AIMS For a better birth...

Women's voices 2016

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There were many wonderful and inspiring speakers including obstetricians, midwives and doulas, writers, bloggers and most importantly many passionate women and mothers telling their birth stories.

This was a day for people from a variety of backgrounds to share birth stories and experiences. Stories from medical professionals and service users interspersed with thought provoking poetry from doula and hypnobirthing teacher Katie Edwards. The wonderful Sheena Byrom, OBE kicked off the day looking at the Birthplace study statistics of low-risk women, all of whom would have met the criteria for MLUs or home birth. Some interesting statistics were that although 87% of women gave birth in obstetric units [only 25% chose to give birth there] 9% gave birth in alongside Midwifery Units, 2% in freestanding Midwifery Units and although only 2% give birth at home, 10% of women said they would prefer a home birth. Sheena spoke about what goes on behind the scenes in maternity units and the need for change and referred to her thought provoking book 'The Roar Behind the Silence' which is a great resource for health professionals.

Florence Wilcock, a consultant obstetrician at Kingston Hospital NHS Trust [the only obstetrician at the conference] and co-founder of #MatExp gave a talkmhighlighting the difficulties of an obstetrician's job and her work with matexp.org.uk – identifying and sharing best practice between maternity services.

Rebecca Schiller, chief executive of Birthrights, freelance writer, mother and doula spoke about her work with the Human Rights charity www.birthrights.org.uk/ and her recent book for Pinter and Martin, 'Why Human Rights in Childbirth Matter', and read extracts from books such as 'Well Behaved Women Seldom Make History' by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich which gave us all food for thought.

Milli Hill a mother of three, writer and founder of the ever growing grass roots organisation, The Positive Birth Movement, expressed her passion about women's need to talk to each other and the positive outcome from sharing their experiences and information. Her book about the Positive Birth Movement will be published next spring.

Beverley Lawrence Beech, honorary chair of AIMS, writer, researcher and campaigner spoke about The History of Encouraging Change in Maternity Care and the work of AIMS.**@JennytheM**, a clinical midwife and social media expert, who has very successfully promoted immediate #skintoskin, and Beverley Beech both called for us all to have the courage to push for change, to speak out and stand up for women's rights.

Laura James, chair of Bromley Maternity Voices, award winning NCT antenatal teacher and mother spoke about her passion for MSLCs and explained why they are so valuable in improving maternity

experiences nationwide. Laura is part of NCT Voices, a team who organise development days for MSLCs and work towards improving maternity services and encourage mothers to feedback their experiences.

Several mothers who are also writers, bloggers doulas and campaigners told their birth stories and their varied experiences of maternity care. **Susanne Remic** – ghostwritermummy.co.uk, **Claire Kay** – who runs Facebook groups Birth Story Listeners and Birth Trauma Christian Encouragement Group, **Louise Oliver** – doula and NCT Breastfeeding Counsellor and **Jody Deacon** – a Radiographer and baby carrying consultant.

Their stories included traumatic birth experiences, being unsupported in their birthing choices and postnatal mental health problems. They are all strong, courageous women who have managed to use their experiences to form face to face support groups, on-line support and discussion groups to help other women who are experiencing similar problems. They have helped support hundreds of women and will continue to support many mothers and families and also work towards making important changes in our maternity care system. Their voices were heard, we all listened, cried and cheered them along, the overall message was one of hope, if enough people act, speak out, write about and campaign then maternity care will change.

'I urge you to play your part in creating the maternity services you want for your family and your community. Voice your opinions ... and challenge those providing the services to meet your expectations.' Julia Cumberlege, Chair of the National Maternity Review Team, Better Births report 2016

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