



## Midwifery Unit Network: the first three years

*We are committed to  
women and families having  
positive birth experiences  
and babies having an  
optimal start in life.*

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July 2018

If referencing this report, cite as: Newburn M and  
Rocca-Ihenacho L. (2018) Midwifery Unit Network:  
the first three years. Midwifery Unit Network/City,  
University of London.

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# CONTENTS

<b>A EUROPEAN COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>BECOMING A COMMUNITY INTEREST COMPANY</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>ACHIEVEMENTS</b>	<b>6-8</b>
<b>OUR HISTORY</b>	<b>9-11</b>
<b>NEXT STEPS 2018-2021</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>KEY MIDWIFERY UNIT FACTS - ENGLAND</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>15</b>

*The women's quotes on pages 4, 10 and 14 are taken from an ethnographic organisational study of alongside midwifery units (McCourt et al, 2014).*

# A EUROPEAN COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

**Midwifery Unit Network (MUNet) is a European community of practice (see p6) with a shared interest in supporting and promoting the development and growth of midwifery units (birth centres), which are managed and staffed by midwives.**

This report, prepared for our London 2018 conference, celebrates what we have achieved during our first three years and describes our plans for the future.

It sets out our latest vision, mission and values. These have been reviewed and refined as we have prepared for the next key stage in our journey, as a community interest company and spin-out enterprise of City, University of London.

## OUR VISION

For women and families to have positive childbirth experiences that enhance their physical and psychological wellbeing and give their babies an optimal start in life.

## OUR MISSION

To support and promote the development and growth of midwifery units (birth centres) throughout Europe, so they become the main care pathway for women with an uncomplicated pregnancy, providing holistic care to them and their families.

To make midwifery units an easily accessible, mainstream option for women with uncomplicated pregnancies and their partners, through research, policy, leadership, quality improvement, training, influencing, information, support and networking activities.

**They helped me move into whatever position; ... we were standing up, over the bed, lying down, in the birth pool.**

**They also had a rope hanging from the ceiling... I could have done pretty much whatever I wanted to.”**

**“I think it smells like a spa. It’s not like being in a hospital with all that clinical smell. It’s a complete change of atmosphere. It’s that kind of spa atmosphere, and all the medical equipment is kept away.**

# BECOMING A COMMUNITY INTEREST COMPANY

Midwifery Unit Network is in the process of becoming a registered community interest company. The MUNet management team has worked closely with a shadow board and professional advisers at City, University of London to develop robust structures and plans for taking MUNet forward. Our partnership with an academic institution has enabled us to raise research funding for knowledge mobilisation on choice of place of birth and midwifery units. It provides a sound infrastructure for future research, fundraising, and educational, training and consultancy activities, providing us with resources, advice and support as a social enterprise.

The community interest company will provide benefit to all women who may wish to use a midwifery unit for the birth of their baby, and will benefit midwives and other health professionals working in maternity services.

## OUR VALUES

We value:

- holistic care that provides for physical, social and psychological needs
- care that is both woman-centred and addresses the needs of the baby and wider family
- care that is both safe and acknowledges women's autonomy, and is kind and personalised
- positive birthing environments for women and their families, and healthy working environments for midwives
- collaborations and co-design between midwives, medical staff, communities, commissioning, research and policymaking
- knowledge of physiology, biopsychosocial interactions, and their impact on the processes of labour, birth and breastfeeding
- using quality evidence to inform decision-making and appropriate use of interventions
- education, sharing of information and expertise, and mutual learning.





# ACHIEVEMENTS

Our key achievements over the first three years have been:

- **Creating a community of practice for midwives**
- **Publication of Midwifery Unit Standards**
- **Development and delivery of training**
- **Establishing criteria for, and publicly recognising, Birth Centre Beacon Sites**
- **Consultancy and leadership events in Europe and across the world**

## CREATING A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Midwifery Unit Network was set up to help midwives managing and working in midwifery units to connect with each other. When people with a common purpose come together in 'joint enterprise', build trusting relationships and share their specific specialist knowledge they develop shared practices and collective intelligence. This is a community of practice.

The concept was first proposed by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger in their book, *Situated Learning*, and has been developed by many others (Rocca-Ihenacho, Newburn and Byrom, 2017). The MUNet website, built and maintained by Sheena Byrom, was developed to act as a hub for the connected social media platforms we use to build our own community of practice. Through MUNet, midwives and others can share resources, ideas and solutions to practical challenges.

As website editor, Sheena Byrom has encouraged practice development midwives, researchers and activists to contribute blogs and resources. Sheena also engages people and promotes midwifery unit care by tweeting on behalf of the Network.

## MIDWIFERY UNIT STANDARDS

At the first Midwifery Unit Network European meeting in April 2016, participants raised concerns about the lack of practical guidance at a European level to define a midwifery unit, the care provided in them, and the characteristics of well-functioning midwifery units. It was therefore decided that MUNet would create the first European Midwifery Unit Standards. Dr Lucia Rocca-Ihenacho was awarded a National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) knowledge mobilisation grant to run a project alongside Laura Batinelli and Ellen Thael.

Further funding was later provided by City, University of London. This project took 18 months and more than 100 experts and stakeholders from 10 European countries contributed to the creation of 10 themes and 29 standards. Before the decision was taken to develop the standards for the whole of Europe, The Royal College of Midwives provided some additional funding for the literature review to inform the development of standards for the United Kingdom.



# ACHIEVEMENTS

## TRAINING

**There is growing evidence to suggest that training and development of the interdisciplinary team is an essential element of quality improvement. The King's Fund (2008) and Thomas and Dixon (2014) have stressed how training together helps staff to recognise their unique but complementary roles and helps eradicate barriers to effective communication and teamwork.**

The Safe Births report stated 'Staff that work together must train together' (King's Fund, 2008). This is especially important for midwifery units as several studies suggest that to avoid a 'them and us' culture, relationships between obstetric units and midwifery units need to be facilitated positively by transformational leadership and interdisciplinary training (Walsh, 2006a, 2006b, 2007; Deery, Hughes and Kirkham, 2010; Newburn, 2010; McCourt et al, 2011; 2014; Rocca-lhencho, 2017).

MUNet offers workshops across Europe as well as a high-quality, RCM-accredited multi-professional training programme inspired by the National Maternity Review in England (NHS England, 2016). This training programme, building on training and leadership work developed by Dr Rocca-lhencho and Felipe Castro Cardona since 2009, includes three one-day workshops:

- 1) Personalised care and partnership in decision-making
- 2) Optimal care in midwifery-led settings
- 3) Skills and drills in midwifery-led settings.

Maternity units can apply for the whole package or individual workshops.



# ACHIEVEMENTS

## BIRTH CENTRE BEACON SITES

The Birth Centre Beacon Sites pilot supports and promotes the development and growth of units run by midwives delivering a social model of care. Led by Mary Newburn, the scheme highlights maternity services with a substantial number of births booked for midwifery units. In 2018, three NHS trusts were awarded for having:

- A significant percentage of births in freestanding and/or alongside midwifery units;
- A clear philosophy in place to provide personalised care, promote physiological birth and support women, their partners and the wider family;
- Systems for midwifery development, multidisciplinary learning and case review;
- A desire to share learning with other midwifery units about vision, set up and on-going organisation, what has and has not worked, etc;
- Willingness to host visits from other midwives wishing to develop birth centre services, and arrange placements for student midwives and midwives wishing to develop their skills;
- Participation in research relating to midwifery units and national audit;
- Service user involvement, partnership working and strategic development of midwifery care across the trust/board;
- Positive communication and marketing.

The 2018 Beacon Sites are

- the Lancashire Teaching Hospitals Foundation NHS Trust;
- Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust;
- Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust.

In 2016, 24%, 32% and 19% of women in these trusts, respectively, gave birth in a birth centre (midwifery unit) rather than in the hospital labour ward, compared with a national average for England of around 14%.

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## EDUCATION AND LEADERSHIP EVENTS

We have hosted and participated in meetings across the UK, in eastern and western Europe, Australia and Canada, co-designed with local midwifery colleagues, service users, academics, professional bodies and maternity services.

UK events have been in Glasgow, Grange, London, Preston, Shrewsbury and Stirling. Interdisciplinary workshops facilitated in mainland Europe have involved midwives, doulas, managers, obstetricians and neonatologists. They have explored philosophy of care in midwifery units, enabled midwives and other maternity care professionals to share midwifery-led care knowledge and skills, and worked with participants to understand the barriers and facilitators for the implementation of midwifery units in specific countries.

In Sydney, Sheena Byrom ran a workshop at the Normal Birth Research Conference and supported midwives to set up Midwifery Unit Network Australia.





# OUR HISTORY

## CO-FOUNDERS

Midwifery Unit Network was established in 2015 by co-founders Dr Lucia Rocca-Ihenacho, lecturer at City, University of London, Felipe Castro, consultant midwife at Barts Health NHS Trust, Dr Sheena Byrom OBE midwife consultant and Mary Newburn, service user advocate. In 2017 Richard Hallett MBE, maternity voices partnership chair, joined the management team, and Chantelle Winstanley, consultant midwife at St George's University Hospital, did so in 2018. Dr Pheobe Pallotti, associate professor, University of Nottingham, provided advice during 2017. In the same year, Mary Newburn took on the role of executive manager for the Network.

In 2018, a Shadow Board was formed, in anticipation of the planned community interest company (see p2). Ellen Thael, midwife at St Mary's Birth Centre, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, and Laura Batinelli, midwife at Carmen Birth Centre, St George's University Hospital NHS Trust, who had been working on the Knowledge Mobilisation project since 2016, as clinical academic midwives at City, University of London, joined the management team.

MUNet builds on previous initiatives in the UK which had more limited methods of communication. Birth Centre Network was run as a Yahoo group, and the Association for Community-based Maternity Care, used printed newsletters, post and email to communicate. The American Association of Birth Centres, and the work of other pioneers in research and practice development, have also inspired us.

## COLLABORATORS AND SUPPORTERS

Our Advisory Board includes a wide range of maternity leaders, midwives working in practice, managers, lecturers, policy leaders and researchers; other clinical health professionals, including obstetricians, a GP and neonatologist; service users and women who are involved in developing their local services, and maternity commissioners.

In the UK, the Royal College of Midwives worked closely with us in our early years, 2015-17. They provided invaluable support as we set up and developed the new network. Our collaborative projects included a series of midwifery unit webinars, addressing midwives' questions.

Since 2015, MUNet has also collaborated closely with the research team at City, University of London, led by Professor Christine McCourt and Dr Lucia Rocca-Ihenacho. The NICE Birthplace Action Study, funded by NIHR, explores ways of implementing evidence-based recommendations on birthplace into practice. NIHR Knowledge Mobilisation funding has made national events and strategic developments possible including a refreshed logo and the new website, being launched in 2018.

MUNet has received both funding and business support from City, University of London and we look forward to becoming a community interest company as a spin-out from City.

We have laid down strong foundations in our ambition to become a Europe-wide network, having been active in Italy, Spain, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Romania, the Netherlands, Portugal, Belgium, Malta, Northern Ireland, England, Scotland, and Wales.



# OUR HISTORY

## RESEARCH

Research and evidence are at the core of our work. In collaboration with the Centre for Maternal and Child Health Research at City, Midwifery Unit Network has been active in research activities since its creation.

### *Implementation science research*

Service managers and commissioners need the support of strong research evidence to ensure that the pathway of care offered to healthy women with a straightforward pregnancy supports safe, physiological labour and protects against iatrogenic effects of exposure to medicalised care settings. Midwifery Unit Network, as an innovative community of interest committed to change, is well placed to contribute to implementation research on extending access to midwifery models of care.

The Centre for Maternal and Child Health Research at City, University of London has a particular interest in research on birth place, models of care and implementation research and MUNet continues to play a central role in its work. Dr Lucia Rocca-Ihenacho and her team, under the supervision of Professor Christine McCourt and Professor Jane Sandall, King's College London, conducted the NICE Birthplace Action Study, which has included developing the Midwifery Unit Support for Excellence Pathway (MUSE)-Pathway. The MUSE-Pathway aims to co-create a local improvement plan in partnership with local stakeholders.



### *Evaluation*

Workshops in the Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Italy were evaluated by Laura Batinelli supported by City University researchers. This indicated that they were successful at renewing the participants' confidence and motivation to promote physiological birth and a social model of maternity care. The workshops stimulated the establishment of a community of practice and motivation to lead change towards making these models of care a reality. This provided important insight into the effectiveness and value of the workshops in the three different European countries.

### *Evidence-based clinical guidance*

MUNet is registered as a stakeholder with the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and has commented on consultations, including the scope for the Antenatal Care guideline.

Mary Newburn and Professor Soo Downe, an MUNet adviser, worked with colleagues from the RCM and Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology on the NICE/NHS England evidence-based place of birth decision aids. The two decision aids, for first-time mothers and for women who have previously had a baby, were published in June 2018.

“They said to my partner, “Do you want a drink, do you want some toast?”, as well as me, whereas last time because we were in the hospital ward, he didn't get offered anything. It's much more about you as a couple.”

## KEY EVENTS - TIMELINE

<b>2015</b>	
<b>Spring</b>	The founders start regular meetings. The MUNet website is created by Sheena Byrom. Mary Newburn writes policy documents. Felipe Castro creates the Facebook pages. Lucia Rocca-Ihenacho develops research and training.
<b>June</b>	Sheena, Lucia and Felipe present the purpose and objectives of the new Network at the Normal Labour and Birth Research Conference in Grange-over-Sands, Cumbria.
<b>2016</b>	
<b>All Year</b>	MUNet meets regularly with Royal College of Midwives (RCM). They work on projects of mutual benefit to disseminate information on running midwifery units.
<b>January</b>	Lucia Rocca-Ihenacho is awarded the NIHR Knowledge Mobilisation funding.
<b>April</b>	MUNet's London launch at City University, chaired by Baroness Cumberlege.
<b>April</b>	The first MUNet European meeting is held at Barkantine Birth Centre, London, funded by the Impact Fund, City, University of London and Active Birth Pools.
<b>April</b>	First Italian MUNet Conference, Genoa, Italy.
<b>May</b>	Lucia Rocca-Ihenacho and Felipe Castro facilitate two hugely popular, 'sell-out' workshops in Tarragona, Spain, at the ICM Conference for Southern Europe.
<b>June</b>	Ellen Thael wins a fellowship from Imperial College NHS Trust Charity to work on the NICE Birthplace Action Study.
<b>November</b>	Mary Newburn joins the NHS England Stakeholder Council representing the Network.
<b>November</b>	Sheena Byrom delivers presentations in Malta at Malta Midwives Association event.
<b>November</b>	Lucia Rocca-Ihenacho and Felipe Castro facilitate the first workshop in Prague in partnership with Prague's association of birth centres (APODAC).
<b>2017</b>	
<b>January</b>	Laura Batinelli and Ellen Thael are employed at City, University of London and the Midwifery Unit Standards project is started.
<b>February</b>	Mary Newburn, Wendy Cutchie, lead midwife for community and midwifery-led units, and Ruth Weston, AIMS, run a conference on implementing Better Births in rural areas for Shrewsbury and Telford NHS Trust. Dr Denis Walsh presents new midwifery unit mapping study findings (see p13).
<b>February</b>	Richard Hallett provides advice on writing a business case for midwifery units and on lobbying.
<b>March</b>	The first MUNet visit to Bulgaria is arranged. A workshop is coordinated by Yoana Stancheva and Ilona Neshkova for Bulgarian and Romanian stakeholders.
<b>April</b>	Laura Batinelli coordinates a successful workshop, held in Grosseto, Tuscany, Italy, with a follow-up workshop in November.
<b>May onwards</b>	The MUNet Academy facilitates workshops in England on optimal care in midwifery units, personalised care for the interdisciplinary team, and obstetric emergencies in midwifery-led settings.
<b>June</b>	Midwifery Unit Network team present at the ICM conference in Toronto. A stakeholder event is also held for the Midwifery Unit Standards project.
<b>October</b>	Felipe Castro and Lucia Rocca-Ihenacho present at the Midwives Federation of Spain (FAME) and the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) conference, and the session, and messages, are reported in the local press.
<b>December</b>	Mary Newburn writes to Shropshire and Telford commissioners and the NHS Trust in support of rural communities who want a positive future for all four of the Shropshire freestanding midwifery units.
<b>2018</b>	
<b>January</b>	Second application led by City, University of London to the ITN-Marie Curie for 25 funded PhD bursaries. Unsuccessful.
<b>January</b>	Lucia Rocca-Ihenacho is invited to Mexico for a network birth centre meeting and workshop.
<b>January</b>	Freedom of information requests are made to Shropshire commissioners.
<b>February</b>	Birth Centre Beacon Sites awards are announced with a press release. There is good local press coverage in Lancashire and Lewisham.
<b>March</b>	Mary Newburn recruits country editors for Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.
<b>July</b>	Standards for Midwifery Units are launched in London at the #MUNet18 conference.

# NEXT STEPS 2018-2021

**It is a priority of the new Midwifery Unit Network community interest company, due to be registered at Companies House in the summer of 2018, to develop a plan for growth and financial sustainability, as well as continuing to provide community benefit. Some of the priority areas include the following.**

## COMMUNICATION AND MARKETING

A new website will offer a fresh design, greater ease of navigation and improved functionality to continue to support communication and mutual support.

The website will host the Midwifery Unit Academy's training courses and will include profiles of Birth Centre Beacon Sites, information resources and details of all MUNet services, including consultancy. New 'country' pages will enable interested European countries to develop tailored information relevant to their national policies and maternity services. Relevant web pages will be translated into key languages.

## TRAINING

In the spring of 2018 we started developing e-learning modules which will be accessible via the new website from the autumn. Some of these will be free to access online and others will be paid-for courses. MUNet will continue to offer training to NHS trusts and boards in the UK and to maternity services throughout Europe. Midwifery Unit Academy will be formally launched in winter 2018-19 with interactive online activities.

## CONSULTANCY

MUNet will develop its consultancy services. We have a track record of being asked for advice and guidance on creating new services or revitalising existing services to make them cost effective and fit to deliver holistic, nurturing, safe care for women and families. We also work with professional organisations and charities where we have mutual interests and complementary areas of knowledge. We are committed to supporting the implementation and/or improvement of midwifery units across Europe. We will offer consultancy services for a fee, with pro bono advice available in some circumstances. We will work with our Advisory Board members to develop this service, exploring online and distance coaching options, as well as visits to services and potential for management placements.

## EVENTS

We will run one national conference a year, alternating between the UK and mainland Europe. The next European conference will be held in Barcelona in May 2019.

## CAPACITY BUILDING AND IMPLEMENTATION RESEARCH

MUNet will support City, University of London in applications for capacity building in midwifery and implementation science research. Further work is planned to develop midwifery unit standards indicators and to facilitate self-assessment of quality.





# KEY MIDWIFERY UNIT FACTS – ENGLAND

A recent collaborative mapping study of midwifery units in England, carried out as part of a mixed methods collaborative study, led by University of Nottingham with City, University of London (Walsh et al, 2017), provides the following information for 2017.

- There are 134 NHS trusts in England, of which a quarter (24%) have no midwifery unit.
- There is wide variation in the percentage of all births taking place in midwifery units between different maternity services, with a spread of 4% to 31%.
- Only one in six trusts (n=23; 17%) has an alongside midwifery unit (AMU) at its obstetric unit and at least one freestanding midwifery unit (FMU).

Since it started in 2015, Midwifery Unit Network has been working with policymakers, professional bodies, change agents and NHS leaders to address this under-provision. From a positive perspective:

- In 2017, alongside midwifery units had nearly doubled since 2010 (n=53–97).
- Freestanding midwifery units have increased slightly (n=58–61).
- There has been a significant reduction in maternity services without either an alongside or free-standing midwifery unit (n=75–32).
- The percentage of all births in midwifery units has trebled, now representing 14% of all births in England (Walsh, et al, 2017).

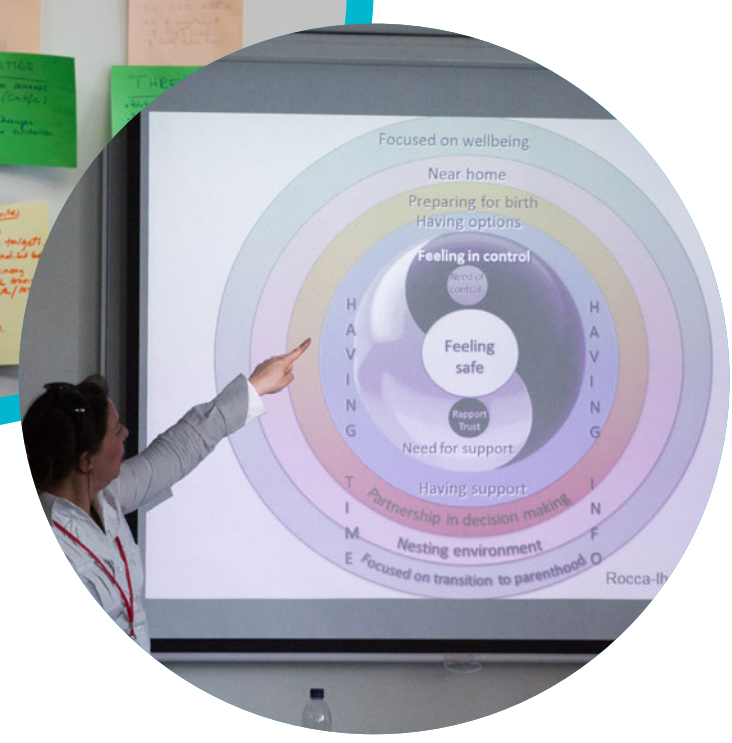
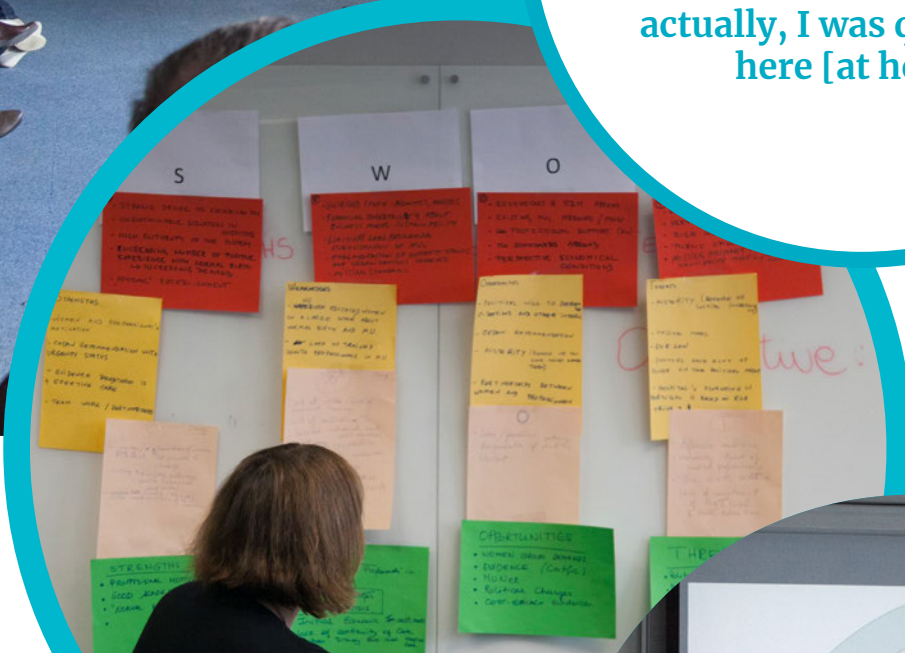
We will support countries across Europe to lobby for high-quality audit and research and help to disseminate published evidence of changing provision.

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They were extremely relaxed. They said to me, “you sound as though you are in control, you sound calm”, they reassured me I didn’t need to rush in. And, actually, I was quite happy here [at home].





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**We would like to thank all of our advisers.**

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