Outlined is a report based on information about pregnancy and swimming, as well as postnatal swimming and parent and child swimming.

**Introduction:** The benefits of swimming during pregnancy

- Swimming is a great exercise for pregnant women as it uses large muscle groups, is non weight bearing, and low impact.

- It provides a good cardio-vascular workout and allows expectant women to feel weightless, despite the extra pounds added by pregnancy. It also poses a very low risk of injury.

- Any type of aerobic exercise helps increase the body's ability to process and use oxygen, which is important for mother and baby. Swimming improves circulation, increases muscle tone and strength, and builds endurance. If you swim, you'll burn calories, feel less fatigued, sleep better, and cope better with pregnancy’s physical and emotional challenges.

- Swimming is also one of the safest forms of exercise to do when pregnant. If you swam regularly before pregnancy, you should be able to continue without much modification. If you didn't swim or exercise at all, you should still be able to swim, but check with your doctor or midwife first. You'll need to start slowly, stretch well during a gradual warm-up and cool down, and not overexert yourself.

**Aim**

- Assess the benefits of swimming for pregnant women, women who have just had a child, and also parent and child swimming.

- Find out what is available for these women.

- Evaluate these women's attitudes to swimming.

- Visit a children's centre whereby free parent and child lessons were offered, see what has happened there and what the pro's and con's are.
Findings

Why swim when pregnant?

First-trimester tips
It is recommended swimming for at least 30 minutes daily. Swimming first thing in the morning may counteract nausea and energize expectant mothers for the rest of the day.

Second-trimester tips
Pregnancy won't require expectant mothers to cut down on swimming as they grow—probably won't need to modify their regimen, but a maternity swimsuit may be more comfortable as their tummy is expanding.

Third-trimester tips
The water supports expectant mothers’ joints and ligaments as they exercise, preventing injury and also protecting them against overheating. Breaststroke can be particularly beneficial in the third trimester, because it lengthens the chest muscles and shortens the back muscles, two areas that typically become misaligned as expectant mothers body changes during pregnancy.

A City Council offering free swims for pregnant women
One City Council created a pass available for pregnant women to use, across a range of pools across the city-
- The free swims didn’t extend to aqua fitness classes or lessons.
- Free swims could be used during family swim times, but other family members must pay
- Photographs will be used for identification purposes and weren’t shared with any third parties

Post natal exercise
- A range of post natal activities are also made available at the City’s sports and leisure centres so expectant mothers could maintain and improve their fitness.
Points

- A great way to get more people swimming
- More likely to carry on swimming behaviour after pregnancy and bring their children
- Social aspect - meet other expectant mothers

If a parent is a non swimmer it is highly likely that their child won’t swim in their early years, delaying the learning process until they get to school. It has also become apparent that fewer people from a BME background swim as adults, in turn they seem to pass this attitude and habit on to their children. If they are either sceptical about the benefits of swimming, or in fact scared of swimming then they are likely to pass these attitudes on to their children.

Swimming initiatives for mothers and babies should be centred on building water confidence/social networks and fitness.

Essex Children’s Centre visit

- The Children’s Centre in Essex is a place where mothers and their children can go; the project was funded by Active Essex, the County Sports Partnership, as part of their Active Women programme – ‘She Has Energy’ in Essex. Therefore it didn’t cost anything to attend.
- When the funding became available the children’s centre linked up with Love2Swim, a private swim school in the Essex area to provide the sessions.
- The Children’s Centre offered a number of free mother and baby swimming sessions, with the funding from Essex council, and an independent swim school- ‘Love2Swim’
- This allowed mothers to take their children along to the local pool, along with the children centre staff, one day a week
- Parent’s had to support their babies in the water- some of these women swam themselves, other had limited swimming abilities
- The feedback revealed that the sessions were immensely popular; some of the women said they were competent, comfortable swimmers and would take their children swimming but a combination of time, money, and childcare issues meant that most found it hard to go swimming
- Those who could swim, enjoyed it and wanted to were unable to swim as much as they wanted too because;
  - They had little time, it was too expensive, or they had too many young children that they couldn’t leave unattended in the pool.
Other women were unable to swim or were very weak swimmers. One could not swim at all and was petrified of water. She has since found the confidence to be able to go in the shallow end with her baby but still can’t swim. She didn’t want her son to have the same fear that she has. In the future she wanted to overcome her fear of water and learn to swim.

One woman said she could swim but considered herself a weak swimmer as she could only swim a width. She wanted to improve her stroke technique and was pleased that her children could swim well; one in particular was a very strong swimmer. She would like to swim with her children more but was aware that with two very young children she would need someone else to help her support them in the water.

All participants appreciated that swimming was a life skill, this was even more apparent if they could not swim themselves

All participants requested more of these free swimming sessions as they said they were “invaluable” - an opportunity to swim in a social setting, and if they had more than one young child, childcare was not an issue because they could bring them too (1 to 1 ratio, meant the children’s centre workers would help out with any extra children)

“We’ve learnt techniques and skills that we can now use when swimming. This has also impacted our relationship by building trust and confidence”

“This was a wonderful idea, to do it for kids. My child enjoyed every session. He loved swimming with his friends and we hope it will happen more often. Thanks”

“The most important thing is that he loves water now, more than ever. He learnt how to blow bubbles; it was a very good idea. I hope that the lessons will start again soon. My son loves the water and playing in it”.

“That was a good idea, my son enjoyed every session. Thank you”

**Post natal swimming**

Parent and baby classes are designed to make babies and their parent’s water confident. These types of classes can be undertaken in water depth varying from 0.5-metres and the area required is dependent upon the class size and parent/child: teacher ratio

One concern is around the pool water temperature, which should be at the top of the recommended range (30 degrees). It is particularly costly to raise the temperature of a larger swimming pool to this level and smaller pools with quieter surroundings are often more beneficial for this type of activity.
External Research: Kelvin Juba- young women’s swimming behaviour/young children and swimming/parent and child swimming

Findings

- Parents want their child to have swimming lessons to gain water confidence and to have fun
- Swimming is a life skill that they want their child to have, but learning to swim has to be fun as a family
- Swimming for themselves is associated with holidays
- More likely to swim more when their children have learnt to swim
- Have thought about getting in the pool when their child is having lessons but it is hard to juggle the changing etc. They would rather watch their children, and their children would rather have their parent watching
- Wouldn’t go for a swim with their child at the end of their lessons because their child is too tired and cold and wants to get out of the water
- An older child had lessons, did all the badges, then got to gold and there was nothing else to aim for. Plodding up and down the pool didn’t appeal to her. She would have liked to do maybe a life saving course or similar. There didn’t seem to be anything there for her after the badges
- Females want a spa type feel, a relaxing environment with a steam room and whirlpool!
- Mother swam rarely- she swims when she starts fad health kicks
- She’s aware of how much of a calorie burner swimming is
- If the child’s lessons were longer she would go for a swim at the same time
- Price influences her decision to swim herself
- Would need a child minder if they were to go swimming as a couple
- Pays attention to notice boards and leaflets
- The lessons are ongoing and aren’t in blocks which is easier because you don’t have to think, are they on or not, have they stopped? They are every week
- The pool is functional and clean, however it does not look fun or appealing, there is no slide or similar
Pregnancy and swimming

- Don’t like a busy pool
- Pool needs to be warm and clean, facilities need to be functional, and a facelift is always good
- Put off by the unhealthy snacks that they offer in the vending machines
- More likely to swim now that they have a child
- Not aware of any family orientated activities available to them in the centre
- A family package or discount scheme would encourage them to go swimming more often
- Would like a family fun session
- They generally get what they expect from swimming and the pool that they visit
- Promotions have to be eye-catching
- Would read stuff about their local leisure centre if it was posted through their letter box or by email

Summary of findings on young women with children and swimming

1. There is a direct relationship between the age of the children and their parent’s swimming, i.e. parents tend to stop swimming when their children get older because, although the children are still sometimes in swim classes, they are big enough to get on with it on their own. Therefore, part of the reason for adults participating in swimming diminishes
2. Most parents find it too much hassle, and the time capsule too short to go in and swim themselves
3. Young parents tend to swim as a way of supporting their children’s learning process
4. A fair proportion of adults tended to restrict their swimming based on price because going with the family is an expensive thing to do regularly
5. A number of young women stated that if they went in the water, they would prefer to do it in a women’s only session (body issues etc.)
6. Because they were parents of fairly young children, most of them thought that pools should promote their programmes through schools
7. Most felt that pools do not proactively promote their pools. This falls in line with our findings that the budget for marketing and publicity in most local pools is miniscule
8. Most parents place their entire trust in pools being able to teach their children, and are happy to let them get on with it
9. Most adults saw public pools as places ‘for kids, noise and fun’ and private pools for having a nice quiet, relaxing swim
Conclusions

- Clear benefits for swimming whilst pregnant, for post natal swimming and swimming with young children
- Any free initiative is very popular
- Any group classes are popular
- Need to get the messages out there with midwives, health workers, social workers, children’s centres, play groups and nurseries
- Need to help to overcome common barriers like swimming ability, childcare, costing and transport with similar schemes as the one seen at the Essex Children’s Centre
- One off free sessions for example may help to get peoples interest in swimming and help them retain interest
- General understanding that despite the mother’s own feeling about swimming it is important for them that their children learn to swim
- Want family fun sessions in the pool and are generally aware marketing at their local leisure centre
- Need for women only sessions
- Will be more inclined to swim when their child has learnt to swim to support the learning process

Suggestions

- Further research into similar schemes as the one ran at the Essex Children’s Centre
- Promote messages regarding the benefits of swimming for pregnant women, post natal women and women with young children