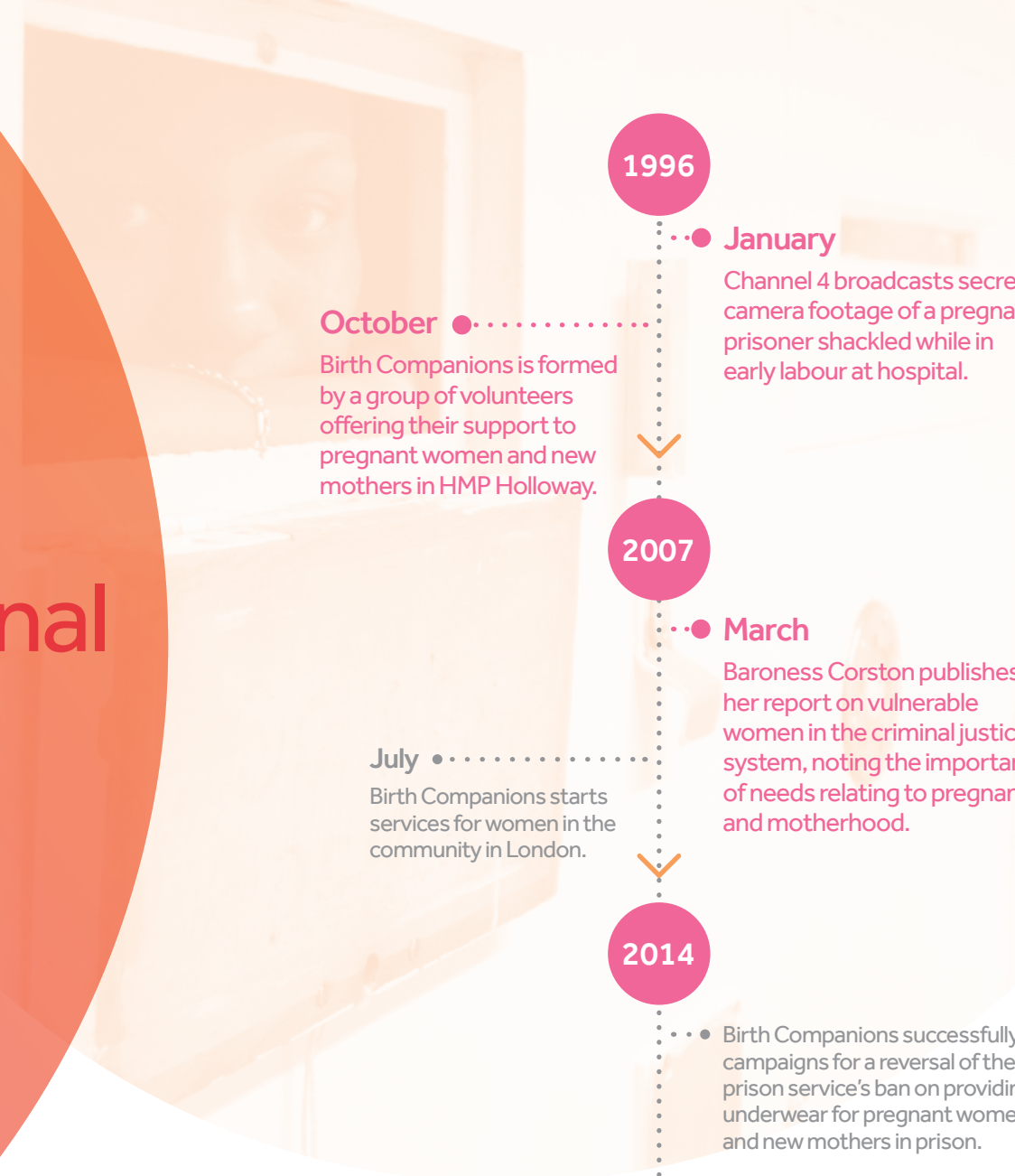




This is what change looks like:

# 25 years of Birth Companions' influence in the criminal justice system

Birth Companions has worked relentlessly for the last 25 years to improve the care of pregnant women and mothers of infants in the criminal justice system. We have been honoured to do this with so many women with lived experience of the system, and incredibly proud of the real change our efforts have driven. There is still so much more to be done to reduce inequalities in the criminal justice system as well as the maternity, social services and immigration systems. But this year, 25 years since we supported the first woman at Holloway Prison, we want to reflect on what we have already achieved.



1996

January

Channel 4 broadcasts secret camera footage of a pregnant prisoner shackled while in early labour at hospital.

October

Birth Companions is formed by a group of volunteers offering their support to pregnant women and new mothers in HMP Holloway.

2007

March

Baroness Corston publishes her report on vulnerable women in the criminal justice system, noting the importance of needs relating to pregnancy and motherhood.

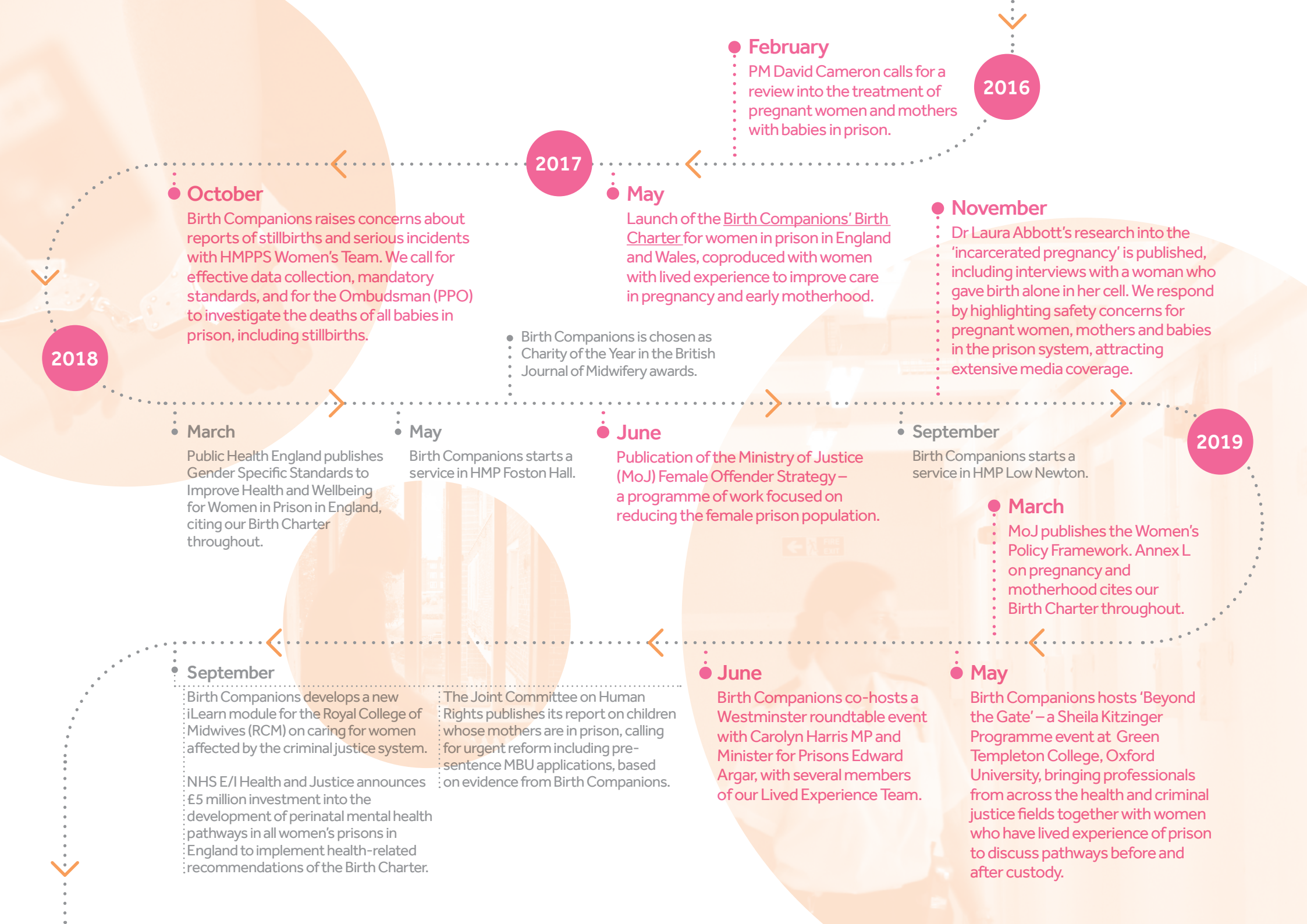
July

Birth Companions starts services for women in the community in London.

2014

Birth Companions successfully campaigns for a reversal of the prison service's ban on providing underwear for pregnant women and new mothers in prison.

Birth Companions starts services in HMP Peterborough and HMP Bronzefield.



2016

● **February**

PM David Cameron calls for a review into the treatment of pregnant women and mothers with babies in prison.

2017

● **May**

Launch of the Birth Companions' Birth Charter for women in prison in England and Wales, coproduced with women with lived experience to improve care in pregnancy and early motherhood.

● **November**

Dr Laura Abbott's research into the 'incarcerated pregnancy' is published, including interviews with a woman who gave birth alone in her cell. We respond by highlighting safety concerns for pregnant women, mothers and babies in the prison system, attracting extensive media coverage.

● Birth Companions is chosen as Charity of the Year in the British Journal of Midwifery awards.

2018

● **October**

Birth Companions raises concerns about reports of stillbirths and serious incidents with HMPPS Women's Team. We call for effective data collection, mandatory standards, and for the Ombudsman (PPO) to investigate the deaths of all babies in prison, including stillbirths.

● **March**

Public Health England publishes Gender Specific Standards to Improve Health and Wellbeing for Women in Prison in England, citing our Birth Charter throughout.

● **May**

Birth Companions starts a service in HMP Foston Hall.

● **June**

Publication of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) Female Offender Strategy – a programme of work focused on reducing the female prison population.

● **September**

Birth Companions starts a service in HMP Low Newton.

2019

● **March**

MoJ publishes the Women's Policy Framework. Annex L on pregnancy and motherhood cites our Birth Charter throughout.

● **September**

Birth Companions develops a new iLearn module for the Royal College of Midwives (RCM) on caring for women affected by the criminal justice system.

NHS E/I Health and Justice announces £5 million investment into the development of perinatal mental health pathways in all women's prisons in England to implement health-related recommendations of the Birth Charter.

The Joint Committee on Human Rights publishes its report on children whose mothers are in prison, calling for urgent reform including pre-sentence MBU applications, based on evidence from Birth Companions.

● **June**

Birth Companions co-hosts a Westminster roundtable event with Carolyn Harris MP and Minister for Prisons Edward Argar, with several members of our Lived Experience Team.

● **May**

Birth Companions hosts 'Beyond the Gate' – a Sheila Kitzinger Programme event at Green Templeton College, Oxford University, bringing professionals from across the health and criminal justice fields together with women who have lived experience of prison to discuss pathways before and after custody.

2019

● **September**

The tragic death of a baby in HMP/YOI Bronzefield. We raise concerns about serious incidents in the women's estate over recent years with HMPPS, MoJ, NHS and MPs, and call for the Ombudsman to investigate.

● **October**

Birth Companions is approached for consultation on terms of reference for the new HMPPS policy framework on MBUs. We work with HMPPS Women's Team to broaden this to include pregnancy, pregnancy outcomes and maternal separation.

● **November**

The Guardian reports a year on year rise in the number of babies born to women in prison.

● **December**

Birth Companions publishes the [Birth Charter Toolkit](#) to help address the continued gaps between policy and practice in the care of pregnant women and mothers of infants in the prison estate.

2020

● **March**

Birth Companions hosts a Westminster roundtable with Minister for Prisons Lucy Frazer, attended by five members of our Lived Experience Team.

National lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Birth Companions launches a campaign calling for the early release of pregnant women and mothers of infants from prison in light of the risks posed by COVID-19 and associated restrictions.

MoJ announces pregnant women and those on MBUs will be eligible for assessment for release under a specific compassionate ROTL scheme.

● **April**

Birth Companions secures NHS funding to provide remote support to pregnant women and mothers being released from prison in the pandemic, extending our reach across the entire women's estate.

● **May**

Launch of the Australian Birth Charter, developed in consultation with Birth Companions.

● **June**

The tragic death of a baby in HMP Styal – PPO launches another investigation.



2020

2021

## February

We join others in criticism of government plans to build 500 new women's prison places.

Birth Companions and Clean Break host a joint event to mark International Women's Day and 25 years since BC was founded, challenging the imprisonment of pregnant women and mothers of infants.

## November

Publication of the Birth Companions Inside guide to pregnancy, birth and motherhood in prison.

Birth Companions is runner up in the Outstanding National Charity category of Criminal Justice Alliance Awards 2020.

## May

Birth Companions publishes A Window of Opportunity, a report with Clinks highlighting the need for greater recognition of pregnancy and early motherhood in community CJS settings – community sentences, probation supervision after release, and bail conditions.

Birth Companions is part of a successful partnership bid with the London Women's Services Alliance to provide wraparound services to women in the capital, and with Advance to provide probation-linked services in the south east.

## September

The first ever mandatory requirements relating to pregnancy, maternal separation and MBUs are published by HMPPS and MoJ, built around the principles of the Birth Charter and incorporating significant input from Birth Companions.