





# FOREWORD



**Carrie Grainger**

BOB ICB Womens Health lead  
(Buckinghamshire Oxfordshire  
and Berkshire West Integrated  
Care Board)

I am delighted to be introducing the 24/25 annual impact report from Equal Start Oxford.

Back in 2022, Health Education England commissioned Community Participatory Action Research, which included a local exploration of Black and Asian women's maternity experiences in OX4. Although, these women highlighted some positive experiences, their feedback indicated much further work was needed to improve maternity care, in relation to access experience and outcomes for women from their communities. Subsequent focus groups with women from OX4 spoke to the need to address the social determinants of health including food insecurity, housing, and destitution, all which impact on maternal and child health outcomes.

Their feedback demonstrated the challenge for maternity care to seek to reduce inequalities in maternal and child health outcomes for underserved women continues to be multi-layered and complex. These insights demonstrated that any work to improve outcomes cannot continue in silos within maternity providers, and that collaboration and coproduction are imperative to drive forward transformational change.

We know that real sustainable change occurs at a grass roots level; Therefore, any potential solutions required a fresh vision and approach which incorporated a focus on building sustainable relationships of trust with our communities and community actors, co-production of relevant interventions and a mobilisation of place-based assets to work alongside maternity to meet health, welfare, and social need more holistically.

Neighbourhoods should be viewed as primary units of change and critical starting points for efforts to improve inequalities. Equal Start Oxford continues to be an excellent example of place-based working which enables meaningful system change.



# WHY EQUAL START BELONGS IN THE COMMUNITY

If ever there were a city equipped to tackle inequality, it is Oxford. At **Flo's – The Place in the Park**, we are committed to serving our community and improving equity in a meaningful and lasting way.

Those of us working at the grassroots level witness daily the urgent need to reach individuals and families who are too often left out of mainstream services. Equal Start Oxford is based at Flo's, a multidisciplinary community hub that acts as a bridge between local communities and NHS maternity care. This unique positioning allows us to identify barriers early, respond compassionately, and collaborate strategically.

All babies deserve the best possible start in life. Through Equal Start, we work to make that vision a reality—supporting women and families who face compounding challenges in accessing healthcare, housing, food, and emotional support. Our close partnership with other community initiatives, including the OX4 Food Crew, strengthens our ability to advocate for systemic change. Together, we are informing local authority responses to emergency housing and promoting access to essential health, cooking, and nutrition facilities.

Being based in a hub like Flo's creates multiple pathways of hope and opportunity. Our vision is simple but powerful: to listen deeply, understand the root causes of exclusion, and reroute energy and resources toward what truly works for women and families.



**Laura Sewell**  
Director of Flo's

## Flo's Pavilion

This free-standing building at Flo's - The Place in The Park has been the home of numerous programs, meetings, and activities by the Equal Start Oxford project.

*Photo by: Mike Sim for Flo's - The Place in The Park*





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### Equal Start Oxford

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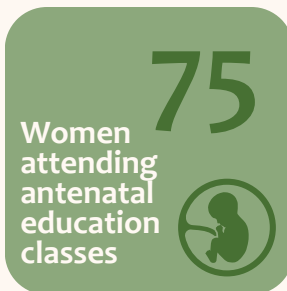
# EQUAL START OXFORD

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report delivers you the impact of the work of the Equal Start Oxford project. Services delivered through Maternity Advocates case works handling, as well as activities and programs addressed to birthing people and mothers with babies and children under 2 years old on weekly basis.

## SERVING THE COMMUNITY

APRIL 2024 TO MARCH 2025



### Key areas for Maternity Justice concerns:

Housing (overcrowding, moulding), benefits (universal credit, child benefits), financial, food poverty. Other areas of concern include domestic abuse and neglect, asylum.

Our impact  
2024/25



# CASE WORKS HANDLED BY MATERNITY ADVOCATES

## BETWEEN APRIL 2024 AND MARCH 2025

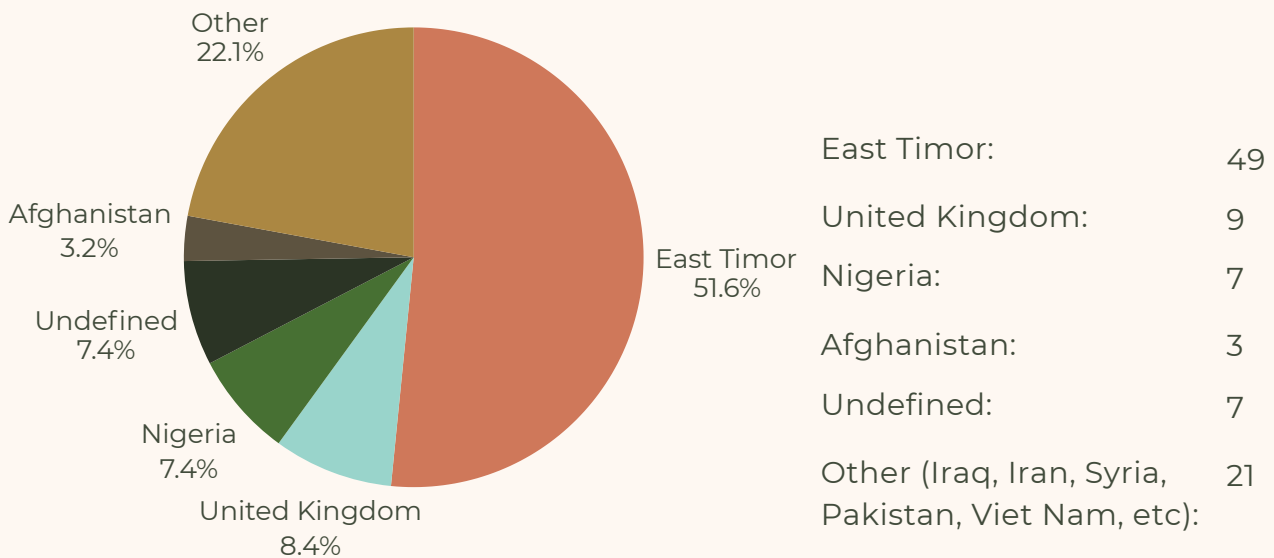
### USING CRM TO CAPTURE THE DATA:

The Equal Start Oxford has started its transition to transfer its notes and data to Salesforce, a customer relationship management (CRM) technology, mainly to ensure data security. This also helps the Project to capture the data more up-to-date and also more accurately.

Apart from that, this system also helps the Maternity Advocates to track interactions and offer better support to pregnant people and mothers.

Overall, the tracking system offers a data-driven decision for the Project's upcoming actions and activities. By so, the Project's activities is expected to be more tailor-made and have sharper approach in targeting the issues.

GRAPH 1. NUMBER OF CASES BASED ON COUNTRY OF ORIGIN:



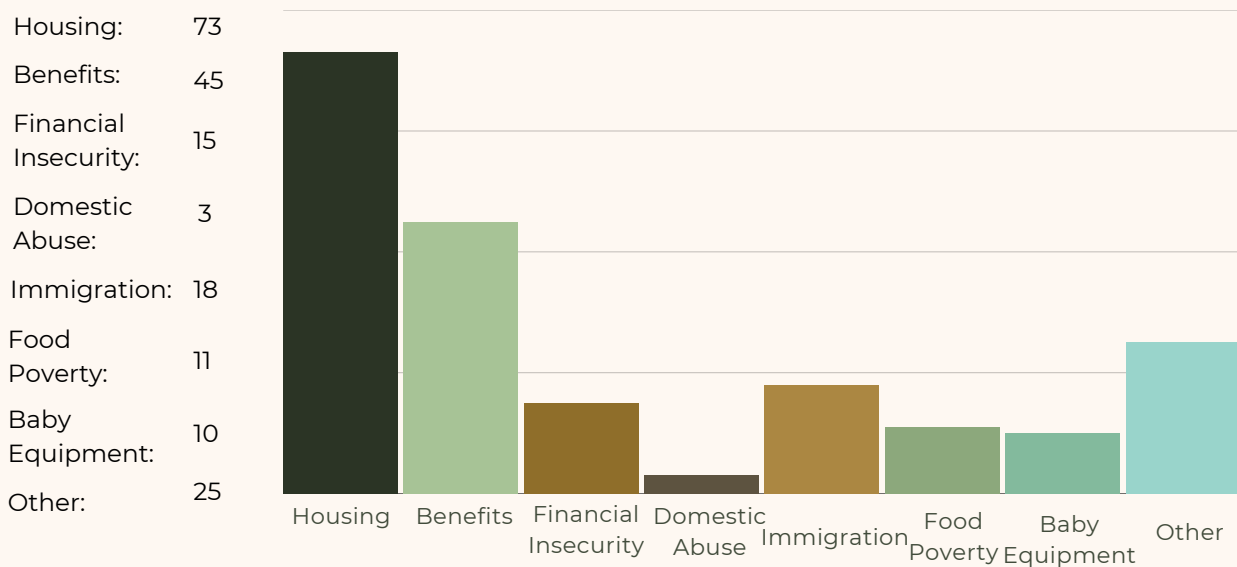
During April 2024 to March 2025, there were 49 pregnant women and mothers from East Timor origin received maternal support. This counts the majority of cases to the Equal Start Oxford as much as 51.6%. Other cases where the country of origin in undefined count to as many as 7 cases, or around 7.4%. Pregnant women and mothers from the United Kingdom was in the second position, with as many as 9 cases, or around 8.5% (see Graph 1 **above**).



Most of the request of help that comes to the Equal Start Oxford are on the issues of housing, such as overcrowding and moulding. There are 73 cases fall under this category, where a lot of them are put in temporary housing, which leads to another issue of food poverty, since they are lacking access to kitchen and hot food (see Graph 2 **below**).

Peer-to-peer support group and the Maternity Advocates service have managed to identify domestic abuse from a mother who was too reluctant to share with any formal institution dealing with such abuse. As such, the Equal Start Oxford team runs through the safeguarding mechanism in line with Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (OCSP) and the larger National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) body.

GRAPH 2. CASE WORKS BY REASON OF REFERRAL:



## ADDRESSING THE ISSUES:

### LANGUAGE BARRIER

Language Barrier has been one of the highest causes of health care access for Black and Minoritised pregnant mothers and mothers with children below 2 years old. Lack of interpreters or translated materials in local healthcare settings may cause misunderstanding and hinder people from seeking care.

### IMMIGRATION & LEGAL STATUS

Some of the individuals that came to Equal Start Oxford's service might have unclear or insecure immigration status.

The fear or confusion about health care access entitlements may discourage them from engaging with vital health care services.



### LACK OF AWARENESS & UNDERSTANDING OF HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

The healthcare system locally may be very different to what they have back home. Lack of understanding of how to register with a GP, referrals, and services like 111, and A&E may hinder them from using the service.

### SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS

Many of the Black and minoritised pregnant people and mothers with young children are from family with low-paid, precarious jobs, often with long or irregular hours. This may lead to difficulty attending appointments, and delayed care.

### STIGMA WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

Stigma around mental health, chronic conditions, or sexual and reproductive health, may lead them to delays in seeking help.

### TRUST & DISCRIMINATION

Experience of discrimination or racism in the UK may further discourage engagement.

## WORK ON THE SOLUTIONS:

The Equal Start Oxford, under Flo's - The Place In The Park, with full support and collaboration with NHS, Oxford University Hospital, and related research departments in University of Oxford, have been working tirelessly to address these issues.



**Maternal healthcare education** for Black and Minoritised women in the OX4 postcode area, with the support of **translation** in the **Antenatal Course**. Provide mental health support to new mothers with babies below 1 year old with **Baby Yoga**.



**Peer-to-peer support for mothers** in the OX4 post code area, e.g. **East Timor Mums Group** every Monday, which are also proven handy not only to address **maternal health** issues but also **isolation** and **safeguarding**.



**Empower the mothers** to learn English by running **English Class**, or make use of their skill in English, as well as other skills provided by **NCT course/Paediatric First Aid** to be the source of help and support for other mothers & learn skills on dealing with children's emergency first hand.



**Equip mothers** with essential skills and knowledge to prepare school-age children with **Getting Ready to School** and **Nature Explorers**.





# BACKGROUND

## HISTORY OF EQUAL START OXFORD

The Equal Start Oxford initially started as a pilot project at the end of 2022. This community project is a response to local and national research on inequalities in access, experience and outcomes faced by Black and minoritised women & birthing people (those from the global majority) living in the local area of the OX4 postcode at Oxford.

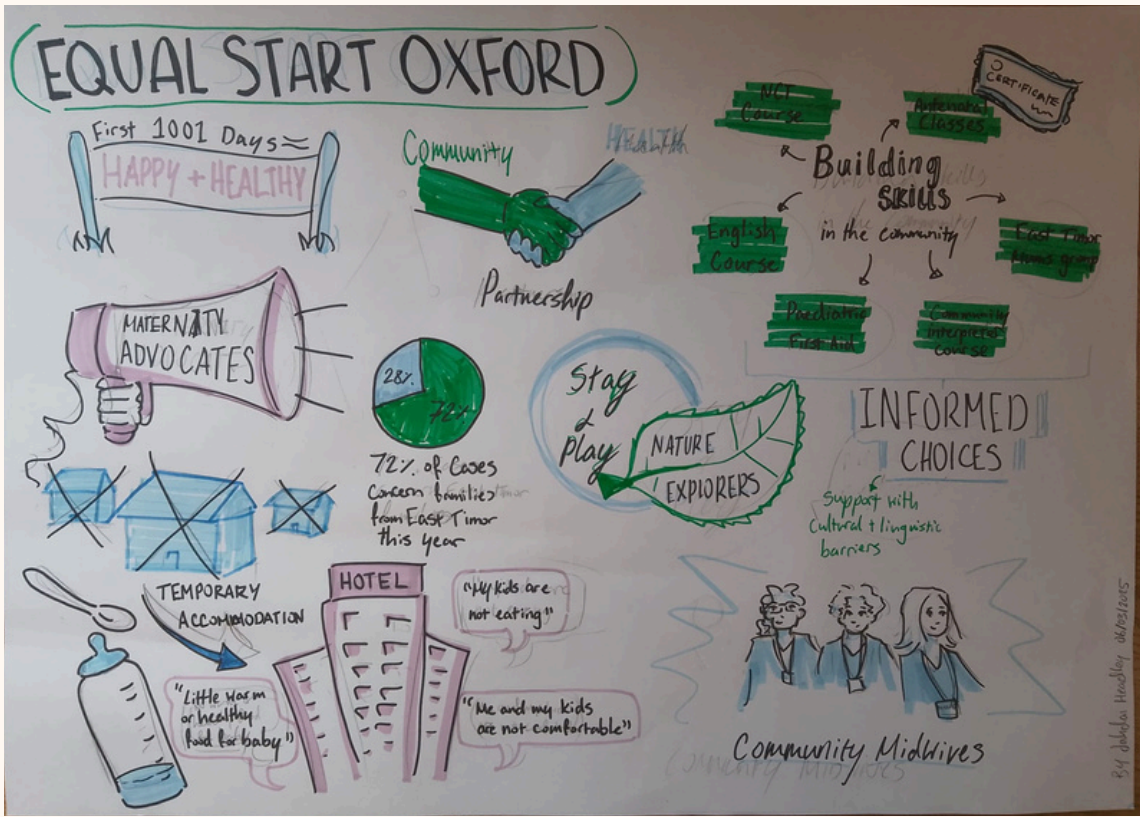
The project focuses on supporting families through their baby's first 1,000 days, which spans pregnancy and the first two years of a child's life. Its main aim is that all mothers and birthing parents in OX4 are able to have a positive experience of pregnancy and early parenthood, and can ensure a thriving start for their babies. The project responds to the needs above with strands below:

1	2	3	4	5
HEALTH LITERACY	MATERNAL JUSTICE	PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT	RAISE VOICES	EARLY YEARS
Antenatal Course	Case Works	East Timor Mums Group	OMNVP Surveys	Getting Ready for School
English Class	CRM	NCT Course	Lived Experience Consultants	Nature Explorers
		Community Interpreter Course	Raising Voices of Families in Temporary Accommodations	Baby Yoga
		Paediatric First Aid		

### INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATIONS

Equal Start Oxford celebrated the first International Women's Day on 8 March 2024. The second International Women's Day was celebrated on 6 March 2025.

The event was attended by numerous parties, medical doctors and midwives from the healthcare system within the NHS, including ones in the maternity, perinatal, and mental health sectors. The event was also attended by researchers from the University of Oxford, NPEU, and other research bodies focusing on maternal healthcare and gender equality.



Equal Start Oxford - International Women's Day on 6 March 2025 Animation by Jahda Headley



## MEET THE TEAM

### Maternity Advocates

Maternity Advocate, previously called MACO (Maternity Advocate & Community Organiser), was created in February 2023.

Their main role is to support women holistically in achieving maternal justice, as well as working with partners to overcome practical and system barriers.



**Elita Quammie**

Maternity Advocate



**Adelia Fernandes**

Maternity Advocate  
East Timor Focus



**Millie Khisa**

Maternity Advocate  
(Maternity Cover)



**Sarah Craft**

Family  
Coordinator

### Family Coordinator

Family Coordinator has been integral part of Flo's - The Place in The Park. Its main role is to run routine activities addressed to families and children. Their activities include Getting Ready for School, Nature Explorers; and Baby Yoga.

### Others

The Communities Manager works directly under the Director of Flo's: managing two major communities projects: OX4 Food Crew and the Equal Start Oxford project.

Along with the Communities Coordinator, Project Coordinator, and all team members, they work together in budgeting & financing, administrative, communications, reporting and community outreach of the Project's programs and trainings.



**Melissa Latchman**

Communities  
Manager



**Madhur Wale**

Communities  
Coordinator



**Jessica Clara Shinta**

Project  
Coordinator



**Dr Brenda Kelly, PhD FRCOG**

Obstetrician  
Oxford University Hospital  
NHS FT Maternity Health  
Inequalities Lead

The works of the Equal Start Oxford are fully supported by Dr. Brenda Kelly, PhD FRCOG from Oxford University Hospital. The project also is fully supported and closely collaborate with Carina Okiki, Specialist Midwife for EDI, who works together with Adelia Fernandes, Equal Start Oxford's Maternity Advocate.

The project works together with the Midwives team from Flo's; as well as the Rectory Road Centra for Florence Park Midwives in Oxford.



**Carina Okiki**

Specialist Midwife for EDI  
Oxford University Hospital  
NHS



The Florence Park Midwives at Rectory Road



# ACTIVITIES & PROGRAMS

## 1. HEALTH LITERACY

Access to Targeted and effective antenatal education and support

### ANTENATAL CLASSES

In antenatal class there are four sessions every month facilitated by midwives from JR Hospital. Referrals come from midwives. Most of the referrals are women from Timor Leste and sometimes from other migrant women. Adelia provides Tetum translation services for East Timor women. This class is very helpful for migrant women who are going to have their baby in the UK for the first or second time. The information given is very helpful for them to be able to understand the UK health system properly. This class also provides a free sim card for mothers to get free data, text and call. They are able to call their midwives and can access the Badger Note app to see their appointments.

In April 2025, we had a Russian woman join the class referred by AfiUK. We visited Spires at JR hospital on 3rd April 2025.



Antenatal Class at the Pavilion, Flo's



Visit to the Spires at JR Hospital

### ENGLISH COURSE

The English course was for East Timor mums. The goal was to encourage mothers to speak English so they can communicate with midwives and doctors. In September 2024, women were taught about general health, such as how to buy medicine at the pharmacy and also how to maintain health for our well-being and mental health. At the end of the English course, all mothers received a certificate. ESO provided community space and childcare, so mothers can learn English. 8 people came in September 2024.



English Course at the Ark-T @ The Venue



## 2. MATERNAL JUSTICE

Advocating for inclusive, culturally sensitive maternity services

### MATERNITY ADVOCATE SERVICE

We focus on women, birthing people and families through their baby's first 1001 days. Helping them overcome barriers that can affect them in accessing the care and support that they need. Through the referral service, their needs are identified, and then we work with them to support these needs. We work with and alongside many organisations for the best advice for that individual, and we will support them with this.

Adelia works tirelessly to translate from English to Tetum, providing accessible information for the East Timor community in Oxford. This also includes support with phone calls and written information to other services.

We are also in the process of looking at the OMNVP survey and adapting it to our service users needs, to make it more user friendly. This will build a bigger picture of how minoritized women felt during their maternity care. We also work closely with OX4 Food Crew in addressing food poverty of pregnant women and mothers with young children relocated to temporary accomodations.

We ensure that mothers get the help they need through referrals from midwives. We talk to mothers to find the best solution to their problems. As a Maternity Advocate, we ensure mothers get the help they need to be able to care for their babies in the first 1001 days of pregnancy.

**The caseworks Maternity Advocates help with range around public support to mothers and families, such as universal benefit, child allowance, housing, immigration, etc. Sometimes, though, they are faced with handling more delicate issues around safeguarding, esp. when issues such as domestic violence and child abuse. Next are examples of cases the Maternity Advocates had to face.**



“One of the ladies we help were put in temporary accommodation. Her first son was taken away by the Council, she was pregnant again. She could not pay for the rent, so she was moved to hotel accommodation. She received food parcels, but all raw food. No kitchen. Protein was found in her urine. Baby was small size.”



“We help a pregnant lady whose entire family was made homeless because they could not afford rent. She was put in a bed & breakfast infested with bed bugs. Family of six was given a two-bedroom housing, where her daughter need to share bedroom with her teenage son.”





## CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT (CRM)

The case notes and referrals received by Maternity Advocates are stored in the safe and secure system of CRM. It helps to organise and streamline processes of case works. It also helps to provides insights through dashboards and reports to guide business decisions and efficiently arrange tasks like follow-ups.

### 3. PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT

Community resilience: Creating peer support networks for new mothers

#### EAST TIMOR MUMS GROUP

The group is very important for East Timor women to share their experience of childbirth and how to care for babies in a new country. It is good for women to come and get information about women's health in general, the school system, domestic abuse, safeguarding, domestic violence, etc. In this group we also help women who have problems with immigration status who don't have access to NRTPF to get more support from other services.

In the East Timor Mums group we invite Guest speakers to come to the group.

In 2024/2025 we invited:

- 1.Oxford Sexual Health Service
- 2.Reducing the Risk
- 3.Sundial Centre



East Timor Mums Group session on contraceptions, 21 October 2024



First Aider Training with East Timor Mums, 11 September 2024



## NCT COURSE: BIRTH & BEYOND

These sessions are done by an NCT trainer, to develop skills and knowledge as a peer supporter. Peer supporters help pregnant and new mums in our community and gather local community information such as advice centres, new groups, events in the area, food banks etc. With the idea to help signpost mums that are in need of support. We have also been very fortunate to offer the peer support workers knowledge based sessions that look at topics such as safeguarding, mental health, barriers to accessing services, domestic abuse



NCT Course, 19 September 2024 to 9 January 2025

## COMMUNITY INTERPRETER COURSE

This course aims at empowering the women who have been actively participating Equal Start Oxford's peer-to-peer support trainings by utilising their skills in their native language and English in helping their communities. The course mainly focuses on subject surrounding the Black and minoritised background communities, such as healthcare, immigration, and issues around refugees. The training was delivered by professional interpreters from Voices in Refuge based in Nottingham, UK.

This course was joined by 19 people from different backgrounds and native languages, among them are speakers of Tetum, Portuguese, Arabic, Swahili, Bahasa Indonesia, Urdu, and Hindi. Equal Start Oxford is currently working closely with Oxford University Hospital on the possibilities for future employment in healthcare areas.



Community Interpreter Course, 23 January to 19 February 2025



## PAEDIATRIC FIRST AID

This training is aimed at mothers to empower them to job market that requires the certification of paediatric first aid, such as schools, nurseries, and other jobs with childcare settings. The training is an intense 15 hours session provided by Body Mind & Soul, which includes practice and written examinations to fulfil the requirement of FAA Level 3 Award provided by NUCO. The training provided childcare to ensure mothers can fully focus on the entire training.



Paediatric First Aid, 10 to 31 January 2025

## 4. RAISE VOICES

Empowering women to share experiences and shape services

### LIVED EXPERIENCE CONSULTANTS

Equal Start Oxford holds Steering Committee Meeting every two months, where Lived Experience Consultants were invited to share their experiences and knowledge with representatives of midwives and healthcare providers at the OX4 area. Husna Akram, Zuleyha Tassew Lako, and Adelaide Piedade Fahic were active participants of peer-to-peer support trainings provided by the Equal Start Oxford. Their valuable insights are worthwhile to the planning and running of Equal Start Oxford's current and upcoming project.



Lived Experience Consultants have been actively participating in Equal Start Oxford Steering Committee Meetings, between September 2024 and March 2025



## 5. EARLY YEARS

Preparing children for school through play-based learning

### GETTING READY FOR SCHOOL

Preparing for school sessions are important because they equip parents with the skills, knowledge, and support needed to navigate the challenges of raising children, build stronger family relationships, and ultimately improve child well-being. They also help reduce stress and improve family communication. This program is part funded by Children in Need.

The sessions empower parents to create a supportive and nurturing environment for their children, fostering healthy development, positive relationships, and overall well-being for both parents and children.

We are doing preparing for school with the East Timor groups because it is particularly important as they have limited access to education and resources which impact children's development.

The sessions we have done so far are Introductory session, Importance of play, Communication. We have started with this because it's a good way to get to know each other and find out how much they know and what they already do with their children, we have had 9 Adults and 8 children coming to the sessions and they have been going really well lot's of interaction from the families, In some of our sessions we have given the families things they can take home and do with their children so far we have given them a set of my first word books.

For the East Timor preparing your child for school sessions, we did the Introductory session first because it's a good way to get to know each other and find out how much they know and what they already do with their children in this session we did a group activity with some different pictures e.g go to the doctors, go to school, sleep and rest, eat healthy, have a mobile phone ect.... And we got the families to put them where they think they should be: Want, Need, No. It was really good that everyone got involved after the activity. We had a group discussion about where they put the pictures and why.



Getting Ready for School with East Timor Mums



## PARENT AND BABY YOGA

Becoming a parent can be tough at times, and parents may find themselves more tired, feeling lonely, and experiencing new emotions. These sessions are open to anyone who may be feeling they want to connect with other parents and use movement to support their physical and mental well-being; whether it be low mood, anxiety, or more. This program is funded by Sport in Mind and addressed to parents and babies (under 1 & after a post natal check-up).

Parent and Baby yoga is funded by the Sport in Mind. This program is beneficial for new parents and babies below age of 1 year old, which also supports mental health.





## CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNED

- There has been maximum capacity issues with other organisations that we have been signposting to, such as Spire and Charity for Homelessness.
- To overcome this, a Partnership agreement with Crisis, Agnes Smith, Asylum Welcome, Connection Support shall be considered.

## NEXT STEPS

We would like to say a big thank you to BOB LMNS & the BOB ICB for providing the funding for this next year 25/26. This allows us to continue the Maternity advocate service for the East Tlmor and other migrant communities. We will also be inviting another cohort of local mothers to build resilience in the community through the Peer to Peer support network training.

Having run the Community Interpreter course we have seen the great need to again repeat this course to expand the pool of interpreters available with the long term view of improving the interpreting services in OUH & other local authority services.

Our Family Coordinator will continue to work alongside our East Tlmor Maternity Advocate to increase the accessibility of early years provision for children of migrant families who have been left behind in terms of school readiness.

We will continue to grow our partnerships with OMNVP, Homestart, OxPIP amongst others to bring our services together for those most in need.



*Photo by: Mike Sim for Flo's - The Place in The Park*

The Equal Start Oxford is an integral part of Flo's - The Place in The Park, where it also hosts Flo's Nursery and Florence Midwives. The project works closely esp. with the Midwives in Florence Park and Rectory Road in East Oxford.



## STAFFING

A big welcome to Sarah Craft who started as the new Family Coordinator in April & Jessica Shinta our new project coordinator who started in September 24. Both have hit the ground running & got stuck into the work without hesitation. Also welcome back to Elita Quammie (& super-cute Kyla) our Maternity Advocate after her maternity leave. Another big thank you to Millie Khisa for also picking up the work very quickly while Elita was away.

Not forgetting the continued hard work of Adelia, our East Timorese Maternity who shoulders some of the most complex family situations we have ever seen. She does this with continued grace & flair.

I can not thank the Equal Start Oxford team enough for their complete dedication to the aims of the project & the plight of the families we work with. This is despite the insecure employment contracts that they hold in the short term funding climate. They are all on the front line of multiple issues with people in extreme circumstances, some of which many people will never experience in their entire lives. This team makes the welfare of young children in this community their priority day to day, meanwhile living in the same communities & taking care of their own families at home.

**Melissa Latchman** - Communities Manager at Flo's

### East Timor Mums Group

The East Timor Mums hosted by the Project received their recognition as part of the Oxford City's community by involving in the Museum of Oxford's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary from the Oxford City Council.

On 19 May 2025, they had the opportunity to display the beauty of their traditional costume '*tais*', and built 'crocodile' representing the East Timor's shape on map, by creating artwork made of recycled papers.

The artwork will be displayed at the Museum of Oxford until January 2026.



Photo by: Mike Sim for Flo's - The Place in The Park





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