**BACKGROUND INFORMATION RE: MAS Project:**

The Maternal Advocacy and Support (MAS) Project will work with mums to develop a network of peer support groups for women experiencing perinatal mental health issues. Delivered by women's centres; Ballybeen, Greenway, Windsor, Falls, Footprints, Atlas, Strathfoyle & Derry, in disadvantaged communities, MAS groups will provide workshops aimed at promoting positive mental health as well as a supportive environment to build relationships and tackle isolation. Working in partnership with Aware NI, participants in the MAS Project will be able to train as peer supporters and access counselling. The MAS network will also support women from disadvantaged communities to tell their story and participate in decisions that will improve perinatal mental health services.

The aim of the MAS Project is that women in disadvataged communities can have access to better perinatal mental health (PMH) support. In addition it aims to develop a unique advocacy role for these women as active participants in improving the services available to all women who experience PMH issues. WRDA will establish a network of MAS groups in eight women's centres, with support from Aware NI as a partner. These will be mental health peer support groups that will operate in the form of workshops running once a week for 2.5 hrs and providing a healthy lunch. There will be 144 workshops delivered each year by project workers in each centre who will also provide 1-1 support for the participants. Workshops will be co-designed with the participants and will include activities such as Aware NI's 'mood matters' training, art and creativity, relaxation sessions, or support with baby bonding and parenting skills.

The Project Co-ordinator will be based at WRDA and will co-ordinate the Project, support the project workers, facilitate focus groups in each women's centre and organise two MAS network events each year. The first one will bring all the participants together to share stories, build relationships and develop advocacy messages and campaigns. The second event will also include people involved in the design and delivery of PMH services, in both the statutory and voluntary sector. MAS participants will have opportunities to engage directly with decision makers on an ongoing basis.

The beneficiaries of the MAS Project will be women in disadvantaged communities who are pregnant or have children aged 0-3. Women's centres have established relationships within the communities they serve and will invite women into MAS in a supportive, inclusive and non-judgemental environment. Each centre will recruit around 15 participants in year one who can stay involved throughout. New members can join at any time. We aim to work with 200 women over the three year period. [See additional information document] The MAS Project will be open to women regardless of their address so mums can be referred into a MAS group by statutory services such as midwives and health visitors. We met with midwives in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust who have told us that they would fully support the MAS Project and are keen to establish an appropriate referral pathway. They recognise the vital role that peer support could play for women who do not meet the criteria for referral onto the limited existing clinical pathways for PMH issues but who desperately need support in the community. Working with an experienced mental health organisation like Aware NI allows us to offer an effective and safe intervention for mums with PMH needs.