# Lahore-Glasgow Twinning - breast feeding promotion team.

A voluntary, multidisciplinary, multiagency program, working to preserve Pakistan's breastfeeding culture by sharing international expertise and resources, which received the Global Citizenship award at the 2024 Scotland Health Awards[[1]](#endnote-1).

The Royal Hospital for Children in Glasgow (RHC) has been twinned since 2001with the Children’s Hospital and University of Child Health (CHUCH) a government hospital in Lahore, the capital of the Punjab, Pakistan. Punjab is the most populous of Pakistan’s provinces, with a population twice that of the UK, while Lahore alone has a population more than double that of Scotland. CHUCH is now the largest children’s unit in Pakistan and deals daily with thousands of outpatients on very limited resources. The expert CHICH staff are intellectually isolated due to visa issues and world political events, so our twinning visits to help them drive quality improvement.

Over the last 10 years it has become increasingly evident that supporting breast feeding was a major challenge due to changes in clinical practice and cultural reduction in the value of breastmilk.

Our breastfeeding promotion team have worked over the last 5 years to develop a quality improvement programme that shares practice and support, encouraging low-cost ways of working that have cultural and health gain. Despite the challenges of distance and the pandemic, we have persevered to create something that is much more than the sum of its parts. We have been working in partnership with the local community to raise awareness and funds to support our work. Scots of Pakistani origin are the largest non-white ethnic subgroup in Scotland, so we are also reaching into the South Asian community here in Scotland.

**Why breast feeding?**

Breast milk is one of the most vital ways to protect all children, even more so for preterm and sick infants, to provide a fairer start in life and compensate for the effects of poverty.

Pakistan is in a dangerous period of transition with respect to breast feeding. As their health system develops, this brings unintended consequences that undermine breast feeding: the important shift to hospital-based delivery now routinely separates mothers and babies immediately after birth, a crucial time for establishing lactation. The great majority of mothers still start breastfeeding, but already CHICH staff see many malnourished babies, where mothers have struggled to provide enough breast milk to meet their baby’s growing need, and the staff lack the practical skills needed to help mothers safely address them.

The United Kingdom went through the same transition 50 years ago when breast feeding reduced dramatically. In response UNICEF developed the baby friendly programme which combines staff education with organisational change and this programme draws on the expertise of Scotland’s well-developed UNICEF baby friendly programme.

**Who are we?**

We are predominantly non-medical experts. Between us we combine skills and expertise in infant feeding, nutrition health promotion and primary care, as well as Urdu language skills and knowledge of Pakistani culture.

Over the years those involved have included several senior infant feeding advisors: Linda Wolfson, Debbie Barnett, Gillian Bowker, Anne Evans; Ayesha Azam, an Urdu speaking health educator; Janet Dalziel, the UNICEF baby friendly lead for Scotland; Denise Mullen a health visitor with expertise in primary care nutrition and Sahira Dar an Urdu speaking GP. Charlotte Wright an academic paediatrician has been involved with the twinning since shortly after its inception, visits Lahore roughly every two years and holds an honorary visiting professorship there.

**What have the team done?**

In November 2019 a first breast feeding educational delegation, comprising three infant feeding advisors and an Urdu speaking health educator, spent a week in Lahore running an intensive breastfeeding training programme for 40 nurses and doctors. Following this course, the team planned a further visit in Autumn 2020. This was prevented by the pandemic, but contact was maintained via zoom learning and education sessions.

In 2022 a second delegation to Lahore including two infant feeding advisors, a health visitor and two Urdu speaking health staff. They ran 4-day infant feeding training programme, attended by 60 nursing and medical staff, concentrating on practice skills and working in partnership with mothers within a safe and supportive environment. They also provided a one-day programme of lectures for students on the new BSc Paediatric Nursing course. The team worked together seamlessly to ensure effective, accurate communication in a combination of English and Urdu.

During this visit it became evident that there were many systemic barriers to good breastfeeding practice that needed to be addressed before knowledge could be put into practice, particularly the separation of mothers and baby immediately after birth.

CHUCH does not have a maternity unit so, rather than just providing education, we set out to extend our reach into maternity care and to advocate for structural changes. To achieve this, we initiated a link with maternity services in Lahore, and between UNICEF baby friendly UK and UNICEF Pakistan.

In May 2024 we hosted a visit of CHUCH, Maternity and UNICEF staff to visit UNICEF UK in London and observe baby friendly practices in London and Glasgow and help them formulate new approaches relevant to Pakistan. During that trip they also visited the Scottish parliament and met MSPs and civil servants. After this we met regularly with colleagues from CHUCH to form an action plan of priorities following supporting them with a baseline audit of the care provided to families and the knowledge of staff to support breastfeeding.

During our next visit to Lahore in October 2024 we visited the large new Ganga Ram maternity unit, where we observed some impressive efforts to promote breastfeeding on postnatal and neonatal wards, but a lack of privacy which still makes this very challenging. In a smaller local unit (Mian Mir). we found that despite awareness of the importance of protecting breastfeeding, mothers and babies were still routinely separated in the first hours after birth, missing out on the ‘golden hour’ which promotes lactation and bonding. During the visit we also met with senior government and other policy makers and met with senior managers to support them in creating affordable, sustainable change in their institutions and health systems.

**How is it funded and run?**

The programme is run by all colleagues giving up their time voluntarily, attending meetings during days off and travelling to Pakistan on annual leave. Our modest funding has been obtained from various South Asian groups and individuals, as well as grants from NHS GGC endowments and the BMJ humanitarian fund. We have no formal admin support, and members of the team share tasks and contribute to fundraising events. The fund is held and administered by the Glasgow Children’s hospital charity.

Chronology

2017 Debby Barnett (Breast Bank) Visit to Lahore

2018 Visit to Lahore by Professor Charlotte Wright, Dr Ada Garcia, lecturer in Human Nutrition to lecture and supervise PhD research & Linda Wolfson, National Maternal & Infant Nutrition Coordinator, Scottish Government to observe breast feeding practices.

2019 Visit to Lahore by Professor Charlotte Wright and Dr Linda De Caestecker, to speak at Pakistan Paediatric Association Annual Scientific,meeting. Meeting with Punjab minister of Health

First breast feeding educational delegation to Lahore - 4 delegates

2020 – 2021 COVID epidemic prevented in person trips, contact maintained via zoom meetings

2022 Second breast feeding educational delegation to Lahore - 4 delegates

2023 ongoing Quality improvement work and planning for 2024 visits via zoom

2024

May: Visit by 3 Lahore staff to London to meet UNICEF UK baby friendly team and observe baby friendly practices in London and Glasgow. Also visited Scottish parliament to meet met MSPs and civil servants.

October Visit by 4 Glasgow staff to Lahore. Visited maternity units, met with senior government and other policy makers.

November Received the Global Citizenship award at the 2024 Scotland Health Awards[[2]](#endnote-2).

1. [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kNcZN-GuUdeBLgywW4cFtuXeOELuYKl5/view](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fdrive.google.com%2Ffile%2Fd%2F1kNcZN-GuUdeBLgywW4cFtuXeOELuYKl5%2Fview&data=05%7C02%7Ccharlotte.wright%40glasgow.ac.uk%7C9123355854db43ed820308dd1f765c69%7C6e725c29763a4f5081f22e254f0133c8%7C1%7C0%7C638701315407156542%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOiIwLjAuMDAwMCIsIlAiOiJXaW4zMiIsIkFOIjoiTWFpbCIsIldUIjoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=DCjBFIaboJ4%2Bqq3FqK5qQh3knFpHcb73V8CAftzXLBw%3D&reserved=0) [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kNcZN-GuUdeBLgywW4cFtuXeOELuYKl5/view](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fdrive.google.com%2Ffile%2Fd%2F1kNcZN-GuUdeBLgywW4cFtuXeOELuYKl5%2Fview&data=05%7C02%7Ccharlotte.wright%40glasgow.ac.uk%7C9123355854db43ed820308dd1f765c69%7C6e725c29763a4f5081f22e254f0133c8%7C1%7C0%7C638701315407156542%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOiIwLjAuMDAwMCIsIlAiOiJXaW4zMiIsIkFOIjoiTWFpbCIsIldUIjoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=DCjBFIaboJ4%2Bqq3FqK5qQh3knFpHcb73V8CAftzXLBw%3D&reserved=0) [↑](#endnote-ref-2)