

ROCKABYE EVALUATION REPORT

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The report is dedicated to the memory of Lucy Livingstone.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rockabye is a group for new parents who are experiencing some kind of difficulty. This report uses in-depth interview narratives from women who have attended the group in order to evaluate whether the group meets its aims. The following offers a brief summary of the findings.

1) Mother-baby relationship benefits

Enjoying being with your baby:

The group enabled mothers to develop more connected relationships with their babies, and to begin enjoying spending time with their babies.

Improving understanding of your baby:

The activities allowed the mums to really focus on their babies, giving them an understanding of how they changed over time, and deepening their understanding of, and curiosity about, their babies.

Increasing confidence:

The mothers became more confident in their interactions with their babies, and their identities as mothers.

Feeling skilled:

The mothers became more skilled in playing with their children, taking ideas from the activities they did at the group home. The group taught them new ways of being together. The way that the group enabled the socialisation of their babies also allowed the mothers to understand themselves as good mothers.

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2) Parenting impacts

Connecting with others:

Other mother and baby groups were challenging to attend, often because they were unpredictable, overwhelming, or unfriendly. Rockabye provided a vital function in allowing these mothers to attend a group, because of the size, the structure of the group, and the ways that the facilitators made it a welcoming environment.

Honesty about being a parent:

The honesty that the group enabled was one of the key themes to emerge from the interviews. Rockabye was seen to be a distinctive space in which they could be honest, without social penalty. The facilitation was key to the creation of this distinctive space and enabled honesty in two main ways. Firstly, the group was non-judgemental, which allowed the mothers to speak freely without fear of being judged negatively. Secondly, the group wasn't explicitly advice giving. The lack of advice was variously empowering (as it legitimated what the mothers were already doing), and helped in respect of the sometimes complex relationships that the mothers had with health professionals in early motherhood.

The effects of honesty:

The honesty that characterised Rockabye had the effects of de-stigmatising the difficulties that they were experiencing. This normalisation of difficulty had positive impacts on the mothers' identities, as they were legitimized and accepted just as they were.

Feeling supported:

The group enabled the mothers to access multiple forms of support, including support from the staff who ran the group, other forms of support (enabling them to access other groups and other early years professionals), and the peer support that they received from the other members of the group. The peer support was characterised by care and compassion, and the friendships that developed were non-competitive. The particular blend of friendship and motherhood that emerged from the Rockabye group was seen to be distinctive by the interviewees, who suggested that they had not been able to access these kinds of intimacy and support in other early motherhood spaces.

3) Mother and baby groups

Mother and baby groups are understood to be a key activity that should be undertaken in early motherhood. They can play an important role in extending the network of social support that the mother is able to access, generating feelings of acceptance, and providing social legitimisation as the mothers participate in this activity which has come to be a normative part of motherhood in the UK. In a number of cases, if the mother hadn't attended Rockabye, they would not have been able to access any mother and baby groups. Rockabye plays a key role in allowing these mothers to access the kinds of social support and acceptance that groups are able to provide.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recommendations:

- **To secure continued funding locally for the Rockabye group.**
- **To make sure all local relevant health practitioners are aware of the group's existence, purpose and referral procedures.**
- **To maintain appropriate group sizes to allow the highest quality support to be offered.**
- **The groups should continue to provide support for the largest number of mothers possible across Bristol.**
- **Research should be undertaken that attempts to address the less tangible and more experiential elements of the group, in order to communicate more clearly the impacts of the dance movement therapy work on the relationship between mother and baby. This might be in the form of observational and/or clinical evaluation.**

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1) INTRODUCTION

Rockabye is a group for new parents who are experiencing some kind of difficulty in early parenthood. Difficulties in early motherhood are relatively common, with between 10 and 20% of mothers reporting experiencing depression in the perinatal period (Bauer et al. 2015) and a wider and more diverse range of difficulties remaining unreported. The kinds of difficulties that attendees of Rockabye experience are wide, but commonly include post-natal depression and/or anxiety or other mental health difficulties; difficulties in bonding with their baby and/ or transitioning to motherhood; relationship difficulties and/or other problems in life; a difficult birth experience; a difficult journey to parenthood; or existing health related diagnoses.

Causal relationships between perinatal mental health difficulties and the long-term negative effects on children's emotional, social and cognitive development have been mapped out by a number of agencies; for example, the Good Start to Life briefing (Mental Health Network 2014: 3) notes that 'depression and anxiety, particularly if untreated or chronic or associated with social adversity, can affect an infant's mental health and have longstanding effects on a child's emotional, social and cognitive development'.

The Maternal Mental Health Alliance has modelled the societal costs of mental health difficulties across the perinatal period (from conception to 1 year post-birth), and they suggest that for 'each one- year cohort of births in the UK' there is a 'long-term cost of society of about £8.1 billion' (Bauer et al. 2014: 3). Of this, they suggest that 72% 'relates to adverse impacts on the child rather than the mother' (Bauer et al. 2014: 4).

In Bristol, a range of support is available for new mothers experiencing such difficulties, ranging from medication, general group and/or individual psychological interventions, and specific support. These are provided through a number of gatekeepers, from Health Visitors, General Practitioners, Children's Centres, and/or voluntary sector organisations such as Mothers for Mothers and Bluebell. Given the range of support, it is important to take the kind of in-depth look at Rockabye that is offered by this report in order to understand the specific offering of this group.

Rockabye was established to support the connection between parent and baby, with the ideas underpinning it drawn from Dance Movement Therapy. Dance movement therapy has been found to enhance mother-infant attachment and experience (Doonan and Brauning 2015), and the group was formed on the principle of supporting what is working between parent and baby, and to nourish shared joy and companionship between them (<http://www.rockabye.org.uk/>).

Since 2005, the group has been delivered through Children's Centres in the Bristol area. The founder of Rockabye, Lucy Livingstone, handed the group over to Katy Taylor (a core process psychotherapist), and Clare Beckell (a play therapist) before she passed away in 2014. They have continued to run the group along the principles established by Lucy, adding their own expertise and specialities in adult and child mental health.

The groups are for mothers with babies who are not crawling yet, and are delivered in a small group format over 10-12 weeks. The group is closed, so the attendance can be as consistent as possible over the life of the group. The groups are facilitated by workers from the Children's Centres, who are trained and receive supervision from Katy and Clare. The group meets once a week at Children's Centres and associated venues (e.g. local libraries on days that they are closed to the public).

Access to the group is by referral from health visitors, general practitioners, primary infant mental health specialists and Children's Centres. The Antenatal Rockabye group also provides a route into Rockabye postnatally, and parents are also able to self-refer. At any one time, there will be multiple Rockabye groups running across the city in different locations.

The group follows the same format each week; the first part of the group is talk time, where the mothers and babies sit in a circle on the floor and are invited to share something from their week, one by one. Following the talk time, the facilitator invites the mothers and babies to take part in various activities which use music and singing, and a variety of sensory-type props. These activities and songs are returned to week on week, forming a core of familiar activities for the mothers and the babies.

This report uses qualitative methods to evaluate what Rockabye offers in relation to the stated aims of the group in relation to improving the mother-baby relationship (enjoying being with your baby, feeling skilled, increasing confidence, improving understanding of your baby) and in relation to parenting (honesty about being a parent, connecting with others, feeling supported).

These are contextualised via literature drawn from across the Social Sciences. The group was last evaluated in 2009 (Horrocks et al. 2009), and the findings suggested that the group provided a safe, supportive environment, facilitated connections with other mums, allowed the attendees to learn about their baby, and develop their parenting skills. The current report provides an important update given the changes in leadership, wider contextual changes, and increased profile of post-natal mental health difficulties more generally.

2) THE EVALUATION

As mentioned in the introduction, the first evaluation was carried out for the purposes of finding out how far the group was effective in meeting its aims, and to provide information for funders. This evaluation has been conducted with similar aims. The evaluation takes a Realist(ic) perspective (Pawson and Tilley 1997).

This has two key characteristics. The first of these is that the programme is evaluated relative to the vision of change that the programme has. Rockabye has a clear vision of the kinds of changes that they want to bring about through the group, and these ideas of change have driven the evaluation, providing the basis for the in-depth interview themes, the analysis of the interviews and the presentation of this report.

The second is the principle that the programme doesn't take place in a vacuum so the circumstances of the participants must be considered in order to fully understand how the programme works (or not). This sociological perspective notes that interventions, such as Rockabye, are embedded in broader social contexts and these social contexts play a part in how participants are able to participate, and the experiences that the participants have.

Context is given a strong role in realist(ic) perspectives; while a programme such as Rockabye can promote change, the extent of change possible is always set within the social circumstances of the participants. These two key characteristics have a broader consequence; that the evaluation cannot give a pass or fail verdict, but rather tries to offer a better understanding of how the mechanisms of the programme interact with the lives of the participants. This evaluation has been carried out in close relation to the organisers of Rockabye so that feedback has been offered in person during the course of the evaluation. A summary of the evaluation's findings was also offered to the Rockabye practitioners who run the groups at their annual Continual Professional Development day.

2.1 METHODOLOGY:

The realist(ic) perspective offered the rationale for the programme using in-depth interviews as the key method. In-depth interviews are a well-established method used across the Social Sciences (Cook, 2012). They offer the opportunity to gain detailed understandings of a particular issue from a small number of people.

The interviews were semi-structured, meaning that I prepared a series of prompts to enable us to cover the key areas that the evaluation was concerned with, but there was also room for the interviewee to direct the agenda. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes, and very rich interview narratives were recorded and then transcribed. The previous evaluation used a mixture of focus groups and in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews were chosen here to reflect my own specialisms, and also because of a belief in the value of giving the women enough time to articulate their experiences in as much detail as required.

Each interview offered the opportunity to gather some contextual information from the mothers, to find out about the attendance of the group, and to gain their perspectives on how the group had helped them and what they thought could have been changed or improved.

The interviewees were recruited through the Rockabye groups; 4 groups were chosen in conjunction with Clare and Katy, and the Rockabye practitioners acted as gatekeepers. These groups were chosen with the aim of ensuring geographical spread across the city, as well as covering groups that were held within the Children's Centres and some held in outside venues. A pragmatic approach also had to be taken as it was only possible to choose groups actually running during the period of data collection.

In 3 cases I was able to attend the final session of the course and was given five minutes to introduce myself and the research, to invite the mums to ask any questions that they had, and to distribute information and consent forms. Many of the participants filled in the forms and returned them in person at the end of the session. Others took them away and posted them back using the stamped addressed envelopes that I included with the consent form. I didn't gain access to the fourth group in person, but the Rockabye practitioner distributed the forms and explained about the research to the group attendees.

15 mothers agreed to take part in the research, and I arranged to meet with the mothers in person to conduct the interviews. Some took place in their homes, some in cafes, and some in the Children's Centres. I tried to capture the opinions of those who had dropped out of the group, asking the Rockabye practitioners to send letters with information sheets and consent forms to those mums who had not completed the course, but didn't get any responses from them.

I attempted some follow-up interviews a year later, in order to try and gain a sense of longer impacts of the group. I contacted the mums via email and text message, but none of the participants returned my messages.

This is possibly because contact details had changed, but also likely because the mums had gained a distance from their difficult experiences of early motherhood and so may have been reluctant to revisit them in another interview, or because they had returned to work and were navigating the complexities and busyness of this and had no time or capacity for involvement.

The research was considered and approved by the University of Exeter Geography department ethics committee. I have experience in interviewing mothers with post-natal depression (see Lea forthcoming), and lived experience of post-natal depression myself. At the beginning of each interview, I took the mums through the consent form and reminded them of the ways that their interview transcripts would be used, I reminded them that they were able to refuse to answer any questions that were too difficult for them or that they didn't want to answer. At the end of the interview I let them know that they were able to withdraw from the research at any time up until the publication date, and gave them my contact details to enable them to do this if they wanted to.

The interviews were transcribed and anonymised. I then coded them by hand, according to themes that emerged from the data, and also the stated aims of Rockabye.

2.2 THE AIMS OF THE GROUP:

The Rockabye organisers supplied me with details of the desired benefits of the group at the beginning of the evaluation process, and these can be broadly separated into two kinds of aims; firstly those related to the mother-baby relationship, and secondly those relating to parenting. These aims are summarised below:

- 1) *Mother-baby relationship*
 - Enjoying being with your baby
 - Feeling skilled
 - Increasing confidence
 - Improve your understanding of your baby
- 2) *Parenting*
 - Promoting honesty about being a parent
 - Connecting with others
 - Feeling supported

Each of these will be evaluated, using extracts from the in-depth interviews, below. These will be followed by some reflections on the accessibility of the group, as well as some discussion of the complexities and difficulties that were reported by the interviewees.

3) MOTHER-BABY RELATIONSHIP

This section will look at the first set of aims which are related to the mother-baby relationship and the identity of the mother; which are feeling skilled, enjoying being with your baby, increasing confidence, and improving your understanding of your baby.

3.1 ENJOYING BEING WITH YOUR BABY

The mothers' experiences of enjoying being with their babies were articulated clearly in the interviews, in a range of ways. Firstly, for instance, interviewee 1 noted that the group allowed her to develop a new kind of relationship with her baby that she hadn't experienced before. The group allowed her to experience very special moments of stillness and connection with her baby;

'one of the things I have been, that has been difficult for me, like he wasn't - like you see he's not very cuddly. He's like a little (laughs) a little worm moving around! But he never wanted to do skin to skin and he has never been very cuddly. So in the first group that was something I was quite - I, which I enjoyed. That when I sang to him, and when he was on the special pillow, he looked right at me"

(Interviewee 1)

In addition to the way that the group allowed this mum and baby to learn new and enjoyable ways of being together, a more general sense of enjoying spending time with the babies emerged. This, in part, arose from seeing the babies enjoying the group as well:

'Routine, I think, you know it was nice when every week, just say like you got out the ribbons or you got out the bubbles, and his face started to recognise what was going to happen and watch him engage with it. At the beginning he would sleep for about half of it and then by the end you know he was shaking [with excitement] when he saw the bubbles coming out you know ... he really, really enjoyed it, yeah'

(Interviewee 3)

'I think he definitely got, I think he definitely liked it, like you could tell he was smiling at it. By the end of it, you know, he was definitely going for things, and I think definitely he enjoyed it, he definitely enjoyed it'

(Interviewee 5)

The weekly repetition of the group structure and the activities undertaken emphasised the developmental change over time in how the babies themselves were understood to be enjoying the activities and enjoying spending time with the other children. The interviewees universally reported that the group had facilitated their enjoyment of their baby. This is significant, given that in many cases the mothers hadn't experienced this in a regular or sustained manner before attending the group.

3.2 IMPROVING UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR BABY

The experience of enjoying spending time with their babies also, in part, created the conditions for the mothers to improve their understandings of their babies. Taking part in the activities allowed the mothers to develop a form of attentiveness and absorption that allowed them to really focus on their babies. At the same time, the regularity of the weekly structure with the repetition of songs and activities allowed the mothers to pay attention to the changes in the babies over time:

'What I enjoyed most was the sensory play and the songs and watching him develop with the same routine each week and the difference it made to him each week, and watching him develop, that's what, yeah, I enjoyed the most'

(Interviewee 3)

'I liked watching [baby] and her reaction to things, and her learning about the things she likes and the things she doesn't like and what she enjoys and what she doesn't enjoy, and watching her become aware of other babies eventually'

(Interviewee 6)

Here, the mothers describe the kinds of learning that they did about their babies, as they attended to their reactions and behaviours, and reflected on what these reactions meant. This shows a deepening curiosity and understanding of the baby as the group progressed, and a knowledge of the specificity of their own baby. This specific knowledge forms part of the basis for the development of confidence as a mother, as the following section will explore in more detail.

3.3 INCREASE CONFIDENCE

Developing the kinds of specific knowledge about their particular baby has been found to be important for the mother's ability to claim legitimacy as a mother and to gain control over their own life (Murphy 2003: 456). As such, the skills learnt at Rockabye don't just encompass a repertoire of activities that might be done with the babies at the group, but also indicate that the group opened up the mother's ability and confidence to spend more time with their babies in the kinds of interactional and playful activities they had learnt at Rockabye:

‘Rockabye gave me ... you know songs and activities and sensory ideas that I could do more with him. So that’s why I carried on going because I felt I was getting more out of in that way, like having a bank of...’

(Interviewee 3)

‘So it was nice to get new ideas and new songs and new things to do at home with [baby] as well, other than, you know, the play gym which gets a bit boring after a while, doesn’t it? You can put them on the [play gym] and you don’t really have to engage with it if you don’t want to.

Whereas we like playing, don’t we? We like bubbles and we like the scarves and we like the songs and we sing them at home don’t we?’

(Interviewee 6)

The group was seen to have positive effects on confidence, and this had a related empowering effect, as interviewee 8 articulates here:

‘and I just think that group gave me loads more confidence in myself as a mother, so it’s really empowering’

(Interviewee 8)

This confidence as a mother can be seen strongly in the interview narrative of interviewee 11 who described how the support offered to her at Rockabye had made a massive difference in how she felt.

Previously, she had felt ‘frozen’ and described how she had found it difficult to even know how to put food together to make a meal, and how to navigate the supermarket to create the meal. Further on in the interview she described how this had changed so that she was able not only to do the food shopping and cooking for her own family, but was also able to help other mums who she had met who were having a difficult time:

‘I’ve made contact with one lady who ... I’m dropping off food for her once a week so she doesn’t have to cook so much.

And ... I’m very good friends with one woman who I met through another playgroup - she was in Rockabye as well - so her and I helped this other lady who was just really tearful all the time - invited her out to the park. So we actually decided - we’re like almost supporting others because we feel that we’re much better ... because we were given so much support and we can offer it’

(Interviewee 11)

It is possible to see greatly increased confidence here, both in terms of being a mother, but also in terms of her identity as a friend and a fully participating member of her social network.

3.4 FEELING SKILLED

3.4.1. Activities

The skills that the mothers developed were multi-faceted. Firstly, a number of the mums said that they took ideas and activities from Rockabye and used them in their play at home with their children:

‘Yeah, a lot of it, we did a lot of it at home, all the little rhymes and activities, I got all like little sensory stuff that I’d made at home, to copy what they had there. So that was, that was long lasting. And again, he recognised it at home being the same, which was nice’

(Interviewee 3)

‘[baby] absolutely loved it. She loved the bubbles, she loved the scarf, she loved the music. And it was nice because those little simple things that you can take home and do in your environment, so it’s not something that’s unachievable to do at home ...’

(Interviewee 6)

In this way, the group teaches the mothers and babies new ways of being together and enjoying being with each other, which were simple enough and accessible enough to do together at home, and which extended the experience of enjoying being with the babies beyond the group; both temporally (being ‘long lasting’) and spatially (to the family’s home spaces

Some interviewees also mentioned that other people in the family (grandparents, father) had learnt the songs, so the benefits of Rockabye were also extended beyond the immediate mother-baby dyad to other members of the family and caregivers.

3.4.2. Social skills

The group was understood by the interviewees in developing their baby’s social skills. They described how their babies learned how to be with the other children and adults:

‘he certainly got socialisation and he got all the fun of those different activities’
(Interviewee 8)

‘he liked the social aspect at the end, he’d always lift the parachute’
(Interviewee 10)

‘because she was a little bit shy, a little bit “who are all these people?” at first. She’s very observant, she likes to watch, but after the first 4 weeks, she was kind of reaching out for babies and you know, taking more of an interest which was nice for me to see ... I think the activities enabled her to be aware of the other babies and then get more confidence in then eventually reaching out for them, so it was nice to see her grow and I think the activities allowed her to do that’
(Interviewee 6)

This socialisation element was seen to have a number of positive effects for the babies and mothers; for example, as interviewee 6 notes, she enjoyed seeing her baby socialising in this way. The social skills also provided another marker through which the baby's development and progress could be measured by the mums.

The socialisation has the potential to contribute to the mother's own sense that they are a good (enough) mother; the environment at Rockabye allows the babies to start exploring the world beyond their mothers in a safe way, so allowing the mothers to come to understand that they have secure attachment with their babies.

The social norms that determine the value of infant socialisation also enable the mother to feel that they are doing what they should be, in order to be a good mother. At the same time, post-natal depression has been found to negatively affect early-infant social interaction (Field 1992).

Rockabye offers the opportunity to mediate some of these negative effects if they are present, and the positive social interaction can potentially be reassuring for mothers who worry about the impacts of their mood on their babies.

3.5 CONCLUSION - MOTHER-BABY RELATIONSHIP BENEFITS

It is important to emphasise the very particular nature of the group and its distinctive position within the more general provision of mother and baby groups in Bristol. The role of Rockabye in facilitating the baby's sociality was seen as crucial by these particular mums, who themselves spoke about their own particular experiences of difficulties with social relationships (either long-standing, or newly experienced as part of new parenthood).

This socialisation function played a part in enabling the babies to meet the developmental norms that the mothers craved, as well as reducing anxieties and difficulties around social interactions. In the following quote, Interviewee 1 underlines just how significant Rockabye was for her and her baby:

'otherwise [without Rockabye] he wouldn't have seen any babies, and he loves babies. So definitely! Yeah. He really enjoyed looking at the other babies. And hopefully he's going to have some friends now as well'

(Interviewee 1)

Without Rockabye, Interviewee 1 (and a significant number of the other mums) would not have attended any mother and baby groups because of how she was feeling. Rockabye made it possible for her baby to get some socialisation and she took pleasure in seeing her baby enjoying other babies.

This section has shown that the group achieves its aims relating to the mother-baby relationship. The group opens up the possibility of new and enjoyable relationships between mum and baby, through the activities and routine of the group over time. These activities also build confidence and provide the basis for the mums to feel more skilled in their abilities to positively interact and play with their babies, and for these skills to develop beyond the spaces and times of the group. This enables a series of new understandings to open up, around the possibilities for enjoyment and relationship, the need for activity and playfulness (even when the baby is very young), and their own ability to make their babies happy and content.

More broadly, for the mother, a greater ability to enjoy her baby has a positive impact on the formation of her identity as a mother, partly because they are better able to fulfil the normative societal expectations about motherhood. While these are taken for granted qualities and feelings amongst many new mums, Rockabye opens up a space in which these can be developed when needed.

4) PARENTING BENEFITS

Attendance at a range of groups is a common activity for many new mothers, and these groups serve a number of different purposes. Groups often serve to extend social networks and to provide support around the shared experience of new motherhood. The groups are able to serve this purpose because, as Thoits (1986, in Anderson 2013: 711) argues, the 'most effective social support comes from individuals with whom we share experience'.

Groups cannot be assumed to automatically provide the opportunity for connection with others, however, so it is worth examining the work done at Rockabye to facilitate social connections, in the context of broader literatures around parenting and mother and baby groups.

One of the key outcomes of parenting groups is the construction and enactment of norms around good motherhood. While these serve to form the basis of inclusion, they can – in other situations – act as a barrier to the development of peer relationships and support. In relation to mother and baby groups, this has been found to be the case where the group's purpose is to teach elements of good parenting, and where there is an authority figure of some kind facilitating the group (Johnson 2015).

Similarly, groups that are designed to meet the needs of a professional agenda might restrict the development of relationships between participants (Peters and Skirton 2013). Even when there is no authority figure present, mother and baby groups have been found to define and operationalise notions of good motherhood informally through the women's talk, and peer support was found to be conditional on compliance with these norms (Tardy 2000).

Mother and baby groups are complex, and it is difficult to create a group that allows a range of different mothering identities to be present, that allows honest expression without penalty, and allows mothers who don't manage to attain the normative standards of parenthood to access professional and/or peer support.

As noted in section 3, the interviewees who had attempted to attend general mother and baby groups had most often found this to be a difficult experience. Groups are important, however; Nolan et al. (2012: 179) argue that 'any opportunity to provide mothers with supportive friendships must be considered valuable'.

In the context of mothers who are experiencing difficulties, and who can't access general groups, then specifically targeted groups that provide some kind of support function, such as Rockabye, are important. Support groups have a different dynamic to a general group, as they are generally more accepting of a range of (difficult) experiences and different identities.

Ugarriza (2004) claims that one of the best aspects of group support is the member's feelings of acceptance, as they are 'able to confide in others who are experiencing similar concerns and fears without being chastised for failing to live up to social values, such as the motherhood myth' (Anderson 2013: 711). Groups are important, but complex; their efficacy and inclusivity is not guaranteed.

The literature suggests that it is difficult to create a group which can support and include women who have a range of experiences. The next sections examine the Rockabye aims that are related to this group function; connecting with others, honesty about being a parent, and feeling supported.

4.1 CONNECTING WITH OTHERS

As the previous section suggested, connection with peers is significant in new motherhood, but the kinds of connections made and their dynamics require scrutiny. This section will look at the difficulties that the mothers experienced in making connections at other groups, before examining some of the opportunities offered by Rockabye.

As already noted, the mothers that attended Rockabye had often found it difficult to access more general mother and baby groups, or if they had attended other groups they had experienced them negatively. As interviewee 1 notes, Rockabye had been the only group that she had been able to attend because the unpredictability of other groups had been challenging because of her experiences of depression:

'Rockabye was the only group that I dared to go to because it's very, it's a fixed formula – you know exactly what's going to happen ... I find that uncertainty is very difficult when you're depressed, so knowing exactly, it's going to start at this time ... at first we're going to do this, then we're going to do this, and then we're going to do that, and then we're going to say goodbye and then we go home'

(Interviewee 1)

Similarly, interviewee 7 found that her experiences of anxiety made it difficult to attend other groups and to develop friendships at those groups:

‘It’s been very difficult, and making friends, especially when you’ve got anxiety problems isn’t easy. And to step outside of your comfort zone and, you know, attend all of these groups can be really intimidating’

(interviewee 7)

Other interviewees had managed to go to groups, but had found them to be difficult to negotiate. For example, interviewee 8 suggests that the other groups at the Children’s Centre had been too big, and in some sessions she hadn’t managed to make any connections or have any conversations with others.

In more bald terms, interviewee 12 notes that the other baby groups she had attended at the Children’s Centre were full of small close-knit groups of mums who didn’t include others, and this had stopped her from wanting to attend:

‘I’m not a particularly group person, but the size was really good. I’d gone to the under ones at [Children’s Centre name] ... Which is a much more free-flow group, drop-in and yeah just the babies do what they want to do and if people want to chat to one another they can, but equally I’ve sat in that group and not really talked to anybody as well, so... Rockabye was much more what I needed and wanted from a baby group’

(Interviewee 8)

‘I hated it because it was full of cliques I actually couldn’t stand it so I stopped going. But that would have been, if it weren’t for Rockabye, that would have been my only place to have gone’

(Interviewee 12)

Interviewee 14 noted that she had attended drop in groups, but she hadn’t been able to make social connections because of the inconsistency of attendees:

‘I don’t know what it was but I never really made any connections at the breastfeeding groups... there was no consistency with one week to the next ... I didn’t really seem to make any friends like that ...that was the good thing of Rockabye, it was the same people every week so we built a really good rapport and we, like met up, we’ve planned in for the next 4 weeks to meet up every Thursday morning to continue it on’

(Interviewee 14)

These quotes demonstrate that the interviewees variously found it difficult to attend groups, and when they did manage to attend the general drop-in groups that were provided by the Children’s Centre or Health Visitors, they had found it difficult to access the kinds of social connections with others that they both wanted, and felt the weight of social pressure to achieve.

For these mums, Rockabye provided a vital function; the group was tailored so that it was easy to attend for mums who were variously experiencing difficulties with their mental health, and the mums felt included in the group. The weekly structure provided opportunities to build up social relationships over a period of time, and, as interviewee 4 suggests, these relationships took on a duration beyond the life of the group.

This was partly supported by the group leaders, who organised circulation of contact details for the group members so they could maintain contact, as interviewee 8 notes here, and also the environment of the group which was planned to enable social contact after the group:

‘the facilitators sent out a text message which was really helpful with that so yeah, they definitely bridged [the gap]’
(Interviewee 8)

‘one of the things that was really important was that you weren’t rushed at the end, even though the session was quite structured – there wasn’t a rush about packing up and very often though the session finished at 10.30 we were still there making our way out of the venue at 11 o’clock’
(Interviewee 8)

The interview transcripts contain valuable information about the nature of the relationships and connections made by the interviewees through their participation in the group, and it is these that the report moves on to discuss now.

4.2 HONESTY ABOUT BEING A PARENT

The second aim – honesty about being a parent – was one of the more significant themes to emerge from the interviews. The societal idealisation of motherhood makes honesty about difficult experiences almost impossible in most spaces. Honesty requires a kind of social contract to be established, wherein sharing negative or difficult information is not detrimental to how the woman is perceived by the other group members, and there is a trust that others will reciprocally share honestly too.

Being honest is a risky practice, as sharing information is generally tied to broader societal evaluations of whether the mother is a good mother or not (Tardy 2000: 454). In spaces where honesty is not possible, however, women can be left in ‘total isolation, unable even to voice her fears, ask any questions, or express any doubts’ (Tardy 2000: 444).

The aim that mothers at Rockabye are able to be honest therefore reflects a desire to normalise difficult experiences, to reduce isolation, and to include all group members whatever their experiences.

The interviewees did understand the group as an honest space, and this was experienced as distinctive (compared to other mother and baby groups).

The facilitation was seen to be crucial to the establishment of an environment where honesty was possible. When asked about the group leaders, these interviewees noted that the consistency in leadership and the consistency of attendees was important, as were the way that the group leaders interacted with group members:

‘it’s a closed group, which is important because it is the same people every week’

(Interviewee 8)

‘because it was the same people each week as well, that was really good – that consistency. They, you know, they remembered things each week about you, which meant, you know, which said they really listened and seemed to care about you. And they were great with the babies as well, so good – you know, if you needed them to hold them while you went to the toilet or anything...’

(Interviewee 3)

‘they’re nurturing, they make you feel safe, they make you feel listened, they make you feel heard. You’re not rushed so you don’t feel like you have to speak, it’s not like “right, you’ve had your turn, it’s the next person’s turn”’

(Interviewee 6)

The facilitation set a tone in the group which enabled honesty in three main ways; firstly the non-judgemental nature of the support, secondly, the fact that the group wasn’t advice giving, and thirdly that the culture of the group wasn’t competitive.

4.2.1 Non-judgemental

The fact that the group was felt to be a non-judgemental space was valued by the interviewees, as it enabled them to speak freely; to say what they wanted to say without fear of judgement or social penalty:

‘I loved the fact that it was non-judgemental. That was really important for me’

(Interviewee 8)

‘It’s good because it’s, there’s a session in the beginning where the mums can spill their guts about their week, so go round and no-one can comment on what you say, so you can just talk freely’

(Interviewee 1)

‘I knew I could go there and say what I want to say ... You know it was so unjudgmental, it was brilliant ... But I really did enjoy just being able to know that I was going somewhere where I could just offload that week’s negativity and everyone would go “take no notice” ... just keep going as you’re going. And that was coming from other mums as well as the staff in Rockabye’

(Interviewee 9)

As these quotes show, the talk time was valued by the participants as it allowed them to discuss their negative thoughts and feelings.

This often wasn't possible with family or friends, because of a lack of support, the fact that they hadn't disclosed the difficulties they were experiencing, or because they had spoken honestly to family and/or friends, but had suffered a withdrawal of support or some form of social penalty because of their disclosure.

The interviewees valued the ability to talk openly and honestly as a kind of mental sorting or making sense. Disclosure in a group setting really matters, because it is part of a broader set of 'identity work' being done as women become mothers. The stories they are allowed to tell, and the selves that they are allowed to construct, matter for their identities as mothers (Faircloth, 2010).

4.2.2. Not advice giving

Another important factor in generating honesty was that Rockabye was not understood to have an explicitly advice-giving or educational function:

'they weren't there chucking advice at you or, like "do this, do that" you know, "you need to do this, you need to get into a routine", they were like "just talk about it, just let it out", and then once its out, you're like, actually it's not that bad!

(interviewee 4)

The group facilitators were key in creating an environment where the mothers were enabled to talk honestly about their difficulties without then being offered advice about what they could (or should) be doing differently. In contrast, the support, guidance and reassurance offered by the facilitators were seen to be valuable:

'the support workers there are really good in terms of just guiding things and can offer, not necessarily, well they don't offer advice, but they can offer support and put, guide you in the right direction and stuff like that, and talk things through more so, and advise you onto other things if you need it... so they're not there to know of say "well try this, or do that" ... because obviously every baby's different ... but they're there to say, "well this is how you're feeling, there's this group or this group, or its OK" or just a reassurance'

(interviewee 11)

'I thought the leaders were brilliant, absolutely fantastic people, really caring, really genuine, really easy to talk to, and the fact that they, you know, draw on their own experiences, you know "oh I remember when my children went through the same thing" - that was really helpful'

(Interviewee 7)

Here, interviewee 7 values the experiential (rather than official) knowledges of the leaders.

The flexibility of the Children's Centre setting enables the group to value these more informal knowledges that the leaders had amassed (which are delivered in the context of the broader expert-led practice of the family workers).

Advice can be problematic when it doesn't correspond with the mother's own frameworks and knowledges of childrearing (Tardy 2000: 454), and it can exacerbate anxiety and perfectionist tendencies.

Not giving advice therefore aligns with the idea of the 'good enough' mother which underpins the theoretical framework of Rockabye (see Winnicott 1953), affirming that the mother is already doing enough, and that babies and children actually benefit when their caregiver fails them in small and tolerable ways, as it teaches them that they can be disappointed but will still be alright.

Not explicitly giving advice has been found to be empowering for mothers. For example, in the context of infant feeding, Murphy (2003: 449) found that not giving advice enables mothers to gain legitimate control of their own mothering work, because the women's own knowledges and practices are valued and are not contradicted by expert advice.

Similarly, refraining from giving advice enables the mothers to skilfully respond to their baby, rather than making them passive recipients of expert advice (2003: 450). This locates expertise in the maternal domain, rather than (or as well as in) the expert domain.

It also aligns with the idea of the 'good enough' mother, which underpins the theoretical framework of Rockabye, affirming to the mother that they are already doing enough, without having to optimise what they are doing.

Additionally, the mothers who attend Rockabye can have complex relationships with advice and professionals. As noted above, the giving of advice establishes an implicit (or sometimes explicit) model of parental deficit because where knowledge is communicated as a set of rules, rule breaking becomes an issue (Murphy 1999, in Murphy 2003). This is particularly the case in early motherhood, where professional advice is weighty (whereas over time mothers are found to become better able to critically evaluate how far they want to follow, or not, such advice (Murphy 2003: 455)).

Interviewee 6 notes that the Rockabye practitioners were careful in their facilitation:

'[the facilitation] was done in a way that can make a massive difference. And it was done in a way that it wasn't, "you need to do this and you need to do that if you want a well-balanced baby". It was "have you thought about this?" So it was delivered in a way that didn't make you feel rubbish about yourself if you didn't do it'

(Interviewee 6)

It is important to note that even the smallest moments of interaction with professionals, and the way that advice is offered, can resonate and reverberate through the everyday lives of mothers. As Knaak (2006, in Faircloth 2010: 3.6) notes, 'for those who do not (or cannot) make the 'right' choice, there is potential for guilt and judgement by oneself or by others for failing at the tasks of 'good' mothering', and the giving of advice can precipitate this.

The care with which the Rockabye practitioners offer support rather than giving advice is essential in facilitating the positive experiences of these interviewees, and mediating some of the 'pain experienced by women in their pursuit of the idealised role of a mother' (Tardy 2000: 462).

4.2.3. The effects of honesty

The interviewees express a number of consequences that arise from the experiences of honesty that they were afforded by Rockabye. These include the legitimization of their identities as they are, and the de-stigmatisation of difficulty, which in turn enabled them to accept the difficulties that they were having.

For example, the below quotes show how the group destigmatized difficulty and normalised these feelings for the mothers who attended:

'It was just a place where you could go and talk about your concerns and find out from other mums that actually it's a bit normal to be worried and not ... and do you know, it was a nice place as well to find out other people are having a bit of a struggle, like it was reassuring, a really reassuring group, do you know, that you're not the only person up at 5 in the morning going "oh my God! Why aren't you sleeping?!" ... 'I think it was honestly knowing not everybody has the perfect baby, not everybody has that perfect - I sleep from 7 in the night until 7 in the morning, and then we get up and just sing songs to each other!'

(interviewee 4)

‘You get to have a chat with the other mums and support workers about how you’re feeling and you can talk about things and you can share and see there’s other people that have similar experiences to you and that’s reassuring’
(interviewee 3)

‘just thinking, yeah – it is normal to feel like that, and people do all have a rough time and a good time, and luckily we’ve had more good times with [baby] than bad times (I mean we’ve been really lucky – she’s such a good girl in every aspect) but like I said, when that did happen it was nice to come in and share it and just let your anxieties go a little’
(interviewee 6)

At the same time, this had significant impacts on their experience of themselves as mothers, and the way that they developed their identities as mothers. This was important – for example, interviewee 8 was able to identify other participants who were similar to her, and this was reassuring:

‘It was a really good baby group for someone like me who has some mental health challenges, because there were, it transpired there were a number of other women who, in that group, had had contact with [specialist mh midwife] during their pregnancies. And in fact those women were all the kind of, tended to be the professional ones as well, slightly older and professional which was very reassuring for me’
(Interviewee 8)

Relatedly, the below quotes show how more ‘unconventional’ identities were valued and legitimised in the group:

‘I think it’s the first time I really felt that somebody was being genuinely nice to me, with no ulterior motive. I know they’re here to safeguard children and stuff, but they actually just liked me and they let me be, and my views weren’t outlandish and I wasn’t a troublemaker ... I was just being me’
(interviewee 2)

‘Even though it was, you know, it’s got a very fixed format, I didn’t feel like it was formulaic. I felt like we were treated as individuals, that – you know – our unique characters were valued and there was space for us to be us, and there was space for other people to be whoever they were. We didn’t have to fit into a mould’
(Interviewee 8)

Both of these mothers had different senses that they didn’t fit into the normal mould of either personhood or motherhood, and these senses of not fitting had been highlighted and intensified through experiences in pregnancy. Both felt that Rockabye was transformational in that they finally had found somewhere where they felt accepted in new motherhood. The value of this cannot be underemphasised for these mothers; as interviewee 2 says, it was the first time in her life that she had felt that it was alright to be her in a setting such as a Children’s Centre.

4.2.4. Complex group dynamics of honesty

Some of the interviewees mentioned complexities that were associated with the honesty of other group members. They suggested – in different ways – that the degree of honesty and the weight of the difficulties that other members expressed were problematic.

For example, interviewee 15 found the negativity expressed during the sessions to be difficult, as she took on the negative feelings of the other mums:

‘if you go there really depressed and you sit there and listen to other people’s stories then you have to go home, it’s, it’s quite heavy...’
(interviewee 15)

Interviewee 9 expressed a similar set of thoughts about the group, noting that, for her, the group wouldn’t have been as helpful if all of the other participants had been ‘unwell’:

‘I wouldn’t have liked it if it had been a group where I felt that everybody was unwell. That wouldn’t have worked for me at all ... it felt to me like it was to do with wellbeing, not illness’
(interviewee 9)

These two interview quotes outline the significance of the other participants and the group dynamics that emerge for the individual’s experience of Rockabye.

While the following section outlines the kinds of inclusions that emerge in terms of peer support and friendships at Rockabye, the flip side of these inclusions is the potential exclusions that these interviewees outline here, and the potential policing of the forms of identities that might be acceptably expressed. This indicates why the skilled facilitation of Rockabye is very important, and reiterates the value of the supervisory model that exists in Rockabye to enable the facilitators to take the care required to make sure that everyone feels included.

Interviewee 13 noted similar issues to do with the group membership, but these emerged because when she was invited to attend by a family support worker at the Children’s Centre, she hadn’t been told that the group was a support group for mothers who were experiencing difficulties rather than a regular mother and baby group. She told me that she was angry about the fact that the family support worker had thought that she needed extra support, when she just wanted opportunities to meet other mums:

‘this is something that upset me a little actually because it was a case of me talking to [Children’s Centre worker] and saying, you know, I’m here to find friends and have like a network of people I can, you know, talk to and she recommended it. So I went along the first week and it was very heavy, the first week, and like talking about birth and stuff, and I was like ‘oh, it’s a bit deep’...’

... And then the second week, again, the talk time at the beginning got very deep and there was lots of tears and emotions, and I thought this isn't what I thought it was, this isn't a mother and baby, you know play and chat and everything, this is a support group. And I didn't click at the time and I wasn't told that'

(interviewee 13)

The feedback offered to the Rockabye leaders from this interview in particular was that the invite to Rockabye needed to be framed carefully and more explicit and detailed information about the group could usefully be offered to potential participants.

4. 3 FEELING SUPPORTED

The interviewees suggested that they were able to access a number of different kinds of support through the group; firstly staff support, secondly other forms of support, and thirdly, peer support.

Firstly, then, staff support (see also section 4.2.2.) was important in allowing the interviewees to feel supported:

'I massively felt supported. I felt really safe to share the things that I did and I wouldn't do it unless I felt safe to. So I think that's where the support comes in, because I think sometimes unless you share, you don't know where to get the support from ...

...But there, and I don't know, it's something about Rockabye that gives you the confidence to be able to share'

(Interviewee 6)

Secondly, the positive experiences at Rockabye also fed into an increased capacity to access other forms of help for some of the interviewees. For example, it opened up the willingness and ability of this interviewee to access other baby groups:

'I feel like if there was a baby group in, that was a singing group, I would have been "oh I'm not going to that" – I would just be mortified. But now I think, "oh it's OK – it was fine at Rockabye so it's not going to be any different somewhere else"

(interviewee 10)

Another interviewee noted that Rockabye had meant that she had been better able to engage with the Children's Centre and other Childcare professionals. She suggested that the group offered:

'reassurance and friendship and, you know, that kind of safe space. It re-built my trust in sharing my, what I was experiencing as a mother, after having such a bad experience when he was 6 weeks old, yeah, it re-built my trust I would say in the whole kind of Children's Centre system and so on ... and I feel much happier now that having a more positive dynamic ... because certainly I won't be able to escape from – and nor would I want to – interacting with childcare professionals and so on'

(Interviewee 8)

This indicates that the experience at Rockabye had much wider implications, as it helped the mum re-engage with the Children's Centre after a previous difficult experience had broken her trust, and gave her confidence in her other interactions with other childcare professionals.

Thirdly, the peer support that the interviewees received was a very significant part of the benefits of Rockabye that they experienced. As already explored in the introduction to this section, friendships and peer support are particularly complex in the period of new motherhood.

Social support is widely seen to facilitate transitions to motherhood, but at the same time, the arrival of children is a significant factor in altering existing friendships (Cronin 2015). The formation of new friendships is complex, given that friendships formed in the period of new motherhood require the negotiation of a complex blend of friendship alongside the 'roles norms, values, practices and tensions associated with motherhood' (Cronin 2015: 662).

While these friendships can be based on competition and related to the kinds of idealized motherhood that are culturally normative and reproduced through group environments (Tardy 2000: 440), at the same time, it is possible that friendships made across the transition to motherhood can allow a significant degree of intimacy and acceptance.

(Nolan et al. (2012: xx) suggest that sometimes these new motherhood friendships 'do not require extended contact before they allow discussion of emotionally charged issues such as challenges to mental health', giving rise to a kind of accelerated intimacy that can be invaluable in creating the feeling of being supported. Many of the interview transcripts demonstrate this kind of intimacy and acceptance, and provide important detail about the nature of the peer support and friendship that Rockabye facilitated. For example:

'I loved the fact that ... increasingly it became about peer support, rather than about the facilitators'

(Interviewee 8)

'We know every Thursday we're meeting the girls still ... So we've made some really good connections, like supportive, and mums with different kids of different ages, so its quite nice and you can say "what did you do when you were at this point?" and stuff like that'

(interviewee 4)

Gaining this peer support was seen as a distinctive feature of Rockabye - these mothers articulated the fact that attending Rockabye was instrumental in allowing them to develop networks of peer support which they anticipated that they might not have been able to do without attending this particular group:

'I don't think I would have got the support from other mums and made these connections as good, had it not been through Rockabye'

(interviewee 7)

'it's quite nice, because I've got my friends that I met there that are now like good, proper friends. I literally knew nobody'

(interviewee 15)

The interview transcripts suggest that the kinds of connections made with others had particular qualities of being based in shared experiences and knowledge, and of care. As interviewee 5 notes, the sharing of experiences reassures that others are experiencing difficulties, and reduces the isolation that might be felt when experiencing difficulties in early motherhood:

'we look forward to going to meet the girls and they know exactly how you feel, not always exactly how you feel, but they know how you feel ... seeing that you're not alone and there's other mums that are going through similar things ... Because it can feel quite isolating otherwise'

(Interviewee 5)

This sharing of difficult experiences was not just useful in reducing isolation, but also in reducing the feelings of shame that interviewee 7 felt arose with her need for extra support from medical professionals, and normalizing her experiences of difficulty.

Expressing her worries at Rockabye meant that this interviewee was better able to maintain her coherence, without fear of experiencing unwelcome (and difficult) emotions while talking to someone in public:

'If you go to the doctors, they'll just be like "oh, here's an anxious mum coming", whereas if you're talking to other mums who sort of feel the same you don't feel ridiculous all the time. And you don't feel like you're taking an appointment, because I didn't need anti-depressants - I just needed to get it out ... its quite a nice place to go to not feel ridiculous, and to not then be like just talking to someone in Tesco and crying at them or - you know!'

(Interviewee 7)

The ability to share experiences honestly meant that the friendships were understood to be characterized by care and support:

'We were at the hospital yesterday with [baby] and like, as soon as I got out of the hospital I was able to message the girls from Rockabye because I thought, do you know, they actually care whether he's OK or whether, you know if we had good news from the hospital, they want to know it'

(interviewee 7)

The friendships were also seen to be compassionate and without judgement; qualities that had been set up during the group:

‘to hear other people going through if not similar circumstances on the ground, at least some similar emotional circumstances, and you know a lot of compassion, a lot of support, a lot of – you know – space to be held ...’

(Interviewee 8)

‘Because I still see two of the mums from the group and ... it’s completely unbiased, you know our friendship is completely unbiased and I’ve still got that support network where I can say I’m not having a good day and they can just continue and say that it’s fine because tomorrow’s a new day, and you start again tomorrow’

(interviewee 1)

This is important, as ‘women’s mothering’ has been found to be ‘highly dependent on feedback from members of their social network’ (Nolan et al. 2012: 184) so this kind of peer support plays a (positive) part in shaping the way that the women mother, even outside of the Rockabye group.

The friendships were also understood to be non-competitive. Competition between mothers is created by the kinds of idealised motherhood that characterise contemporary cultures and can be reproduced through group environments (Tardy 2000: 440). The following quote demonstrates the way that culturally constructed norms around progress and development had been experienced as oppressive at other groups.

In contrast, Rockabye allowed her, and her baby, to have a space where they could just be, without being subject to the kinds of pressures around ‘normal’ development which have been found to have negative consequences for mother’s identity and self-valuation (Tardy 2000: 444).

The non-competitive nature of Rockabye, in contrast to the other groups she had attended, was especially significant for this mother whose baby wasn’t meeting the developmental milestones set out by medical frameworks:

‘I liked with Rockabye ... there was no competition with the mums or anything. Whereas I find in some of the other baby classes it has been a bit “oh what do you do, baby hasn’t, you’re not weaning him yet...” Maybe it’s just because everybody in Rockabye had like other issues, they weren’t really concentrating on the, you know, the comparing their babies’

(interviewee 7)

While much of the peer support described here was centred around the babies, friendships were also developed in spaces and times independent of the babies. Interviewee 1 notes here that:

‘We meet up all the time with the kids. We’ve been out, been out once for burgers and beers. One of the mums – she’s really not very good in big spaces, and she’s really anti-town. But we’ve convinced her ... that she’s got us – she’ll be fine’

(interviewee 1)

Close relationships are key to being known and understood (Derlega et al. 1993 in Tardy 2000: 455), and the kinds of peer support that the interviewees talk about seem to mirror the kinds of intimate and supportive friendships that Nolan et al. (2012) suggest that can arise in early motherhood, and avoid the more competitive and difficult friendships that can arise in group environments (Tardy 2000).

While it is true that the kinds of friendships that arise from Rockabye are a complex blend of friendship alongside the 'roles norms, values, practices and tensions associated with motherhood' (Cronin 2015: 662), the kinds of norms, values and practices that arise here are around care, acceptance and good enough mothering, and the friendships seem to ease some of the tensions that are associated with motherhood.

The peer support accessed by these Rockabye attendees is experienced as distinctive, and often not available at the other mother and baby groups they had attended.

4.4 CONCLUSIONS: PARENTING BENEFITS

As the preceding sections have shown, the interviewees were clearly able to articulate the benefits of the group in relation to making connections, expressing themselves and their parenting experiences honestly, and in feeling supported. The amount of interview material relating to these parenting related benefits outweighed the amount of interview material relating to the parent-child relationship.

Some of the interviewees explicitly named the talk time as being the most valuable part of the group, and in general, the mothers found it easier to name and discuss the value of being able to talk through their experiences and to develop their support and social networks.

What they found harder to articulate was the benefit of the movement orientated second half of the group. This is perhaps because of the difficulty of translating the embodied experiences of this dance movement therapy element of the group into words, as these more visceral and intangible experiences were less likely to cross the threshold of 'cognitive contemplation' (McCormack 2003).

Dance movement therapy seeks to enact a therapeutic space where 'movement experimentation' is used to 'explore new ways of being and feeling, and to gain access to feelings that cannot be verbalised' (Stanton-Jones in McCormack 2003: 499). This suggests that interviews will always be inadequate in completely accounting for the benefits and/or difficulties that emerged through the movement work done at Rockabye.

This is a key difficulty in offering an evaluation of Rockabye as it is an intervention that does important work in this more intangible, but nonetheless powerful and potentially transformative register which is impossible to capture and articulate clearly in language.

5) CONCLUSIONS

This report has used in-depth interview transcripts from 15 women who attended Rockabye in order to evaluate whether the group's aims are being met and whether the group has changed under its new leadership.

There are continuities between the focus group quotes that are included in the 2009 report, and the interview narratives of the mothers who took part in this research. This suggests that the group, as taken on by Clare Beckell and Katy Taylor after Lucy Livingstone's death, has managed to stay faithful to the core values, ethos and purpose that Lucy established.

For some of the mothers interviewed, the group has had transformational effects on their experiences of themselves and their babies:

'I don't think I would have survived if it hadn't been for Rockabye. It kept me going each week'
(interviewee 1)

'this group made a profound difference to my experience of my baby's life in this first period ... I can't quantify really how much it has added to our quality of life, without it though I can assert definitively that we would not have been so good ... Rockabye's been a lifesaver'
(interviewee 11)

'I would say it's brilliant, I really, really enjoyed it and I would, would highly recommend it to anyone. Because you don't, I mean you don't know what you're going to get out of it until you go, and yeah it is daunting, especially when you're walking into a room full of women that have anxiety problems and depression and you know they've got a similar story to yours, but actually that worked out to my benefit'

(interviewee 4)

These descriptions of the group are the extremely positive end of the spectrum. As the quotes throughout this evaluation suggest, the group is received positively and the women who take part are able to get what they specifically need from the group. The rich qualitative data collected and presented in this report offers insights into these impacts, and the various ways that the group is valuable.

One of the limitations of this evaluation, however, is that the voices of women for whom the group didn't work are not represented, because no-one who had dropped out of the group replied to the invite to take part in the research.

A recommendation is that a focussed research intervention takes place in order to understand why mothers drop out and what might be done to support their participation, or to provide alternative support.

The impacts of Rockabye extend temporally and spatially beyond the group itself, for example, the interviewee mentioned in section 3.3 who became able to help others because of the transformational effect of the support she had received in Rockabye, and the peer support networks that developed in the groups and outlasted the time and spaces of the group.

Other interviewees noted that the group meant that they were less needy of other kinds of support and were more able to go back to work, for example, therefore flagging up broader social and economic impacts of the group:

‘it’s been my rock though this whole period, and yeah, I don’t know what I would have done if it wasn’t there to be honest ... I definitely would have needed more support if it weren’t for Rockabye ... [If I hadn’t gone] I probably would be more depressed, I probably wouldn’t be going back to work next week ... I would have been a much bigger burden to the system. I would have gone back to the GP ... It’s really been my rock’

(interviewee 9)

A range of support for mothers experiencing difficulties in early parenthood is available in Bristol, including Mothers for Mothers, Bluebell, Health Visitors, General Practitioners and other healthcare providers.

Rockabye holds a distinctive position within the landscape of service provision, as it is the only group that explicitly aims to address the relationship between mother and baby. It is *essential to maintain the group* as part of the broader provision because of this, but also because – as a number of the interviewees mentioned – if it hadn’t been for Rockabye they would have not been able to access any kind of mother and baby group or support for the particular difficulties they were experiencing.

6) RECOMMENDATIONS

- **To secure continued funding locally for the Rockabye group.**
 - **To make sure all local relevant health practitioners are aware of the group's existence, purpose and referral procedures.**
 - **To maintain appropriate group sizes to allow the highest quality support to be offered.**
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- **The groups should continue to provide support for the largest number of mothers possible across Bristol.**
 - **Research should be undertaken that attempts to address the less tangible and more experiential elements of the group, in order to communicate more clearly the impacts of the dance movement therapy work on the relationship between mother and baby. This might be in the form of observational and/clinical evaluation.**

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