What was the research about? Why was it appropriate?

Research has found that maternal antenatal anxiety also has an impact on the developing baby. If a mother is depressed, anxious, or stressed while pregnant, this increases the risk of adverse outcomes for her child, including emotional problems, symptoms of ADHD, and impaired cognitive development (Glover, 2013). Maternal anxiety in early pregnancy has been associated with depressive symptoms in girls and mothers’ antenatal depression significantly predicts antisocial behaviour in their offspring (Loomans, 2011).

The effects of antenatal anxiety and stress are not limited to adverse emotional and behavioural outcomes; persistent or toxic stress can lead to elevated cortisol concentrations, which have been associated with lower birth weights and elevated glucocorticoid levels in offspring (Seckl & Meaney, 2004).

In addition, a review of the literature on social support and its relationship to cortisol concentrations, which have been associated with lower birth weights and behavioural outcomes; persistent or toxic stress can lead to elevated glucocorticoid levels in offspring (Seckl & Meaney, 2004).

Mellow Bumps programme

How did you get people interested in the research?

Based on the research and existing antenatal support available, Mellow Parenting identified a gap in support for vulnerable pregnant women. In order to address this gap we developed, piloted and tested an attachment based antenatal parenting programme which was informed by strong theory and research. Once the programme had demonstrated to be effective in improving outcomes we made the programme and resources available for services to use with the families they work with.

In order to share this programme and the research it was based on, we carried out a number of activities, including:

- Devised a training package that drew on the research and translated how to put the research into practice.
- Training was provided to practitioners, family support workers and services that work directly with the families.
- Working together with the services to evaluating the outcomes and impact of the programme through disseminating the findings via poster and oral presentations at national and international conferences.
- Highlighting the importance of the research and the impact of the programme by attending numerous network meetings and discussion forums led by the Scottish Government and local authorities.

Who benefited from the research?

Through this project (Mellow Bumps), it has been the most vulnerable and at-risk pregnant women from across Scotland who have ultimately benefited. An antenatal attachment based parenting programme was made available, which aims to reduce anxiety during pregnancy, increase knowledge of child development and attachment, as well as providing social and peer support.

This has been achieved by Mellow Parenting sharing the research and supporting a number of organisations from health, education and the third sector in implementing the programme by providing training, workshops and intensive support including financial support where applicable (provided by the Scottish Government).

As a result, over the past three years, the project has had a huge impact in Scotland. By building and encouraging partnerships with over 40 organisations and supporting them to deliver the Mellow Bumps programme; together we were able to reach 226 families across Scotland.

How did you evaluate the impact?

The impact of the research was assessed through the impact and effectiveness of the Mellow Bumps programme. Mellow Parenting has put evaluation procedures in place. This has resulted in a data set of pre and post measures for 119 participants and continues to grow.

On average, participants of the Mellow Bumps programme show significant improvements on all subdomains of the Adult Wellbeing Scale (n=119, p<.05). The majority of infants gestational ages and birth weights are within the normal range.

Qualitative feedback from participants indicates increased social support, with services reporting increased uptake following Mellow Bumps groups.