A couple of years ago practicing midwifery didn't look like an option to self-employed midwives. Faced with the fast approaching EU directive 2011/24/EU requiring all health professionals to have professional indemnity insurance, Independent Midwives UK (IMUK) took up the challenge to solve this elusive condition of practice for its members. The decision to attempt this previously impossible task involved reassessing the current thinking around risk and then challenging the assumptions and understandings of not just ourselves but that of the insurance industry. With the help of our clinical statistics, collected over 11 years, and the NHS Litigation Authority’s Clinical Negligence Scheme for Trusts payout scales, we were able to engage with brokers, underwriters and negligence lawyers, to understand the actual risks associated with midwifery care, and separate them from the obstetric ones.

Questioning the status quo has started to become second nature for independent midwives and it is something we must all be prepared to entertain if we are to move our profession away from the very industrialised childbirth model that women are very clearly saying they do not want to be presented with.

The ability of midwives to be self-employed has been a joy for those of us who have ventured along this path. Being able to offer continuity of care and carer to women and their families has helped us to be able to add to the bank of evidence that one-to-one care, with a known practitioner, has markedly improved outcomes for women and babies. And protecting the right of women to choose midwifery care outside the mainstream option is something the board and members of IMUK feel rightly proud of.

The support of thousands of families during the hard fought campaign Choose Your Midwife, Choose Your Birth kept us powering on through even the most difficult of times. This has not been an easy journey especially as we were very aware that the amount of work that would be required would initially only enable us to stand still. However, now that the dust has settled and self-employed midwives can look forward: IMUK are making plans for that future.

With a membership that is growing daily IMUK is leading the way to a new way of practising midwifery. We are in negotiations with universities to become more closely involved in midwifery education and training and have developed a scholarship in conjunction with one of our sponsorship partners.

We are building a strong and supportive organisation that will stand beside midwives as they walk with the women in their care. We are launching our new website and rebrand this month and are looking to change the face of independent midwifery forever. In the past, perhaps connected to the insurance issue, there has been a sense of a defensive organisation. Not any more. We are going to shout from the rooftops about the fantastic care provided by self-employed practitioners.

We will not be sitting on our laurels or taking our hard won victory for granted. In a way the work has only just begun, but the ability of midwives to have a choice in the way they practice outside of the employment models is something independent minded midwives are prepared to fight for.

It has been a privilege to be part of what has felt like at times this David and Goliath journey. In order to make sure we do not find our autonomy at risk or our future uncertain again we will take the advice of Abraham Lincoln who said ‘The best way to predict your future is to create it.’

So for 2015 I wish us all the strength and vision to create the future that we want. Happy New Year.