

# Mothers at home Matter.



Spring 2017

## From our New Chair

**M**others at Home Matter (MAHM) has two primary aims: to support and to campaign. We support those at home raising their children and we campaign to make it possible for more mothers to choose to care for their children themselves.

We have achieved much over 25 years: providing support through newsletters and social media; engaging widely with other organisations and individuals; speaking at conferences and in Parliament; challenging policy and politicians and gaining national name recognition.

However in terms of changing policy and enabling more mothers to be at home we still have a long way to go.

Twenty five years ago 57% of mothers with a child aged 4 years or under were at home full time. The figure today is 28% (the Office for National Statistics). The tide has turned against us.

There has been a conscious drive by successive governments to get mothers back into paid employment. Targets have been set and Treasury policy has been formulated to do just that. Billions are spent on childcare, whilst more money is taken off families in tax where a parent stays at home to raise their children than if both parents are in employment.

All parties stand for increasing subsidised childcare for younger and younger children, as well as so-called equality in the workplace. It is seen as progressive. Not one political party is prepared to support a mother at home raising her children. The economic playing field is stacked against her. The mantra appears to be: 'A mother's place is in employment'!

Yet 88% of mothers say they would prefer to be at home with their children more often, caring for them themselves, according to the Centre for Social Justice. The Netmums Great Work Debate said: "Most mothers feel

choice has been eradicated" and they return to work sooner than they would like to because economic necessity demands it. Simply put, they cannot afford it. MAHM represents these working mothers too. And the success of our campaign will in a large part be measured by how many mothers are able to spend more time at home with their children.

In order to change policy we need the support of a wider audience. We need to engage more fully with working mothers and my first aim as the new Chair is to break down some of the barriers that divide the so-called 'stay at home' and 'working' mother. It is why I am delighted Miriam Clegg has agreed to share a platform with MAHM in the autumn at a joint event with the Home Renaissance Foundation, focussing on the importance and value of home.

It is an opportunity for us to put down our defences and our arms, to come together in recognition that what unites us - the love of our children, and the importance of home - is greater than those things that divide us. If we as mothers can work together then the potential for success and real change is so much greater.

I am hopeful for the future. We have an excellent committee team and we are continuing to challenge tax policy. Alex Payling, on her own initiative, attended the 'Future of Work' conference of the UN and International Labour Organisation in Geneva, provoking reflection by asking how unpaid workers were included in the dialogue.

At the end of June MAHM will be speaking at the Bath Festival of Childhood alongside many other notable organisations, discussing modern childhood. There are other exciting ideas but all these for another newsletter! In July a new member, Antonio Ribeiro will be participating in the London Triathlon raising money for MAHM, in gratitude to his mother. Do support him (see backpage).

I would like to close by thanking our former Chair, Marie Peacock, for her devoted service to MAHM. I am very grateful that she continues as an active member on the committee. I plan to build on her work, so that the possibility of raising one's own children, which I have found to be such a fulfilling and happy one, can be open to more mothers. **M**

*Anne Fennell, Chair of MAHM*



# Too Busy

**O**ur editor, **Claire Paye**, questions the society we live in that values constant busyness, and concludes that as being a mother is the only role that is uniquely hers, she should make more time for mothering.

I notice it most at bedtime, when I'm saying goodnight to my daughter, Amelia. She suddenly comes to life and wants to engage in chatty, chatty time. I have the finish line for the day firmly in my sights and am aware of a number of hurdles I still need to cross before I can go to bed. As Amelia is eleven and I know our chatty, chatty days are very precious and limited, I do want to engage with her question as to whether I prefer blue or turquoise. At the same time, I am very conscious that I need to do the online food shop/renew the car insurance/wash up/finish the MAHM newsletter and various other jobs that need to happen now or soon. Is busyness affecting my ability to care? Or is Amelia just using delaying tactics and her need for sleep is enough of an excuse for me to finish our lengthy bedtime routine and get on with all the other things I need to do?

Busyness is a dominating feature of our cultural landscape. Being busy can be very fulfilling and rewarding, particularly if we feel we are making a valuable contribution to our families and our community. But being too busy means we have to make a choice as to what we do. I sometimes ask myself, 'what am I not doing in order to do this activity?' Quite often, the answer is 'sleep' or 'answer emails' but sometimes it is 'play with my children'. What I have always found difficult is the sense that I am not playing with my children because I'm cooking, or cleaning, or sorting the washing, or any of the myriad tasks that need to be got through daily to keep the family going.

The problem with being a stay at home mother is that it is difficult, on a daily basis, to feel you have achieved anything at all, as it all has to be done again the next day or the next week. It is never finished. I'm always conscious of the things I haven't done and the hope of getting them done fades as the evening draws on.

I've decided that I need to change how I look at daily life. Instead of focussing on the file full of photos to be sorted on the computer, the work I need to do for the charity I'm a director of, the paid project work which my company has taken on, the emails I need to respond to about MAHM, I'm trying to recognise what I *have* achieved in the day, even if it's the same as the day before and will have to be repeated the next day. I'm trying to measure the right things. So if I've fed the family, sorted the washing, played games with the children and spent time reading to them and chatting about whatever is on their mind, I've already achieved a great deal in the day.

However, I'm always battling a sense that I should be doing more. I believe this comes a bit from society, which values output rather than input. Witness the aftermath of the terrible murder of the MP Jo Cox. Lip service was paid to the fact that



she was a 'great mum'. However, what was really valued was all the community work she had done, all the initiatives she was involved with. These could only have been achieved in the time she didn't spend at home with her children. Have I got the balance wrong? Should I miss some bedtimes, leave the children to play by themselves or, more likely, to play on their screens, buy more ready meals or in fact pay someone else to look after my children in order to contribute more to society as a whole? I could get more solar lights into Kenyan schools with the charity I help run. I could make sure our church volunteers have all completed their safeguarding training. I could help shape our village's Neighbourhood Plan.

I don't think there is an easy answer but I do know that the only role I am uniquely qualified to carry out is being my children's mother. No one else can perform that role the way I can. So I appreciate the fact that I am at home full time and do have time to care for my children the way I want to. But at the same time, I do need to finish this newsletter so conversations about my favourite colour will have to wait until the next day. Which is why Amelia is now launching into something that has been troubling her. Now I'm hooked and it's the newsletter which will have to wait. And so the days go by. **M**

*Claire Paye, Vice Chair, and Media and Newsletter Editor - see what I mean...*

# Why I joined the MAHM Committee

*MAHM is run exclusively by volunteers. The newest committee members introduce themselves.*

## **Katharine Boddy**

I am a mother of four children and a trained primary school teacher, among other roles. I stopped working when my eldest, David, aged twelve now was born, and have not gone back since, although I love teaching and would like to return to it when the time is right. When asked the classic question 'What do you do?' I used to answer evasively, thinking that all the little tasks I carry out through the day were too insignificant to count for much. Recently however, I have reflected on this, encouraged by my association with MAHM and have realised that I do work and my job description is pretty varied and unique, that the many roles I play may be small but are important and significant, I just don't get paid to do them!

Our children are aged seven to twelve: three boys, one girl and are all at school now. I am Chair of the school PTA, I mentor senior school girls in their meditation practice once a week, assist with reading at school, attend weekly philosophy meetings, host a weekly meditation evening and assist Anne in her work as Chair of MAHM. This is, of course, all framed within the familiar routine of pick ups, drop offs, swimming lessons, play dates, meal times, homework etc etc.

For many years I hosted a weekly Mothers Group which was facilitated by Sine Pickles, the long-standing Membership Secretary of MAHM. This was one of the most fulfilling points of my week, being surrounded by wonderful women and their fascinating toddlers, engaging in a very varied and expansive conversation that ranged from poetry to potty training via Plato! Sine introduced us to MAHM and I have been a member for a long time, always enjoying the newsletters and appreciating the sense of community it fostered. Anne Fennell, the new Chair, invited/encouraged me to join the committee last September and now that I am privy to all the conversations and activities that the committee engages in, I am truly impressed by the energy, passion and plain hard work that everyone gives to this cause.

I love being a mother and have noticed that some of my happiest times are when I am with my children, despite occasionally thinking I would like some time to myself! As they get older and more independent, they also seem to need more quality time with me and my husband, ideally one to one. I sense adolescence coming and with it a lessening of my influence over them, not to mention their desire to enjoy simple pleasures in our company, so value their fleeting childhood more than ever. Every mother should have the ability to give her child/children the very best and for many



mothers this means being with them in person, yet so often society and circumstance flies in the face of this need, which is both sad and inequitable. MAHM is essential as a voice for those women and children who seem so under-represented in society and the media.

## **Citra Abbott**

I am a stay at home mother of five. I joined MAHM after hearing about it from a friend, following years of frustration and feeling very much marginalised and not quite as valuable as 'empowered working women'. There is a growing ideology in our society that children can be raised just as well by the State, from birth, through their childcare programmes and that a woman's place is in the workplace, paying tangible taxes and 'proving' her worth.

Little is said about the fact that parenting is the bedrock of any society and the success of a community is based on happy, healthy and secure children. Originally qualifying as a barrister, I subsequently studied and trained as a journalist, but gave up full time work because of our children. It was impossible for me to be successful at my job, stick to deadlines and raise the children. We made this choice because it was the best one for my children. As a consequence, my husband, children and I live in a small flat and on a single income. Despite us being penalised in the tax system, (as a single income couple we pay at least £6000 more in tax than a dual income couple), nothing would convince us to change the decision I made.

Coincidentally, my eldest daughter was diagnosed with a range of serious medical conditions, along with two of my other children. The level of availability and flexibility I now need to care for them would have meant that any company I was employed by would have fired me by now.

I fully believe that the best place for raising children is in the home and that we should support and not punish those who choose to do this difficult job full time.

## **Maro Iordanou**

I only joined MAHM a few months ago, having attended their annual conference. I felt so strongly about what was said that I instantly decided to join the committee.

I returned to work full time when my firstborn was only five months old and part time when my secondborn was nine months old. Both had chronic eczema and needed round the clock care and attention, but I had no choice but to return to work.

I feel passionately about mothers being given the option to care for their own children at home. I now work from home around my children and really enjoy having a great work/life balance, being able to put the needs of my family first and foremost. I would love to help other mums to achieve this too. M

# An Insider's Guide to Life in Nurseries

**I**n the last few years the current Government's policy has been to encourage more and more babies and children into nursery care through the introduction of free nursery places. **A MAHM member**, with experience of working in a variety of early years settings, gives an insider's view of the impact this is having on both children and nursery workers.

Having worked in nurseries for the last few years I was asked to paint of picture of what it's like for the people who work there. Without happy and well supported staff there cannot be happy children, which is what nurseries should be all about.....not about league tables or statistics, but a place for each individual child to form happy memories, to build relationships, to develop and grow in their own unique way.

Ideally, the emphasis is on playing and making the most of each day during the fleeting childhood years. In other words respecting the child's 'here and now' experience, rather than staff being distracted (it's inevitable) by endless record keeping, journals, evidence building and targets. These mean they are often prevented from connecting with the children; not to mention the stress of 'doing it right' for the inevitable inspection.

So what does 'quality' actually look like in early years for children and for their caregivers (or should we say 'early educators'?). Settings vary enormously. For example some children play mainly outdoors such as in Forest schools whilst others struggle for outdoor space. Being in one place all day is no fun if there isn't enough space and noise levels are high.

## Hours Spent at Nursery

But it's not just about space and staffing, it's also about the hours spent in nursery. Most settings are under pressure to open for longer hours, although a few still operate on a mornings-only basis. That's great news for children, who are usually more than ready to go home after a few hours playing with friends.

However, from the staff's point of view, with all adults now under more pressure to work longer hours to make ends meet, it can be hard if working just part time hours on low pay. The truth is that it's probably one of the least rewarded, most rewarding, and yet most challenging jobs in the world.

It's my view that the length of the day is of paramount importance and, from the child's perspective, the shorter the better. But the trend is sadly in the opposite direction. Long days caring for children day in day out can lead to exhaustion. It's important for staff to have variety – moving between rooms, being outside in the fresh air, having regular visits to the local park or woods, can help a lot.

Regular breaks are difficult as it's vital to maintain adult:child ratios at all times (another source of stress when staff are off sick). Childcare is not like any other type of work – you can't just leave the desk to go for a walk in your break. Finding 'fill in' staff to cover at lunchtime is difficult. Having worked

on and off in nurseries for years I feel there should be more partnership work with volunteers, perhaps older people in the community, as long as the usual checks are in place.

For nursery workers in full time settings, who rely on full time income, it can be incredibly tough working long ten hour days, and harder still for the children dropped off at 8am and picked up at 6pm. The work of looking after young children, despite being great fun and an enormous privilege, is demanding both physically and emotionally.

Even after many years in the sector, there is poor pay progression, which can be disheartening. And because the sector lacks proper funding, even highly qualified and/or experienced staff members are rarely rewarded for their skills and dedication. There are real concerns that moving towards 30 hours per week will put yet additional pressures on managers, administrators and staff members - and inevitably on children.

## The Pros and Cons

The good news is that, despite the pressures of the working environment, if parents choose their nursery carefully - and ideally spend some time on site- they will find a nursery where children are cared for by reflective practitioners who enjoy working with children, have opportunities for training and progression, and are well supported by experienced open-minded managers.

The priority is always to provide a happy environment, where children experience nurturing relationships, where they feel safe and happy, have time to play and explore; a place where they can play with friends as well as having a quiet place to just watch, think and observe...because, like adults, not everyone wants to interact with others all day long and children are no different.

The bad news is that unfortunately some settings are constrained by lack of space or lack of funding for maintaining resources, or can find it difficult to achieve consistency in staffing arrangements. Finding experienced staff can be difficult as people decide to move into other better paid work instead.

## Treat the Staff as you would treat the Child

It strikes me that what makes a happy practitioner is not unlike what makes a happy child! As adults we have the benefit of language to express ourselves and experience to know when something isn't quite right. A child relies on adults to listen and make judgements on their behalf.

In my experience, adults in nursery environments are often pressed for time, so they are unable to respond to individual children's needs or even spot when there's a problem brewing. For example, we all remember being little and having something stuck in our clothing which makes us uncomfortable. When I was working in a nursery recently I lost count of the number of times I spotted shoes on the wrong feet or ill-fitting spare trousers. Little eyes look up in vain, hoping there'll be a connection so they can seek a resolution to a problem they have no language to explain.

“what makes a happy practitioner is not unlike what makes a happy child”

When the problem is spotted they skip away happily, and trust is made, so they turn to you next time, knowing you're the adult in the playground most likely to be in tune with their needs. When language becomes more complex they start to articulate what they feel 'Can you come again tomorrow?' 'Please don't leave.' 'Can I go home now?' 'I don't like (so and so)...they keep pushing me'.

### The Difficult Truth

Writing this piece makes me realise that it's hard to be honest about the difficult aspects of nursery. It's in my nature to be optimistic. I know that the majority of staff work hard and do their best. I know parents often have too few choices and are struggling at home and with paid work. Parents suffer from lack of extended family support these days. I know that nursery managers are constrained by funding issues beyond their control. But here goes....

Many children struggle with the nursery day. Many staff members are unhappy and have become jaded by the lack of support they feel. Some children make few connections and the mix of children in a particular cohort can be tricky at times. It's a microcosm of adult life.

Many children become withdrawn, some are aggressive, cross, tired. Some become distanced from their parents or display challenging behaviours as they come to terms with the relentlessness of a typical week with long days in nursery. My feeling is that they can't quite believe they're really expected to follow this regime every day, all day. They often ask 'When's mummy coming back?'

Sometimes they've been in nursery for four hours already, but there's another five hours to go. There's no easy way of breaking that news on a bad day. It's unlikely there'll be a free member of staff to snuggle up to for story time.

Staff members juggle nappy changing with potty training, toilet accidents, managing sleeping patterns, dealing with parents' enquiries, setting up a craft table, sorting out squabbles and so on. They may not have had a drink themselves for some hours. And they won't have noticed the quiet child in the book corner who hasn't played with anyone all morning.

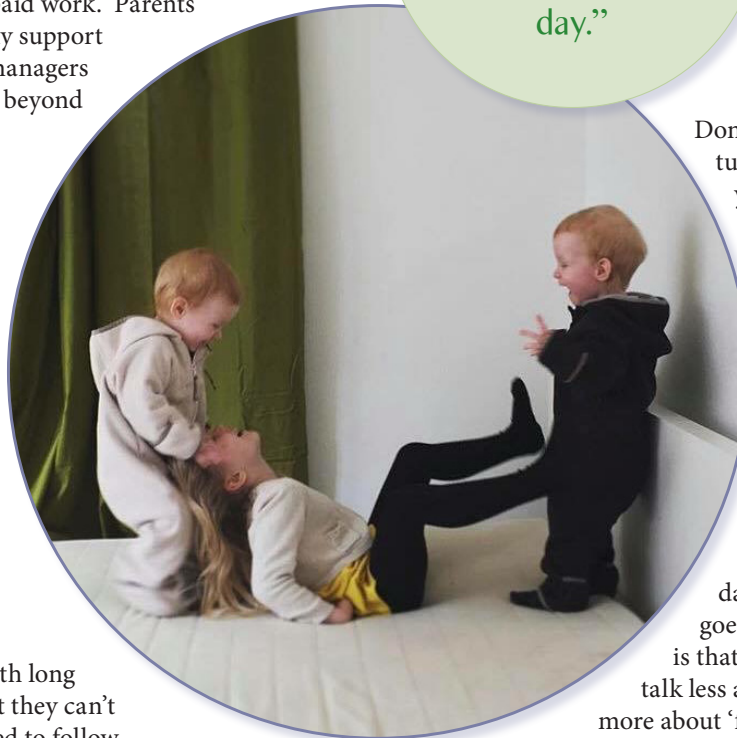
Senior practitioners can take care of up to 13 pre-school children, and many will need your attention at the same time. It doesn't really work. When they're all wet from water play outside, it's hard to help them all get changed and into dry clothing, especially when tearful and tired after a long morning.

### How Best to Utilise Nursery Time

My advice would be to delay group care as long as possible, choose mornings only and take children home for lunch, perhaps until the term before they start primary school.

Maximise family time, collect your child on time and don't be late (it's just too disappointing when that happens). Turn up early sometimes and take your child home when they're poorly. Don't bring them in when they're not 100% – they won't cope well with the day and it's just not fair at that age.

“Many children struggle with the nursery day.”



Don't be put off when your child turns the other way when you arrive....they are just disappointed with the way things are. It's not your fault. Don't be persuaded that they 'prefer nursery to home'. That would be the wrong conclusion nine times out of ten.

Parents know their child best – and a child's idea of the best day is to spend as many hours with mum or dad as possible. Childhood goes by in a flash and my hope is that policymakers will start to talk less about 'more childcare' and far more about 'family care' as the best way to cherish and nurture our children.

Almost all children in the UK are in school by the time they are five years old. Before then children will be perfectly prepared through the loving care provided by home, in local playgroups, music groups and the odd morning in the local nursery (but keep the hours down so that each day is fun, rather than a daily necessity).

### What YOU Can Do

And if you feel so inclined, start lobbying your MP to find out why they don't recognise the important job that parenting is and start supporting family care more enthusiastically.

It's all babies and small children really need to give them the best start before they start school for real. Children already complete 14 years in school between 4 and 18 years old.

Do they really need to spend more years away from home than that? As for parents, they have 45 years of working life between 20 and 65 years old, surely the system can afford for mum or dad to spend a few years devoted to raising children and taking care of them when they need us most? **M**

# Mothers, Fathers and Mental Wellbeing in Children

“**G**ood mothering and strong attachment to the mother can reduce the risk of mental illness in later life.”  
“Mothers are instinctively and biologically wired to parent differently to fathers.”

These two statements are extremely controversial but, if true, we must take them into account to ensure the well-being of the next generation.

The rise in mental illness amongst children and young people is probably due to a number of factors, including the rise in the use of social media and screens. However, am I the only one to note a link between the number of mothers of babies and toddlers working long hours and the rise in reported cases of anxiety, depression and other mental illnesses in children?

In the very welcome drive to include fathers more in their babies' and children's upbringing, the lines are blurred between what babies need and the desire for so-called equality between parents. Studies have shown (see below) that under the age of 1, babies really, above all, need their mothers. Fathers are extremely important all along, not least in supporting the mothers, but are of particular value when their children are slightly older and they can play together actively.

## **Toddlers are more stressed when in childcare than at home**

In a Norwegian study toddlers who spent more than 5 hours during the day in a childcare setting had higher, and still rising, levels of the stress hormone cortisol by the end of the day than if they had spent the day at home where levels are reducing towards the end of the day. The rise in cortisol was particularly significant in those spending 8-9 hours in daycare. Better ratios of staff, the temperament of the toddler (average 23 months), the quality or type of childcare or other such variables were screened for but made no difference. Therefore, the researchers surmised from their results that the cause of the higher cortisol was most likely to be separation from parents and changes of care-giver.

*Elevated cortisol levels in Norwegian toddlers in childcare, Drugli, MB, Solheim, E, Lydersen, S, Moe, V, Smith, D & Berg-Nielsen, TS (2017). Early Child Development and Care*

## **How stress in early life affects brain development**

This paper has emphatically shown that early-life stress can have profound and long-lasting effects, both on brain structure and on future behaviours. Stress in early life can affect the formation of the brain, affecting emotional, social and cognitive behaviours. Many mental illnesses start early in life so it is important to examine the role of stress in “programming” the brain during this early stage of development. The majority of early life stress arises from abnormal maternal care, ranging from insensitive care or neglect in the home to the removal of a very young infant from the mother to an external day care setting for long hours. The outcome of stress varies according to its timing, severity, duration and quality, in other words, how long the stressful experience continues, at what age it begins, and how bad the level of stress is. Early life stress is the stress which has the most profound effect on the healthy development of the brain. Adolescence is another period where the brain is especially susceptible to stress.

“Good mothering and strong attachment to the mother can reduce the risk of mental illness in later life.”

*Toward Understanding: How early-life stress reprograms cognitive and emotional brain networks, Chen Yuncai & Baram Tallie Z. Neuropsychopharmacology REVIEWS (2016) 41, 197-206*

## **Day care reduces the IQ of girls**

Attending day care between the ages of zero and two had a negative effect on the IQ of girls compared to parental care, reducing it by around 0.5% per month. This was due to the loss of one on one care. This is particularly significant for girls, who are more mature than boys even at this age and would gain more from adult-child interaction. In more affluent families, where there is a greater range of resources such as books, the impact is greater, at about 1.6% loss of IQ per month. Girls in day care miss out on the quality one to one interaction they could have had at home, which is why their IQ reduces if they are not at home.

Another study (Baker et al 2008) showed that boys aged 0-4 in day care experienced worse outcomes for behaviour, social skills and health.

*Cognitive and non-cognitive costs of daycare 0-2 for girls, Fort M, Ichino A, Zanella G. Journal of Economic Literature (2016) Social Science Research Network IZA Discussion Paper 9756*

## **Mother's affection at 8 months has an effect on adult mental health**

This longitudinal study examined levels of warmth and affection exhibited by the mother to her 8 month old baby. The children with highly affectionate mothers had lower anxiety and exhibited fewer distress symptoms 33 years later. The authors of the study suggest this is because higher levels of maternal affection promote secure attachment and bonding and develop resilience. Nurturing behaviour may stimulate developmental processes which enable people to cope with stress. So good mental health in later life can be linked to good attachment and *bonding with the mother*.

*Mother's affection at 8 months predicts emotional distress in adulthood, Maselko, J., Kubzansky, L., Lipsitt, L. and Buka, S.L. J Epidemiol Community Health, 26 July, 2010*

## **Oxytocin in mothers affects how they respond to their baby's cry**

Oxytocin surges in the mother both during and after childbirth. In a study on rats even non-mothers, when given oxytocin, responded differently to the sound of rat pups crying, and would pick them up and return them to the nest. Oxytocin makes sure mothers hear their baby's cry and also that they respond to it. In a different study, when mothers touched or held their infants frequently, oxytocin increased.



In addition, maternal touch regulates infant stress, in other words, being held by their mother reduces the level of stress felt by infants.

*Oxytocin enables maternal behaviour by balancing cortical inhibition, Robert Froemke et al 2015*

*Touch attenuates infants' physiological reactivity to stress, Ruth Feldman, Department of Psychology and the Gonda Brain Sciences Center, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan*

### **Mothers' and Fathers' brains are wired to respond to a baby's cry**

Men and women respond to babies' cries differently. When women (mothers and non-mothers) heard an infant crying, their frontal cortex, the emotional centre of their brains, snapped out of the rest mode and prepared for activity, to go to comfort the baby. When a baby cries it's the reasoning and motor centres of the man which lights up, preparing for action to deal with any perceived threat. The father launches into protector mode, the mother into comforting mode. Mothers respond instinctively to meet the emotional needs of their baby. Fathers launch into thinking and analysing mode.

Mothers' brains grow in the first three months after giving birth, particularly in the areas responsible for motivation, reward and emotion processing, reasoning and judgement. In a cross cultural study, all mothers will speak to a baby within two seconds of the baby vocalizing to her. By the time a baby is three months old, mothers' brains have become attuned to the face of their baby, and babies' brains have become attuned to the face of their mothers.

*How mothers and fathers differ in hormonal response to babies, interview with Marc Bornstein, Head of Child and Family Research department at National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2013, based on study: Gender Differences in Directional Brain Responses to Infant Hunger Cries, Bornstein et al. Neuroendocrinology of parental response to baby cry, Swain et al 2011, University of Michigan*

### **Babies' cries affect men's testosterone level**

Fathers' responses to the cry of their babies differs according to how they interpret the cry. Initially their testosterone may reduce, facilitating a nurturing response to their babies' cries of distress. However, if they are unable to reduce these cries after a very long period, they may interpret it this as some kind of a threat, in which case their testosterone might rise and their aggression levels rise as a consequence.

*Individual variation in fathers' testosterone reactivity to infant distress predicts parenting behaviors with their 1-year-old infants, Volling et al 2015, University of Michigan*

### **The emotional security of children is linked to the quality of parenting they receive from mothers and fathers.**

How well mothers care for their infants up to 12 months makes a difference to their child's emotional security. The quality of fathers' play when their children were ages 2 to 6 was significantly related to children's emotional security at ages 10 and 16. Conversely, the quality of fathers' care and mothers' play did not significantly affect their children's emotional security. But both parents together have a unique and significant role in affecting their children's emotional security at 6, 10 and 16 years old. These findings fit with Bowlby's identification of two areas which enable children's later ability "to make affectional bonds: (1) the extent to which a child's

parents provide him with a secure base, and (2) the extent to which they encourage him to explore from it" (p. 311, para 1). Fathers encourage risk taking in play while mothers provide a safe haven.

The authors of this report didn't rule out the possibility of one parent combining roles, or a variation in the roles, but they did identify the importance of both sensitive care and exploratory play.

*The Uniqueness of the child-father attachment relationship: Fathers' sensitive and challenging play as a pivotal variable in a 16-year longitudinal study, Karin Grossmann et al., Social Development 2002, vol. 11 The making and breaking of affectional bonds, Bowlby, J. 1979*

### **The difference a mother makes**

The following was highlighted in ScienceDaily back in 2004 from studies at the time:

Motherhood helps learning and memory, which in turn helps mothers care for their offspring. Mothers respond better to the cries of their own infants than fathers do. The earlier the stress caused by maternal separation, the greater the offspring's later social difficulties.

*Society For Neuroscience. "Mothers Have Brains Primed For Care And Certain Techniques May Reverse Problems In Offspring Related To Poor Parenting." ScienceDaily, 4 Nov 2004.*

### **Buzzing flies more likely to wake men than crying babies.**

Fascinating research by MindLab found that the number one noise likely to wake women is a crying baby. For men, it was a car alarm. Crying babies didn't feature in the top ten of sounds likely to wake men (a car alarm was the top noise).

*MindLab 2009*

I am extremely indebted to Diana Dean, Research Director, What About The Children (WATCH?) [www.whataboutthechildren.org.uk](http://www.whataboutthechildren.org.uk) for her assistance in identifying many of these studies. WATCH? performs the extremely difficult task of taking research from different disciplines and drawing conclusions about what children under three need to thrive in life. Their work underpins a great deal of what MAHM campaigns for. Diana is quick to point out that in the area of human development and parenting, it is not always possible to carry out precise research, given the need for longitudinal studies of decades to see outcomes, and the ethical considerations behind, say, leaving a baby to cry for two hours to see the effect on their fathers. However, the mass of research being carried out, if considered all together, points to certain conclusions, namely the importance of babies spending as much time as possible in quality one on one interaction with their mothers and the importance of fathers for the emotional security of their children. M

Claire Paye



# Your Letters

*Mothers at Home Matter campaigns on behalf of mothers, and these two very different letters underline how important our work is. We are always happy to hear from any mothers, members or not, so please email us on info@mothersathomematter.co.uk*

## **Can the Government FORCE a stay at home mum into paid work?**

“I came across your website early this morning whilst unable to sleep and searching “can the government FORCE a stay at home mum into paid work?”

Let me explain a little of how I got here. Yesterday, the 6th of April 2017, I attended what I thought was a ‘prepare for work’ interview under Universal Credit at my local job centre. I found that it has all changed and because my youngest is 3 (instead of 5) I need to be seeking employment. I sat in the meeting quite shocked, being asked what kind of work I’d be interested in, what are my skill sets, etc

I’ve not worked - at least not paid work - since having my first child nearly 13 years ago. But my husband has always earned money to support the family and we both contribute in different ways to raising our children.

Around two years ago my husband found himself unemployed after sustaining an injury at work. We happened to live in one of the deprived areas trialling Universal Credit, so on it we go.

I was surprised to find back then that I had to join him on the claim, though I wasn’t seeking employment. But they assured me I didn’t need to do anything until my youngest was 5 and at school.

Before this, my husband earned a low income wage. His wages were topped up by child tax credits for the children, and we made the decision that we would ‘survive’ with me continuing to be a stay at home mum. We didn’t live luxuriously. We had no holidays, no new cars, no credit, our clothes were second hand, and we rented our home in the cheapest area. But we chose this, and were very happy.

My husband now works in a role with no proper contract, no holidays, no sick pay. At the moment this is all he can get in our area. Companies don’t seem to factor in that he is a graduate, trained as a teacher, studied part time for his MA (whilst in employment) and did voluntary advocacy work too, helping others. Despite all this experience, it’s proved difficult to find decently paid work and he doesn’t earn enough to come off Universal Credit, and as the ‘second parent’ I am required to join him on this journey.

I informed them in this interview that I was 21 weeks pregnant. But from the 6th of April until I am 29 weeks pregnant, I have to be doing 16 hours a week engaged in job seeking. Hence, why I am sat up at 3am. I can’t sleep. I don’t know how to do it. My ankles are swollen. I’m not sleeping well anyway. My bones in my pelvis ache. It’s the Easter holidays and I want to enjoy my children and make Easter nests, and go out on play dates, do anything other than sit and worry about how I’m going to find 16 hours of work for the next 7 weeks, especially as there are few jobs anyway and no extended family help.

So I searched “can the government FORCE a stay at home mum into work”. Well, the answer is simply ‘Yes they can’. I am unable to come off my husband’s claim especially as we live together. Perhaps it would be different if we lived apart.

If I do not fulfil my ‘commitments’ to find work, we will be sanctioned. The sanctions we would receive would be: having money taken from us daily (somewhere in the region of £10.70 daily for the length of time I do not keep my ‘commitments’). Our Universal Credit payments would completely stop if I decide to not be in gainful employment and if I continue being a stay at home mum, or if I do not manage to keep up with my ‘commitments’ to find work.

If anything, writing this email has been cathartic. So thank you for inviting me to express this with you.”

*Name supplied*

## **Proposed Thirty Hours Free Nursery Care is an Insult to Nurseries**

“Dear Nick,

I am writing to you as my local councillor in the hope that you can help. I am very concerned about a KCC (Kent County Council) leaflet I was given at my son’s pre-school advertising 30 hours free childcare. I would like to complain about the leaflet and about the policy.


The tone of the leaflet was glib, harmful, misleading and shows a disturbing lack of empathy towards the children involved. The claims made on the leaflet are untrue and they glorify 30 hours a week of very young children being separated from their parents. Numerous studies show that pre-school age children have an intense need to be with their mother, where they thrive, and that separation leads to stress, anxiety, low well-being, low self-esteem, sadness, depression and a lack of school readiness.

Quotes on the KCC leaflet said: “She’ll have a head start when she starts school – that’s priceless.” This is a lie. “The extra hours at work will allow me more money left to spend on little treats for the kids”. This shows an unacceptable valuing of money over human contact. “We’ll be able to save for a family holiday now”. In reality, the best treat for any pre-school child is to be with its mother, every day.

My son’s pre-school is committee-run and as a pre-school committee member it is clear to me that 30 free hours would be financially crippling. The hourly rates KCC pays do not cover running costs, and staff wages are already pitifully low, considering the skilled and important work being carried out. How does KCC think a small pre-school can survive if it takes on extra free hours? It would put increased pressure on the already overburdened Committee (made up of unpaid female labour), who would have to desperately scabble around for ways to bridge the gap.

The 30 free hours leaflet is a direct insult to women who have chosen to give up (or reduce) paid work to care for their children in the home. Instead of supporting and valuing this superior childcare, the government encourages and financially incentivises mothers into paid work outside the home. We need to learn from the Scandinavian family friendly financial and tax structures so we can reflect the valuable care work mothers do.

I would like to see this KCC leaflet and the 30 hours free childcare policy withdrawn. I would also like to know how government and KCC are working to protect the rights of mothers and children to stay together – especially in the critical early years.”

*Harriet Rudd  
Hardworking mother of three* 



# Book Review

## What Mums Want and Dads Need to Know

by Harry and Kate Benson  
published by Lion Books

Many couples find that their once secure relationship falters when children come along. In this book, Harry and Kate Benson examine why this happens and what you can do about it as a couple if this happens to you. Their approach is based on their own experience of running into trouble in their own marriage and of counselling other couples through their relationship problems.

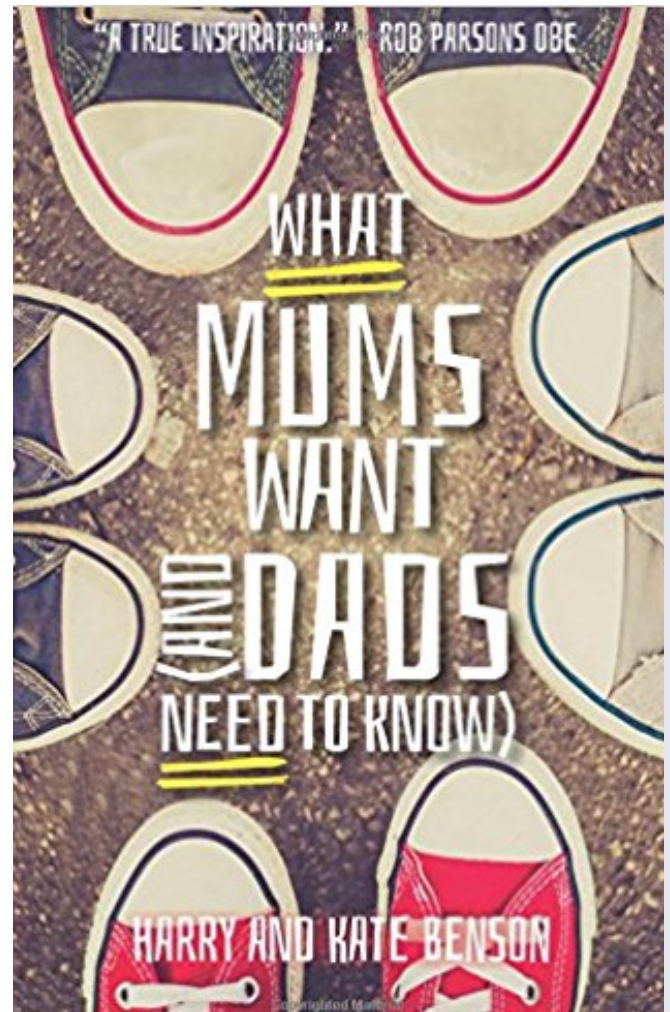
This book has its limitations. It is squarely aimed at couples where the mother has taken on the role of primary caregiver to the children and the father is primarily focused on work. Harry Benson is the research director of the Marriage Foundation and the slant of this book is very pro marriage. The authors cite research that shows married couples are more likely to stay together than co-habiting couples and there is no mention here of gay couples raising children. However, if you can get past the fact that this book is aimed very specifically at heterosexual, married couples with children, I believe that all couples raising children together can find something useful in this book.

The Bensons believe in the mantra, 'happy wife, happy life'. They believe that once children come along the mother becomes the centre of the family. Her happiness and wellbeing should be paramount but so often the mother's needs are overlooked. In their view, the husband's job is to focus on his wife's happiness and if he does this her love and appreciation of him will naturally follow. What wives want and need from their husbands is to be noticed, to be appreciated and to be treated as a friend.

The book begins with the story of how Harry and Kate's own marriage reached a crisis point when Kate announced to Harry that if things did not improve in their relationship within a year then their marriage would be over. Harry and Kate's story weaves its way through the whole book and, along with Harry, the reader learns about what a difference can be made to a relationship when a husband learns to prioritise his wife's happiness.

In a chapter addressed to mums, Kate Benson states, 'Most of this book is about affirming you as a woman and inviting your husband to put you first'. The authors surveyed 291 married mothers for this book and asked them what they most wanted from their husband. They found that the most important things to mums were that their husband was a friend to them and that he was interested in her and in their children.

Kate Benson writes about how her husband was never intentionally unkind or neglectful of her but how the role changes that parenthood brought made him overlook being her friend and focus on work instead. She sees the responsibility as being firmly with the father to change things and does not see this approach as being sexist. She writes, 'Times may change; human nature doesn't. Men and women certainly have equal value and importance. But that doesn't mean we are the same.' She argues that the fact that women have babies and men don't



'orients us towards our children and our home in a way that doesn't happen nearly as naturally for fathers'.

Harry's message to fathers in a later chapter is that communication is not enough to save a marriage in trouble and that it is often a complete shift in attitude that is needed from fathers. He writes, 'What works is being kind and gentle with your wife' and he expects fathers to take responsibility for the marriage.

There are lots of practical tips for improving your relationship in this book. The authors outline the bad habits, such as point scoring, putting each other down etc. that often wreck relationships and how these can be avoided. They also examine the concept of 'love languages' and how an understanding of the different ways that people express and experience love can help our relationships.

The most welcome thing about this book though is the way that it unapologetically prioritises the mother and the mother's happiness in the family. The Bensons write, 'Fundamentally, what matters most in the family is mum. She is the centrepiece around which the rest of the family rotate'.

It is so refreshing to hear someone say, 'The secret of successful family life is this: a happy mum makes a happy family'. <sup>M</sup>

Kerry Hedley

# Being a Mother – A Valuable Career Break

*In the Spring 2017 Budget, the government allocated £5 million for returnships; to support people returning to work after long breaks. A returnship is a paid short-term employment contract, with a view to supporting an individual when they return to work; a longer term job offer may result but is not guaranteed.*

*But how do you start the process of returning to work after years spent raising a family? MAHM member, **Ronnie Cloke Browne**, founded CareerBreak People to help mothers value their career breaks, maintain their confidence and return not just to work but possibly to a career when the time is right.*

I have a letter to the Telegraph from Rosalind Oliver in 2010, which I keep on my wall. “As someone who came late to motherhood, I continue to be amazed by the amount of care and attention that good, or good enough, parenting requires.... The work to do this is enormous.... A stretching range of activities as I have ever been involved with in professional life.”

I know a mum of three grown up boys, excelling in their careers, who doesn't feel that she has achieved anything and is questioning her role in the workplace. Although she had had previous jobs, she felt she didn't actually have a “career” and has little to offer. I argue to the contrary and that her rock and input to her boys' development enabled them to achieve and she must take credit for this. Isn't life a career? Motherhood is a different job that brings with it a rich tapestry of experiences.

Today's world of work requires us to be much more flexible and adaptable – much like we are teaching our children and exactly as we have to be in the home. It is ironic that in the process of raising her sons to be confident in their careers, this mum has lost her own confidence. It is clear that she now has an awful lot to offer to the world of work.

It can be very daunting returning to work after a long period away, particularly given the rapid changes that have taken place since leaving.

When I started my family 15 years ago the majority of internet connections were by dial-up, mainstream use of Office and on-line diaries didn't exist and Excel was mainly for specialists. However, these are only tools and how to work in the new on-line environment can be learnt relatively quickly.

What cannot be learnt so easily are the plethora of non-technical skills gained whilst being a mother and running a family. These skills are difficult to teach, but are essential to management and succeeding in business: understanding people, flexibility, compromise, negotiation, conflict resolution, teaching others, to name but a few.


In addition a mother needs self-motivation and drive – if they aren't motivated very little happens and moves forward; there is no home incentive scheme and no workplace course to train them. Let us remember that during a career break mothers also make an important contribution to the wider community.

Volunteering helps develop valuable skills, perhaps in chairing an organisation, running publicity campaigns, fundraising, understanding legal issues, using social media for advertising,

using spreadsheets for tickets or accounts – the list is endless.

Therefore, the first thing you need to do when considering your role change back into the workplace is **BE CONFIDENT** - be confident about what you have achieved and be confident about what you can contribute. You have a lot to offer and business **WILL** benefit from your skills. The next thing you will need is courage to address psychological (often) barriers to return to work; your trigger to return may be unexpected and unplanned. Finally be resilient (as our children are constantly being told) as your journey back may not be straightforward, but be positive and learn and adapt from every step.

## What to do now?

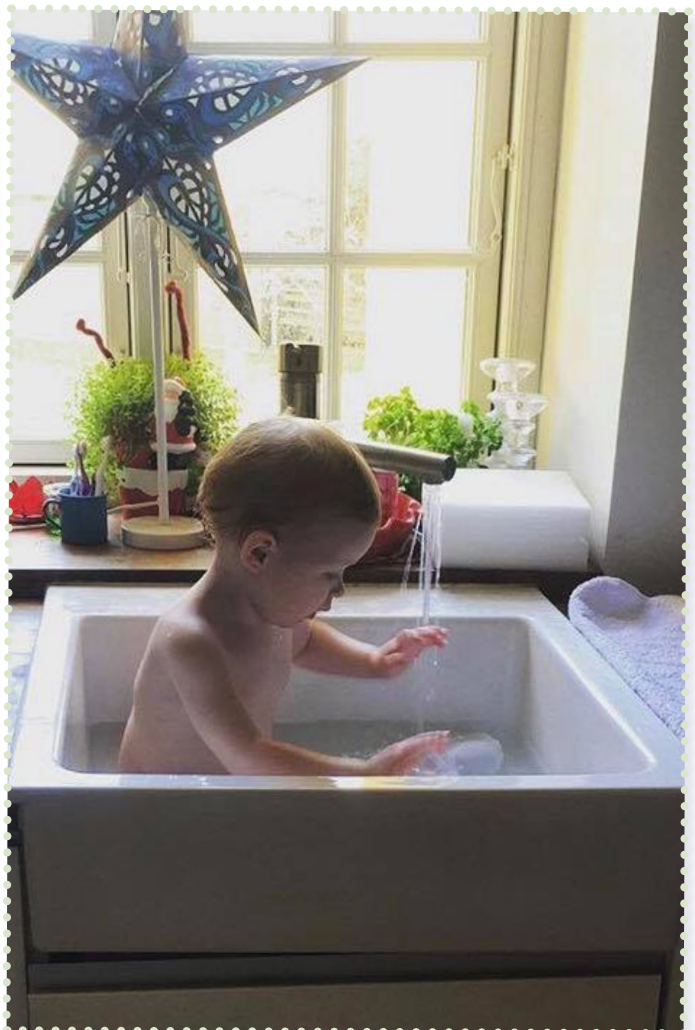
Whether you are ready to go back to work or are currently on a career break, start thinking and exploring topics now. Contact CareerBreak People, come to a Pondero (Pilates for the Mind) talk, complete a Personal Skills Log, attend workshops, restart your professional membership (if lapsed) and use our Return to Work help. 

For more information check out:

[www.careerbreakpeople.co.uk](http://www.careerbreakpeople.co.uk)

@CBPeople

[www.facebook.com/careerbreakpeople](http://www.facebook.com/careerbreakpeople)



# How Do I Want My Daughter to Mother?

**D**o we want our daughters to have the same experience of motherhood as we've had? What would we change, and what would we encourage them to copy? **Poppy Pickles** explores her own feelings on what she would want for her daughter.

I became a mother at a young age, only 23 years old. I'll admit that it wasn't planned, but, I had offered up a fervent prayer for children at the altar, so I shouldn't have been surprised when my prayers were very promptly answered.

Despite this utterly ruining my life plan at the time, which was mainly 'going skiing' and 'enjoying my twenties', in hindsight, it was a blessing. My son arrived in time to meet nearly all his great grandparents and his grandfather, who died only a few months after he was born.

Also, being a young mum meant that it was an easy decision not to return to work as I hadn't really had time to establish a career path. So, my husband and I settled into what is now viewed as an almost archaically traditional set up, with me as the stay at home mother and him as the 'going out to work' breadwinner.

This separation of labour worked for us though. My husband and I have always viewed ourselves as equal halves of a whole. He worked hard in an office and I worked hard at home. I poured my energies, creative and academic, into the children and the house, and while the children were little those energies were absorbed and fulfilled. Gradually, once the kids started school, my energy outlets broadened. I became the Co-Chair of the PTA for three years and I then began to sing in a trio, and now teach yoga and write articles.

There was no plan behind my current work-life balance, because being a young mother sculpted my life in an organic and free-flowing way. I didn't have time to think, worry and plan for my first child, or to consider whether my decision would have a long-term impact on my own life plan. Because I started out putting my children first, they have stayed firmly in that position. Whatever else I fill my life with, whether paid, or unpaid, that is where they remain.

But would I want the same for my daughter, now 10 years old? What would I choose for her if and when she has a family of her own?

I would choose choice. Even if she has invested time and money into a career that she loves I would like to think that when she has children she will have the choice to keep working, to work part time, to have a career break, or to have a career full stop, without feeling that she is being judged for any one of those decisions.

I admit it would probably be hard for me if she chose to return to work full time while her children were little. When my friends, a lot of them having children now, tell me that they're returning to work after 6 months, I feel quietly distraught for their babies. I would never judge them, or criticise their decision, I just look at the little baby in their arms and know that I would not be able to hand over the raising of that child to strangers.

But, I am also quietly concerned that the full burden of care is being handed down directly to my daughter. Bringing up a boy and a girl, it's very easy to see how the stereotypical gender roles are seamlessly handed down the generations. Already, there is a boy/girl divide in our family, and while these differences are natural, I am aware that I don't want to encourage the idea that the domestic sphere is the sole responsibility of females and the outer hemisphere is the male domain.



In our 'equal' society the way we raise families has not evolved to benefit family life. While it is fantastic that there are more women than ever setting out on a meaningful career path, it is at the expense of time spent with their children. As women, there seems to be a stark choice between children and a career, because raising the next generation is viewed as opting out of society, being an invisible and unvalued carer.

The mantle of home-life organiser also falls squarely on the female shoulders that I know. This emotional labour takes up an inordinate amount of time and energy, and if it has to be done alongside the commitment that a job entails there is little time left for anything other than sleep.

Girls are capable, thoughtful, intelligent, caring and, given a chance, can make a significant difference to the world we live in. There is a real and lasting value in the work done at home bringing up children, I feel this very strongly, but there is also a real need for women in the professional and political sphere who have a strong voice and who are prepared to make a real difference.

I think the answer has to be that with our longer life expectancies there should be less pressure to do everything at once. Taking time out to be there in the early years of our children's lives should be a valued part of a career trajectory. Parenthood teaches us so much, gives us so many skills, whether we like it or not!

And then, once your children are at school, or even left home, there is time to return to the world of work. **M**

## Making a House a Home

**M**ercedes Jaureguibeitia, Executive Director of the Home Renaissance Foundation, on making the invisible work of making a house a home into something that is both visible and valued.

Home sweet home! The expression that's repeated time and again after a tiring journey or a difficult day at work. And when we return to our parents' home we are often flooded with fond memories, because the home is a human being's first point of contact with other humans. It is the first place where people feel they belong and interact with others and where they receive the care and education necessary to develop as a person.

No matter where in the world you live, every culture appreciates that the home is the most important place for everyone. However, when surveyed, very few people truly acknowledge the work that's required in creating a home. Men and women alike, when asked about the home, fail to value the work that goes into caring for the home, giving far more relevance to work done outside the home, while recognising that work commitments lead to neglecting time which should be dedicated to home and family life.

This contradiction is invariably caused by the economic and social changes in today's society that have so much influenced family organisation. We may think one way but we invariably act another. Since the organisation of the home determines the way it operates on a daily basis and greatly affects its occupants, a smooth running home requires a business-like approach to its management.

In the first report of the Global Home Index, where more than 9,000 people were surveyed from 94 different countries across 5 continents, we see that society views domestic work as tedious, boring and not very challenging. However, taking care of people's basic needs is vital and the work required to build a home is of incalculable importance as it's directed towards what a person most cherishes - the care of their loved ones. For this reason, society is faced with a major challenge - to make the invisible visible and ensure that the work of the home has greater social recognition because it has immeasurable value. The Global Home Index study highlights the fact that although men have increased the numbers of hours they allocate to the home, it is still overwhelmingly women who dedicate the most time to the day-to-day running of the home.

The full report of the survey, which is still open to participants, can be accessed on the website using the following link: <http://www.globalhomeindex.org/>

## How YOU can help

### How you can get involved

Please do contact us on [info@mothersathomematter.co.uk](mailto:info@mothersathomematter.co.uk) if you can help with any of the following:

- Write and edit the **newsletter**.
- Attend **policy meetings** in Westminster as a voice for mothers
- Carry out **media** interviews
- Write **blogs** or viewpoints for our website
- Offer a one off **donation** to help with our costs.
- Identify relevant **research** – we would love to put together a resource list for anyone interested in mother child relationships, child development, family taxation policies

Or if you have any particular **expertise** or interest, please feel free to contact us to discuss how you could help.

### Subscription Renewal and Membership of MAHM

Mothers at Home Matter is a membership organisation funded by our members' subscriptions. **Please don't forget to renew your membership.** It is £12.50 for individuals or £15 for couple membership. You may need to increase your Standing Order if you are still paying at the old rate. You can join online at: <http://mothersathomematter.co.uk/menu-support-us/join-us>

### Social Media

**Facebook** - You can join the conversation on the public page 'Mothers at Home Matter Too', which has **over 9 400 followers**. Or apply to join our closed groups: Mothers at Home Matter (if you're a parent at home and want to join a mutually supportive group), or the new MAHM Members Community Group, for our paid up members. These sites offer a space to discuss issues which affect you, find support from others in similar situations, as well as a way to get involved in campaigning.

**Twitter** - We have almost 1,800 followers of our MAHM @mumsdadsmatter account, #valuecare

**Website** - We have almost finished our website redesign. You can find past copies of the newsletter, our finance booklet called Who CARES about the Family which outlines how it is that single income families are penalised so heavily in the tax system when they are amongst the poorest in society, our manifesto (MAHMifesto), blogs, viewpoints and much more. Please send any blogs you would like to contribute to [info@mothersathomematter.co.uk](mailto:info@mothersathomematter.co.uk)

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## STOP PRESS!

As mentioned by our new Chair, Anne Fennell, a new member, Antonio Ribeiro, will be participating in the London Triathlon in July on our behalf, in gratitude to his mother. He will be launching a fundraising campaign on Facebook so do support him!

This is an encouragement to MAHM that our work has a much wider appeal than the stay at home mother.

To sponsor Antonio, please go to <http://livetotri.co.uk>

