Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust (LPT) has launched the first dedicated perinatal mental health ChatHealth text messaging service – called Mum’s Mind.

The confidential service offers expert advice and information to support mothers across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland who struggle with mental health issues during pregnancy and baby’s first year. It is provided via a dedicated text line – 07507 330 026.

The new service, believed to be the UK’s first NHS perinatal mental health text messaging support, was developed with service users by the Trust’s specialist perinatal mental health team (pictured). They are hosting a launch event at Eyres Monsell Children’s Centre on Hillsborough Road, Leicester on Monday (26 April) from 2pm to 4pm.
Team lead Donna Stafford and ChatHealth clinical lead Caroline Palmer will tell an audience of families, health and social care professionals how and why the free text support line was developed. They will also hear from families about the impact they believe Mum’s Mind will have (See Deanna and Naomi’s stories below).

Operating from 9am to 4pm on weekdays, the Mum’s Mind ChatHealth line can provide advice on a range of issues ranging from sleep problems, anxiety management and panic attacks to depression, psychosis, OCD and medication concerns. The service can signpost service users to other support from GPs, midwives and health visitors, psychological therapies, benefits advisers, social care providers and birth reflections.

And it can also help with practical advice on issues such as mums who might be experiencing bonding and attachment issues in pregnancy and after the birth of their baby.

The perinatal service offers specialist mental health care close to home for mothers referred to them with moderate to severe mental illness, and support and advice for their families. The team also provides training for midwives and health visitors to help them identify women who need mental health care.

Donna Stafford, the perinatal team manager, explains: “Every year our team provides support in the community for more than 400 women who experience mental illness during pregnancy and in the months following birth.

“Our ambition has always been to ensure that women who need access to perinatal mental health support or expertise can access it. And with technology such an integral part of day to day life for so many families today, we hope that the launch of the Mum’s Mind Chathealth text messaging service will be a step change in expanding that access.”

The new service was made possible after LPT secured £460,000 from NHS England last year to double the size of the perinatal mental health team.

The funding was from the second wave of a £365 million national package of additional funding from NHS England to improve access to mental health care. The additional investment enabled the team to grow from 9.5 to 19.75 full-time roles.

As well as increasing nursery nursing, community mental health nursing and medical staffing, the service introduced occupational therapists and psychologists as part of the team and expanded its peer supporter and recovery worker roles.

ChatHealth is an award-winning service developed by LPT and now used by several NHS Trusts in other parts of the UK.

- The Mum’s Mind service is not a crisis service and does not provide general advice on baby care – this is available through LPT’s original ChatHealth service on 07520 615381 (Leicester City) or 07520 615382 (Leicestershire and Rutland)
**Mums’ stories:**

**Deanna Dalby,** from South Wigston, was an 20-year-old student when she discovered she was pregnant with her daughter Isabelle, who is now two.

A painful early pregnancy sparked anxiety which became severe following later complications and a very long labour and traumatic birth which led to Deanna experiencing convulsions and developing suspected sepsis. She says: "It was hours before I met Isabelle and by the time I had her back with me I didn't know what to do and felt she wasn't mine. I was crying out for help. After the birth I went from being terrified I would have a stillbirth to being terrified of SIDs and the perinatal mental health service was a godsend. I was visited at home every fortnight and it was clear to the team I had severe PTSD as a result of the birth, along with post-natal depression and severe anxiety. They recognised that I already had OCD and bi-polar.

"I believed I wasn't bonding with the baby but they helped me to recognise this wasn't the case and showed me how I could show my love.

"They say it takes a village to raise a child and and not everyone has that, which puts you at further risk. The perinatal service became the village I needed and helped me to become the best mum I can be.

"If I could have accessed specialist NHS help earlier in my pregnancy, when I locked myself away in my room for days on end, worrying and monitoring the baby's movements, my story might have been very different and I think a service like Mum's Mind is long overdue.

"We are living in a technological age and we should be using it. It can help a lot of mums in the future and their families too. My partner tried to pretend there was nothing wrong as I became more ill. This service could have helped him too. I would really urge any woman who thinks she needs help to use it. The more I think about it, mums so often act quickly when their baby's health but don't take their own care as seriously and it is so important. I would also urge family members with any concerns to use the help that's available."

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**Naomi Harrison,** from Melton Mowbray, went from confident career woman to a woman overwhelmed by anxiety and fear after her son Harvey was born seven weeks early and spent his first three months receiving round-the-clock care on a neonatal unit. She had experienced acute prenatal anxiety which she says later made her irrational and tortured by feelings of inadequacy.

She says: "As my anxiety grew worse I felt unable to feel any maternal instinct. He was receiving specialist care and there was little I could do for him, I couldn't even breastfeed for the first two weeks because my body wasn't prepared with him being so early. I became more and more anxious about the
prospect of taking Harvey home and being responsible for him, the fear getting worse with every milestone he reached.

“Then a nurse on the ward noticed I wasn’t OK and soon after I was prescribed medication. A member of the perinatal team came to see me at home while Harvey was still on the neonatal ward and saw how I was struggling with bonding and knowing what to do. I had two members of the team visiting me on alternative weeks and they supported me with so many concerns. They helped with bonding, with challenging my negative thoughts, and by helping to normalise my experience. When you are acutely anxious it’s so good to feel that it’s totally OK, because you have just had a baby.

“It’s hard for me to realise some days how dark things seemed then as today I am able to get such enjoyment from being Harvey’s mum. I think it could have made such a difference to me if, during my pregnancy I had been able to use a confidential service like Mum’s Mind, and speak to trained NHS professionals about what I was experiencing.

“It’s clear from other mums that so often we don’t realise that we need help and I am really pleased the service is also there for partners and families who need to understand what the signs are and also because they too need emotional support. When Harvey was in the neonatal ward my husband had to go through long days of work and hospital visits and dealing with my anxieties as well. This could have made a difference for him too.”

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NOTES TO EDITORS
1. Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust (LPT) provides community health, mental health and learning disabilities services for the one million people living in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. We have a budget in excess of £275 million and employ approximately 5,500 staff. For more information visit: www.leicspart.nhs.uk
2. Raising Health is our registered charity (number 1057361) which raises funds to support LPT’s excellent care initiatives, equipment and innovations which go above and beyond core NHS provision, to enhance the experience of our patients, service users and staff. www.raisinghealth.org.uk

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