



# The Impact of the National Breastfeeding Helpline in Scotland

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The National Breastfeeding Helpline provides independent, evidence based, non-judgmental breastfeeding support to families across the UK. It offers a phone and webchat service, run by the Breastfeeding Network (BfN), in partnership with the Association of Breastfeeding Mothers. The service is based on the principle of peer support and calls are dealt with by trained volunteers. There are specific support services available in Welsh, Polish, Bengali, Sylheti and in Scotland, a BSL translation service.

As a telephone and online helpline service open 9.30am-9.30pm, 365 days a year, it aims to give all parents access to peer support and evidence based information, wherever they are based in the UK, empowering them to make decisions about feeding their new baby, thus helping to improve the health of future generations and helping to reduce health inequalities.

Since 2015 the National Breastfeeding helpline has been funded by the Scottish Government as part of its commitment to reduce the drop off in breastfeeding rates in Scotland at six to eight weeks after birth by 10% by 2025.

## Aim:

In 2017 BfN commissioned an external evaluation which aimed to measure helpline caller satisfaction and the impact of the support, as well as to help understand whether it was meeting the aims of the Scottish Government grant - which were to increase capacity to offer peer support on the helpline and to raise awareness of the helpline with families and professionals.

## Methodology:

An external evaluation company was commissioned to carry out the research. There were several parts to this: an indepth analysis of call statistics; an online survey of service users (n=38); two focus groups with non-users and telephone interviews (n=24) with service users, helpline volunteers, healthcare professionals, Scottish Government and BfN staff. Data from other sources was also analysed, including a 2017 volunteer survey, call and webchat record forms related to Scottish calls, and reports on calls and webchats answered by Scottish volunteers.

## Results:

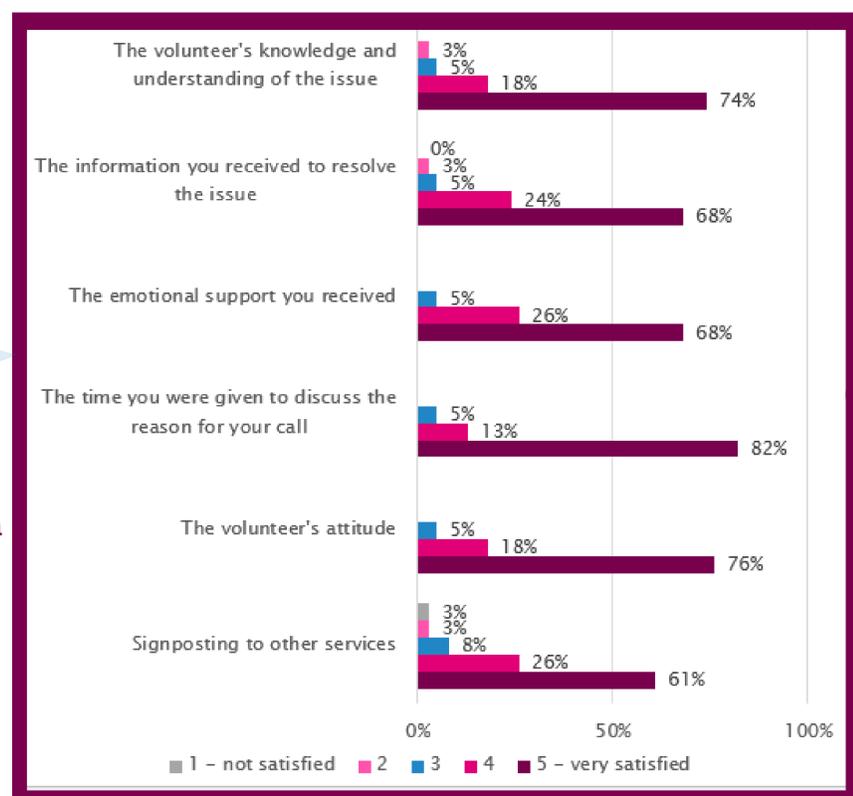
**Service users** surveyed reported high levels of satisfaction: 95% agreed or strongly agreed that the helpline empowered them to continue breastfeeding their child. 92% said it improved their knowledge of breastfeeding and 91% said it helped them carry out the choices they wanted to make.

"The volunteer was very good at making me feel like I wasn't just being crazy, listening to what the problem was, reassuring and offering good information."

"They reassured me at the weekend when no other breastfeeding specific support was available."

**Healthcare professionals** reported that even those in areas where there was adequate local support, felt there was a need for a national helpline service, given the need to promote and support breastfeeding across Scotland. A universal, national service also offered a level of anonymity that some women found helpful. BfN was regarded as providing sound, evidence based information, and one person commented on how the independence of the helpline was important.

**Helpline volunteers in Scotland** were positive about the impact NBH has on them. Interviewees commented they "felt good" about helping other mothers, and being part of a supportive network. Some also said that they developed new skills which may help with future employment.



## Conclusions:

The evaluation found the helpline is a strong fit with the Scottish Government's strategic objectives for breastfeeding support. It occupies a unique place as a universal service, complementing other service provision. There were high levels of satisfaction with the support received and the helpline was effective in helping parents resolve issues, providing them with information, signposting and enabling them to make informed choices. Evaluation showed volunteers felt their training was effective and they felt well equipped to answer calls and support parents. The report found that more needs to be done to ensure families and HCPs are aware of the helpline. **A number of other recommendations were made which included: reviewing the delivery model and considering the role of alternative forms of digital access and social media; and ensuring BfN, the Scottish Government, and NHS services work together to develop a collaborative approach to increasing awareness and take up of helpline services.**

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**Further info:** [bit.ly/NBHScot](http://bit.ly/NBHScot) / email [felicity.lambert@breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk](mailto:felicity.lambert@breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk)