



l support across the South West of England in an innovative church-led project.

For the past four years, Dr Louise Hughes and Karen Egitto have been developing a series of parish-based antenatal courses known as 'Begin Well' which parents can access for free in their local community.

The courses offer much-needed support, going beyond antenatal care and looking at parenting skills, to support building a happy family life in areas where such courses are not available for free.

Since the beginning of lockdown, more than 100 sets of parents have been supported with a six-week course on Zoom in Devon and Bristol.

Health worker Karen explained: "Begin Well is based on the NHS course to help support existing provision where services may be stretched. Over lockdown we were seeing women with little or no access to antenatal education, nothing local, and if there was it was too expensive."

Each parish helps bring the course to their community after receiving training from Karen and Louise. The pair have been fortunate with high numbers of healthcare professionals already active in church communities. In the courses no personalised advice is given around health and people are signposted to their own healthcare provider.

Rooting couples, who often face loneliness and isolation particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic, in their local community is a crucial aspect of the project. The pair cite a couple in the Barnstaple area who have bonded with fellow parents in a supportive community despite the pandemic.

Begin Well offers their services to all people within the parish.

Dr Louise, an obstetrician, explained: "This is about the Church serving the local community. Whoever is in that community, they can feel they have a community supporting them."

Karen agreed saying: "In our day-to-day jobs we work with people of all faiths and background, and we really want people to have a safe space where they feel valued and not judged."

More information:

- More details for Begin Well can be found on their **Facebook** and **Instagram**.
 - Courses in 2021 are running in the South West and can be **arranged online**. To sponsor a parent to attend the course a donation can be made **online**.
 - Some parishes run the course in conjunction with other churches, both Anglican and non-denominational. This six-weeks-on six-weeks-off approach has been particularly successful in rural areas
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