with only those providing cover left to be onboarded. OBS would also like to thank all the wonderful supporters, who's generosity helped the charity increase its unrestricted income to £44,141 through the donations received.

[Find the full 2023-24 accounts here.](#)

## Reserves Policy Statement

The reserves policy has been agreed by the trustees and is reviewed annually to ensure that the appropriate levels of reserves are maintained and OBS is able to continue to fund its activities without unnecessary disruption. OBS reviews the level of reserves held both restricted and unrestricted at each trustee meeting. The charity relies on donations from individuals, grants and fundraising to fund the majority of its charitable activities. The nature of these income streams is that funds are not certain to be received and are not evenly spread throughout the year. As future income from donations is uncertain and would be affected by the wider economic conditions, holding reserves allows the charity time to plan the best way to reduce services or investigate other sources of funding. As the charity was awarded some long term grant funding most notably 114K over five years from the National Lottery, this has meant that the charity feels more confident in holding a reduced level of reserves compared to the prior years and use this money to invest in the sessions that aren't funded by the grants.

The charity operates a mixture of face to face booked breastfeeding groups alongside one to one and group online support. The trustees believe it is reasonable to hold enough reserves to enable the organisation to transition towards a larger proportion of face to face sessions compared with online operations. The charity continues to move from a self-employed contractor organisation to employing staff. The trustees believe that it is prudent to hold enough reserves to provide a buffer for any

unexpected employment costs, emergency expenses or potential redundancy costs, as well as to ensure that funds are available in a timely manner to continue to maintain our levels and nature of service provision.

In order to assist in the planning of future service levels and to enable giving notice to both service users and facilitators of any reductions in service levels because of lack of funds, the trustees consider it reasonable to hold between 6 and 9 months of expenditure in reserve.

Unrestricted reserves at the end of the year were £51,787 which represents nearly nine months of expenditure.

### **Lee Mathers MCIOF (Cert), MIAB**

Charity Development Specialist & Independent Examiner

Positive Community Finance Ltd

## **Risk Management**

Our mission to increase breastfeeding, provision of breastmilk and responsive feeding for babies in Oxfordshire requires careful and proactive risk management to ensure the stability and continuity of our work. As a small charity, we recognize that our resources are limited and that even minor risks can significantly impact our ability to serve our community. The board of trustees and management team are committed to identifying, evaluating, and mitigating risks to safeguard our charity's future, reputation, and the welfare of those we serve.

The major risk to OBS, as with many other small charities, is financial. Reliance on a small number of funding sources, including grants and donations, can make the charity vulnerable to economic downturns or changes in donor priorities. To reduce financial risk, we continue to diversify our income streams, actively pursuing multiple grants, individual donations, and community fundraising initiatives. We also maintain a reserves policy to ensure continuity of essential services in the face of financial challenges. We have also widened the team who have financial oversight, by hiring a bookkeeper, and delegating more responsibility to the team.

Finally, since the pandemic, we have found that OBS is in high demand from service users, and the needs of the users have increased in clinical need. To ensure we continue to deliver high quality care to our service users, we have prioritised the sessions that will benefit our users the most, especially considering our limited operational capacity as a small organisation with a limited staff and volunteer base

Through these safeguards, OBS is dedicated to maintaining a secure, supportive, and effective service environment, continuing our mission to promote breastfeeding and responsive feeding for Oxfordshire families.

## Looking Towards 2024/25

The last year has seen big changes at OBS. We completed the switch from self-employment to employment contracts for the team, we started a new session in Blackbird and Greater Leys, we ran a long-anticipated new series of breastfeeding grief and trauma sessions, and we saw the departure of two very long-standing trustees and our new director.

These, along with the end of the National Lottery Community Fund's generous grant, mean that 2024/25 will be focused on: sustaining our current services; fundraising; reinvigorating our relationships with our volunteers and local community organisations; continuing to examine and reflect on how to better serve a greater cross-section of our community.

As we look ahead to the coming year, we will continue to work on increasing our sustainability both in terms of team and trustee capacity, and in terms of fundraising income. This will allow us more freedom to develop social drop in capacity at our in person sessions and to continue expanding our reach within the community. With the planned recruitment of new trustees and staff, we are confident that OBS will continue to thrive and support even more families across Oxfordshire.