



Beverley Lawrence Beech - 12 November 1944 - 25 February 2023



Beverley joined AIMS in 1976 and was elected Chair of the AIMS Committee at the AGM the following year on 23rd April 1977. She held this role until she retired as an AIMS Volunteer in September 2017, but continued to be an AIMS member until her death.

Beverley was a women's maternity rights campaigner, a second-wave feminist and a birth activist. Her voice on issues was challenging for many, but always came from a perspective of women's human rights.

She would listen to what women and families were saying and actually hear what they had said. Then she would stand up for their rights in any way that she could: helping them personally to find ways to assert their rights, speaking out about the injustices anywhere that she could get a platform and challenging the systems which were creating such injustices.

This was the basis of the work she carried out with other AIMS volunteers over the years, and the basis of the work of AIMS today, including the AIMS Helpline, the AIMS Journal, AIMS publications and AIMS Campaigning.

She came to this work before computers or the internet were available and when everything had to be done on paper, by phone or in person. There were long periods of time where AIMS Helpline calls were all going to Beverley's phone number and letters to her address. Beverley and AIMS were keen early adopters of these technologies as they became available and Beverley was always keen to try things that

would enable her to be able to do more.

Beverley was actively involved with the AIMS Journal; not just writing the Journal articles which bear her name, but commissioning, editing and peer reviewing articles, helping the AIMS Journal to be the platform for debate of maternity issues which it has been for decades. She would also get involved with the production and distribution of the Journal, and use it to highlight issues to those who were in a position to make improvements in maternity services. Again, this was initially without the aid of computers or the internet, but adapting and making use of technologies as they emerged.

Beverley had developed an understanding of book production from having written books such as "Whose Having your Baby?" and knew how valuable such books were in sharing information. That book later became the AIMS book "Am I Allowed" when at the end of the 1990s AIMS gained lottery funding to enable the publication of a series of AIMS books. The funding and production of this initial set of books put AIMS in a position to be able to continue to produce new books.

AIMS has a habit of picking up on issues within the maternity service before others, often because people reach out to the AIMS Helpline when they have not found their answers elsewhere. This led to some particular issues with which Beverley and AIMS became involved. Three that stand out are the shackling of labouring women prisoners, the use of social service referrals or the threat of referral to coerce compliance, and birth trauma, PTSD and suicide after birth.

Beverley and others in AIMS got involved in supporting and campaigning on these issues, raising the profile until they were accepted by others as issues which needed action. Since then all three of these issues have been taken up by other organisations who have been able to focus on them in detail. For example, Birth Companions (www.birthcompanions.org.uk) now focuses on the issue of women prisoners during pregnancy, birth and early motherhood (see [AIMS Article on this](#)). NPEU was encouraged by AIMS to extend their data collection to include death due to suicide and this helped to raise the profile of Birth Trauma and mental health issues, issues that are now considered mainstream. Other organisations such as the Family Rights Group (<https://frg.org.uk/get-help-and-advice>) provide support for those being referred to Child Services. Although all these issues are still a concern to AIMS, with the AIMS Helpline often still supporting women dealing with threats of referral as a means of coercion, I would hope that by listening to women and birthing people we can continue to be a voice on issues where there is no other specific support - yet.

I wrote very soon after she died my personal reflections of Beverley which can be found [here](#). I have since reached out to others who knew her to hear their reflections and memories, and that piece can be found [here](#).

We were very pleased to see the Guardian recognise her with the following obituary <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/apr/05/beverley-lawrence-beech-obituary>.

And one of our ENCA partners have published a blog "When I grow up I want to be like Beverley" <https://www.elpartoesnuestro.es/blog/2023/03/01/de-mayor-quiero-ser-como-beverley> [\(and in the English translation](#)

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I am also pleased to see that she now has a Wikipedia Page

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beverley_Lawrence_Beech

Beverley has been an inspiration to many birth activists. So, in the spirit of the saying “It is better to light a single candle than to curse the darkness.” which AIMS adopted and has been using in the AIMS logo since the late 60s, I am sure Beverley would want her legacy to be the lighting of candles everywhere we can.