



They showed us the money!

By Julie Cook

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At last, some practical support for a home birth group.

In November 1999, Lancaster Home Birth Support Group received a £200 Miscellaneous Grant from Lancaster City Council to improve their information resources. Julie Cook tells how they did it...

When I first contacted Lancaster City Council I wasn't looking for a grant for information resources. In the files, I had come across an old application for a Miscellaneous Grant which had been turned down in 1993. I thought I would find out if the scheme still existed, and if we could apply for money to get some new information leaflets printed, and for basic expenditure, like postage, photocopying and telephone calls. The man I spoke to in Administration Services was much more helpful than I had expected.

It turned out that the small grants (maximum £500), didn't cover the kinds of core funding or 'revenue costs' we needed. Also, they couldn't fund printing costs, although they could give us access to their own printing services at a very low rate, and other groups might find it worth investigating if similar facilities exist through their own local authorities. There were many restrictions on what Miscellaneous Grants were available for, and none of the criteria seemed immediately appropriate to our needs.

Luckily, I was asked to explain what we actually did as a group, and it emerged that grants for 'purchasing equipment' would allow us to make a funding application for books and videos for our library. I would never have thought of publications as being equipment, so it shows that even if it seems an unlikely prospect, it is worth talking your needs over with potential funders.

The grant application form was short and straightforward, but I spent a lot of time crafting careful answers to the questions, particularly as there wasn't much space. As I was putting the application together, there was a letter in the local press from a Green Party Councillor on the grant awarding committee, encouraging more community groups to apply. As I knew she had planned home births herself, I contacted her, and got some useful advice about the kinds of issues the committee was currently concerned about, so that I could address some of these in our application.

For example, they wanted to support groups that benefit people throughout the wider geographical area, and not just within the City of Lancaster (the City Council covers a large rural area as well). Women in rural areas are often told they live too far from a hospital to have a home birth, and frequently have particular need of our support to get one, so I was able to stress the geographical spread of those

involved with our group.

I also pointed out how the kind of information we hold is generally not available through the NHS, libraries, or other support groups, and that many women don't have the financial means to buy it for themselves. To make the policy issues clear, I referred to Changing Childbirth, and the increasing numbers of women who are actively exploring place of birth options, and rather than concentrating on our very low home birth rate (less than 1%), I talked about how in some areas, up to 20% of women are now booking home births.

Our local maternity services refer interested women to us in their literature, and this gives us added credibility. I made it clear that we have been active since 1988 and have never previously had any local authority funding, and I itemised exactly what we wanted the money for, and made the costings clear - two videos from Ace Graphics at £40 each (they have a catalogue of childbirth education materials - telephone 01959 524622) - subscription to AIMS - AIMS publications - and other publications we needed to update.

Our local CVS (Community Voluntary Service), was also a great help. I didn't know how to prepare proper accounts, which had to be submitted with the application, and they helped put together all our old cash receipts and notes into the necessary format. CVS also had some useful fundraising notes, which gave me the hint that funders don't want you coming back year after year for more of the same, so I assured the Council that the grant would secure our main information needs for several years.

It took me a lot of time and energy to put this application together, and I wasn't very hopeful, but we got the money! I think what made the application successful was the time spent on careful research into what both we, and the funders needed. I understand most local authorities have similar schemes, so other groups could also make use of them.

Our stock of information resources has been hugely improved by this grant, which has really benefited our group, even though it wasn't something we were originally looking for. As well as the essential AIMS material which I genuinely don't think any birthing woman should be without - particularly the booklets on the second and third stages of labour, we have been able to afford two wonderful, empowering videos.

It is a great improvement to have some visual materials, and as well as thinking about using the videos with various groups, we can loan them to more people for shorter periods than is possible with written materials, so new paths and ways of working are opening up for us.

Julie coordinates Lancaster Home Birth Support Group, which provides information and support to women who are interested in, or planning, a home birth in the area, and continues to provide support post-natally for as long as it is required, wherever the baby was born. She can be contacted by email on lucasjm@cwcom.net