

our stories matter

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Part of the
ESME: Resources for Sense-Able Conversations Pack

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Our Stories Matter

Our Stories Matter is a booklet of 7 stories, shared by midwifery students and midwives, as part of the ESME (Exploring Student Midwives' Experiences) Study.

Using this Resource

Each story can be shared as a stand-alone story or alongside one or more of the other stories in this booklet.

The following process can be used to stimulate group discussion on a chosen story

- Ensure everyone has a printed version of the story they can refer to.
- Have the story read out loud.
- Once people have had a chance to listen to the story being read, allow time for people to read it quietly themselves so they have time to absorb the details of the story.
- Begin the discussion by asking people to respond to the question -
What is there to celebrate in the story?
- Once everyone has had a chance to respond to this first question, follow-up with the question-
What are you wondering about after hearing the story?
- If you have limited time for the discussion, you might agree an allotted time for responses to the two questions, for example 5 minutes per question
- Open up the discussion to general conversation, again dependent on time available
- End the discussion by asking people one thing they are taking away from the conversation

Story 1: Midwifery Student

Working it Out Together

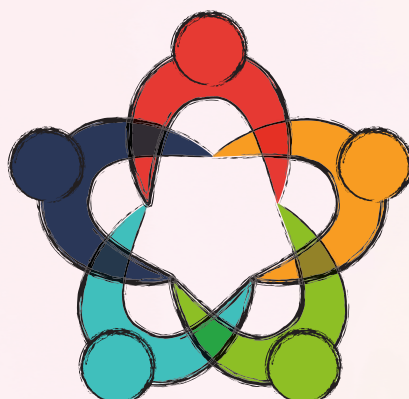
I feel valued because we have made a shift plan together, my opinion matters and we have decided to regroup every hour or so to check in with each other. I find that when the team work together we don't miss anything, handover is easier and I feel more supported. I know this doesn't happen all the time- sometimes we split. It really depends on who you get put with. I like having another registered midwife with me to bounce ideas off. It doesn't really matter their level of experience it's more just working it out together, so you don't feel alone.

When the midwife is here it makes me feel more confident. When I have support I feel I can ask questions. Good mentors talk and show interest in you, others you just follow around and I feel a bit stupid.

As a student I value the team work and regular check ins. I want to be part of the team and not feel like a burden. When midwives stop for a chat and check in on each other, this gives me the opportunity to speak about 'other things'.

Otherwise I would not have necessarily spoken about those 'other things' that enables me to express and debrief how my day is panning out. At the start of the shift I explain where I am up to, and what I need – I feel confident to do this.

Working alongside the midwives helps me to trust in myself and gives me confidence especially when talking to the women. I have come to realise you just need to sometimes go with the moment, there is no formula so always take those opportunities to connect with the women and have those important conversations.



Story 2: Midwifery Student

Welcoming Springtime

Some days I struggle with not always being able to meet the woman's needs. I think you want to achieve everything you want to achieve but sometimes this is not possible.

I was feeling overwhelmed on my third day on the unit and out of my comfort zone because my background is nursing and there were so many policies and procedures that I was not used to in my own area, for example, baby observations. The midwife made me feel supported and heard by making me feel included as a team member and I felt I could approach her with anything. I did not know how to speak the jargon in this world so I did not feel confident but the midwife encouraged me by telling me that I will get the hang of this eventually and if I had any questions that I could come to her at any time. This midwife's demeanour was just so nice and she smiled AND she still is.

The other day I asked one of the women, what would help her to have a sense of achievement today. She said 'if I can get some help with breastfeeding then it will be a good day'. When she said this I felt vulnerable. I didn't have the tools or knowledge to educate the women about this. What if they ask me difficult questions? I had heard other stories from students about this on their placement so I thought what if I give her the wrong information and she suffers, not because I might make a mistake but more about the women suffering? So I decided to ask the lactation consultant for some education on strategies as I wasn't totally comfortable with the 'football' hold. In the end it was a good experience- helping her with breastfeeding. I asked her if I had done a good job and how she felt about breastfeeding. She thanked me for all my help and this was great encouragement for me to keep going. Because of this experience I too had a sense of achievement that I was able to help the women and we connected. I also felt respected as the team understands that I don't know everything.

I think the midwife's role is to show support and share wisdom with us. Midwives tell us when we start as midwifery students that we come in like a bulb, as we don't have much knowledge but as spring comes – we flower! The midwives flourish and grow when we are here! We all flourish and grow – not just the students.

Welcoming Springtime

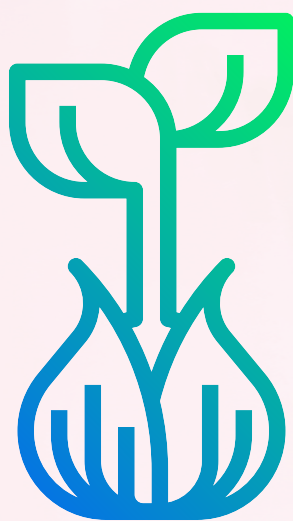
It's funny because sometimes I feel more confident without the midwife there, as it means they trust you.

It would be great if all midwifery students could have a week of just observing. We have already seen midwives arrive and leave three months later. To have a permanent mentor or mentors where you work with them continually would be excellent. And also working their shifts would help also. As a midwifery student, I value the midwife's transfer of knowledge and wisdom.

The Clinical Midwife Educator is also really supportive and checked on me and also helped me with a procedure I have never performed before. She made me feel like I could do it. I like working here.

It can be hard sometimes to make sure you get the experience you need. Sometimes it can feel like we are all competing to get births in the birth unit. I feel bad when I take a birth, but sometimes you need to. We need to talk to each other – students, about who needs the births and not just taking them.

Some midwives will take you under their wing, they do all of the beautiful things they are exactly what I want to be as a midwife. I will always remember those midwives and so will the women they care for.



Helping Put the Pieces Together

As midwives we need to transfer the knowledge and wisdom like handing the baton onto the next generation. The student midwives come in like a bulb, they don't have much knowledge, but as spring comes they flower, flourish and grow. Our role is to help put all the pieces together and guide them in the right direction. It's about role modelling. We need to make sure that the students are looking after themselves. Eat right. Sleep right. They need to stay well.

We have three people that have dropped out this week; I really hope they hang in there. It is one constant juggling act between the demands of university, home and work life. If there are ways we could relieve the pressure even just a little bit, it would be great as this course affects all aspects of your life.

We are not always aware of how far through the course the student is. I made an assumption that the student was nearly finished, when in fact was only half way through the course. We can become better at listening to our students to make good changes, as it is important to listen to what they have to say, and their experience. I love it – working with students.



Story 4: Midwifery Student

The Juggling

Sometimes I don't feel there is enough flexibility especially when we have so many study commitments and juggling the course work with clinical work expectations. I am constantly juggling all aspects of my life. Working clinically as a staff member, I feel when I read all the policies and combined with all my other commitments, for example, trying to do well at uni, CoC's, your brain is not as absorbed and you go home and think of one situation. In fact, I am happy and I am sad – I have never cried so much as I have whilst doing this degree. I think time and experience will be helpful in managing better. In this placement there has been very thoughtful rostering, which helps with work/life balance.

As students, we need to make sure we are looking after ourselves. It can be different for everyone. It is a difficult course, I was not prepared for the on-call and the disruption to my life, but midwifery is what I want to do. It is amazing having a job where you can make a difference, feel valued and make connections with women.



Story 5: Midwifery Student

You are Welcome

I always wanted to be a midwife and work with babies and this is why I have chosen this profession. I love getting to know the mums and I feel like I connect well with the women. It never feels like work when I provide women care as a midwifery student and I look forward to the day when I am a registered midwife. It's important to me to have the time to educate women, it feels rewarding when I can do this.

Even though I am new to the antenatal/ postnatal unit and have only been here for two weeks, everyone has been so helpful and friendly and they have offered me help when I ask and I have been welcomed when I come on to each shift, they have a good aura. Midwives knowing my name rather than just being 'the student'. I have not yet met a midwife that didn't make me feel welcome. My CME gave me her number so that I can message her if I need to and I also have good support from the uni.

I really appreciate everyone saying hello and remembering my name. This helps me to feel part of the team and I feel safe working here. I think it's important for people to have a sense of belonging. For me, even a simple hello and asking me how I am doing, helps me to feel valued and significant in my role as a midwifery student. The midwives asking me how I am travelling and getting to know me personally makes a huge difference and helps us to stay connected to each other. Simple offerings of assistance throughout the day in the busy times enables us share our experience and stories and we get each other! I think this is an excellent way of role modelling for students.

Some midwives go above and beyond and will seek us out and are happy to reach us. Some midwives see their role as helping to put all the pieces together and to guide the student in the right direction. We are their legacy and they want to see us achieve in our journey in becoming a midwife.



Direction of Travel

My mentor giving me positive feedback in the moment made me feel comfortable and supported. For me, being honest and realistic helps to give me a sense of achievement and a clear view of the direction I need to travel. I feel like you always want to achieve everything you want to but sometimes this is not possible as a midwifery student. So being realistic is key. We as individuals don't always realise our strengths so I like to have that reinforcing feedback. I have been thinking about our language in giving feedback and how it is so important, maybe we could say "I would appreciate if you could ..." We could then provide the purpose for doing it this way. I don't like being told "you should have done", wouldn't it be better to say- "it would be lovely if you are able to..." "I feel that this would help people share and feel comfortable to give and receive feedback.

The midwife's wealth of experience was amazing and her suggestions were really helpful for my learning about what it means to be a midwife. The other day a midwife came on shift and I heard her say that having 2 students on was great, so that just put us in a better frame of mind working with a midwife that was appreciative of students and valued our learning experience. That was really nice for students to hear.



Space for Feedback

I remember when I was a midwifery student, positive feedback would help me and I wanted to ask for it more of the time but it can be hard. We all have strengths so it's nice to remind each other and it brings us together. I feel passionate about giving and receiving feedback both good and bad. I think it is important to provide feedback as we go along and not just at the end of the day, saying things like, "You should feel proud of yourself". It was really nice when my manager said she noticed that I used my initiative, if she had of said this in two weeks' time it would have meant nothing to me.

I think it is good for students to be challenged, but there needs to be support. Students feel encouraged to stay if well supported, knowing who to go to for support (approachable) is important, giving them reassurance. It is important to us when students start in the unit that they don't feel like 'a spare part', we try to make sure they are orientated and have things to do.

What would be great is if we had a quiet space to give feedback and to hear something positive as we are trying our best and maybe the students could give us feedback so we are more aware of what their needs are and what they expect from us. I could say to students, "Let me know if you need anything" but if they don't know me, would they actually ask me? What if I had asked them, "What would you like feedback on"? I can support and empower the midwifery students by sharing my knowledge and understanding in order to help them understand what is important to the women and their journey.

I also like to let the students know that they will find their own way of doing things on their midwifery student journey. Some students are embarrassed if feedback is not provided in the appropriate way. It's about making them feel positive, not leaving them feeling horrible and taking the time to acknowledge the good things that they have accomplished.



