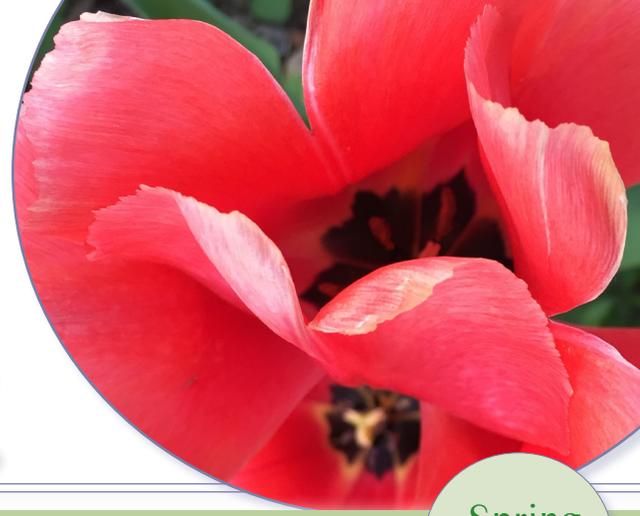


Mothers at home Matter.



Spring
2019

CHOICE?

The tulips are in bloom and it's time for our spring newsletter to be arriving through your letterbox. I'm Philippa and am taking over as editor from Claire Paye. I can't say that I feel equal to the excellent job she has been doing over the past several years but I'm up for the challenge.

The MAHM Newsletter has always been the best part of my stack of mail and I would grab any rare quiet moments to read through it a couple of pages at a time. Now I'm finding out how much work went into bringing it to us twice a year and, rather than relaxing with it and my coffee, I'll be breathing a sigh of relief that it's printed and delivered!

Mothers At Home Matter often highlights the choice - or difficulty of choice - of mothers between being based at home and available to care for their children or employment in the paid workplace. I've been mulling over this a lot recently. Bear with me as I appear to go off on a canine-induced tangent.

I've just spent an exhausting few weeks baby-sitting (should that be doggy-sitting?) my grandmother's five-month cocker poo and as a result I've been out and about unusually early with the

puppy getting her exercise in before my husband leaves for work and the children wake up. Walking her along my local streets in the dark, it struck me how many couples there were rushing their babies and preschool-aged children out of the door at 6:30 in the morning.

The parents were dressed for work, looking stressed and hurried. Often the young children were crying and bleary-eyed.



Now, I'm not making a judgement on these families; I have my fair share of being harassed and hurried getting four children out of the house - just ask my neighbours! But you see, this made an impression as I rarely have to be out the door that early in the morning; I opted not to send my children to nursery neither do I have a school-run because I home-educate them. It struck me then what a long day those small children have in nursery and daycare with little or no alternative.

There is a growing body of research proving that infants and young children flourish and develop best when predominantly in the care of their mothers. We heard this strongly at our November AGM from Diane Dean from the charity What About The Children? as she shared study after study supporting this idea.

Allison Pearson, author of 'I Don't How She Does It', told us in her witty way of the difficulties of juggling work deadlines, time and motherhood. (See Sally Greenhill's report on the conference talks on pages 10 & 11.)

Unfair taxation, the high cost of housing, and social pressure narrows the options for mothers who want to give their children both the best of themselves and, if we go by the research, the best start in life by being fully available to their children. It is something MAHM is seeking to redress. Choice: every parent should be able to have the opportunity to put the care of their child first.

Among other articles in this newsletter, Tara Easton has researched the studies which link obesity to full time employment of mothers. Emily Tredget, our Mental Health Expert, tells us of her #ShoutieSelfie campaign to shine a light on Maternal Mental Health. We have a guest article from Don Draper about unfair family taxation and the information his organisation, Tax and the Family, are gathering. And, in addition to running a charity for children in Africa, our own Claire Paye has news of an exciting new project much closer to home.

So grab your favourite hot beverage and enjoy. I hope it provides, as always, food for thought. **M**

Philippa Nicholson, Editor

Letter from the Chair

Our Chair, Anne Fennell, on the prevailing status quo which lowers the value of unpaid care, with a suggestion of a practical way that we can challenge it.



It is a truth universally acknowledged that a mother in possession of a young child must be in want of childcare. However little known the feelings or views of such a mother may be on her first entering motherhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the governing and intellectual circles, that every family policy enacted by the Government or Treasury is directed to liberating the mother from the *burden* of caring for her child. The strength of these ideas hit home to me a few weeks ago at an event that I attended in Parliament. I realised then just how far we have to go. And yet, as I reflected on these ‘universal truths’, it was precisely because of these that I felt it vital that Mothers At Home Matter exists, however small.

I cannot be, and know that I am not, the only mother who intuitively feels that for me, at this time of my life, being available for my children and raising them is one of the most important things I can be doing and that it benefits them. From a happy, secure and stable base we can better serve society.

But intuition is not enough and to talk about what may be ‘natural’ is taboo. We must justify our position, and justify it against a backdrop of agendas pushing to close the gender pay gap, make men and women exactly the same, get mothers into work to increase GDP or to get them off benefits.

Against these agendas our organisation is at best an irritant - we are seen as eccentric and old fashioned - and at worst we are the problem because, until all mothers are back in work, the gender gap will not close and GDP will not increase. Moreover, by putting ‘mothers’ and ‘home’ in the same sentence, we boldly go where no one else dares to go and it is against the current orthodoxy that seems to regard the family and home as a prison for women.

Challenging ‘Happier with Childcare’

Yet these agendas need challenging. Here is an opening extract from the recent debate on the 19th February at Westminster on free childcare raised by MP Darren Jones (Labour):

“...the premise of my argument is that childcare that is fully funded by the state should be seen as a redistributive investment rather than a cost. Such an investment could create a more productive, more equal and happier country due to the contribution that fully paid childcare can make to the economy, the impact it can have on tackling class and gender inequality, and what it can do for family happiness.”

I would challenge all these assumptions.

How does a country become more productive by taking ‘caring’ out of a home environment into a paid one?

This is not an increase in output. The difference is that it can be accounted for as GDP. GDP registers an increase where something that was previously not bought and sold (such as care in the family, for love) becomes a traded commodity (care by agencies, for money), and is measured as growth. GDP does not count the quality and continuity of care, the emotional well-being and the strength of the family unit. But we can change the way we account for things.

How exactly will it tackle class inequality?

In my view it will exacerbate class inequality. Any increase in disposable income that lower income families may gain will be taken back by the State in reductions to their tax credits or benefits. Many families will lose as much as 76p in every £1 they earn. They will also lose the right for their mother to be at home for her children, because how can poorer families justify being at home if childcare is free?

On the other hand middle income and higher income families will keep the disposable income they gain by free childcare.

How exactly is gender equality measured?

Full participation by mothers in the workforce will not achieve this so called equality. In Sweden for example, full participation by mothers in the workplace has exacerbated gender inequality. ‘The Swedish labour market is among the most gender segregated in the whole world. Women are mostly working in low-paid jobs in care and education in the public sector. In day care 97% of all employees are women.’

Unless, and until, we value care more we will not achieve equality. Emancipation of women is a worthy ideal but it is distorted if mothers are artificially pushed out to work.

Where does he find the evidence that families will be happier?

Since 1972 the General Social survey has seen a year on year decline in women’s reported happiness. Survey after survey report mothers saying they would much rather look after their own children and spend more time at home if only they could afford to. But this is never mentioned in debates. And what about the children? Do they wish ever increasing hours outside the home away from their mothers? Are their needs ever really considered in these debates? There is plenty

“Unless, and until, we value care more we will not achieve equality.”



Letter from the Chair, contd...

of evidence indicating a decline in young people's happiness and mental health.

Mothers at Home Matter is not against childcare. We understand the complexities of life and the needs of most families to have two incomes now to survive. But families can be supported in many ways and fully funded childcare is not the only way. Childcare policy should not be looked at in the context of how it can best serve the economy but how

policies and the economy can best serve the needs of children and their families. If the evidence proves that young children are better served by being cared for by their parent, or if this is not possible then by a relative or childminder in a home setting, then this must be supported at the very least equally alongside nursery settings.

Ministerial Group

The government has just announced Andrea Leadsome, Leader of the House of Commons, is to chair the ministerial group on family support from conception to the age of two. She has been an advocate of 'The 1001 Critical Days'. This is a cross party group of MPs who have come together to acknowledge the importance of the 1001 critical days from conception to age 2. They have done much to raise awareness of the importance of attachment, brain development and psychology in these years which influence long term behaviour and life chances. But even here, there is a reluctance to speak about the role of the mother as unique in this period.

This is where we at MAHM and all our members can have a role to play. Andrea Leadsome's brief is to identify gaps in available provision and make recommendations on how coordination across departments can be improved. The review will build on recent government policy in this area, including NHS England's Maternity Transformation Programme, expanding provision for perinatal mental health care, building parents' confidence to begin the learning process from the home, and supporting thousands of families with access to free childcare.

We need to praise this work but emphasise that "building parents' confidence to begin the learning process from the home" includes economic policies which support families to have a parent at home rather than discriminating against them.

We will produce a draft letter and I would encourage you all to write personally to all the members of the cross-party working group. Please contact us for further details if you are interested in using the draft letter as your own letter's basis and for a list of MPs to contact. Unfortunately many of these members only advocate free childcare. Unless they are challenged, and have pressure put on them, there will be no change.

In the meantime I encourage you to have confidence, in the true sense of the word, go 'with faith'. It is difficult when few recognise the value of caring at home to have this faith but,



in moments when I lose faith, I think that on my deathbed what would I wish I had done or not done – what decisions would I have made. I know I have valued enormously the chance to be with my children and raise them myself and I hope that this chance not entirely lost for our children's generation.

Welcome to New Committee Members

Finally I would like to welcome our new committee members: Philippa, Emily and Lynn who each bring with them a new energy and angle to Mothers at Home Matter, and would like to particularly thank Philippa who has bravely taken on the mantle of editor and done a superb job! And to Tara who has diligently taken on the task of researching articles. I would also like to thank Lynne Burnham for stepping up as Vice Chair. Lynne joined long before me and is a tireless campaigner attending meetings and speaking on the media whenever she can.

Good luck to Claire with her podcast venture, and to Emily who is full of passion and energy. We would like to support Emily more in creating her MummyLinks app – a new, free app that aims to help mums beat the potential mental health issues loneliness can lead to. So if any of you are able to run a marathon, or jump out of a plane(!) or something similar for her cause, please do be in contact. 

Anne Fennell, Chair of MAHM

The Childhood Obesity Crisis: the latest research



MAHM investigates the recent research into the childhood obesity crisis in the UK, which finds that it is in part fuelled by the increase in mothers taking on full time employment away from their young children.

The UK Millennium Cohort Study, an extensive and ongoing study of many aspects of the lives of a representative group of children born and raised in the UK between 2000 and 2002, has allowed facts about the growing obesity epidemic in the UK to be examined in detail. One of the latest papers looking at the connection between maternal employment and obesity in children (Fitzsimons, Pongiglione 2018) is based entirely on this up-to-date UK data and comes to a couple of politically awkward conclusions:

“We find that maternal employment increases children’s BMI.”

“We find that children of working mothers are more likely to be sedentary and less likely to eat breakfast regularly. This is consistent with an overall positive effect on children’s BMI.”

Significantly, this is the first paper providing causal evidence on the effect of maternal employment on children’s weight in the UK and is one of the first papers on this topic to distinguish between mothers who are single and those who are partnered. It is important to understand that causal effects on BMI due to household income were allowed for during the mathematical analysis of the results since it is already well established that poverty is a risk factor in childhood obesity.

In the UK it is widely accepted that we are faced with an obesity crisis that will damage the health and financial outcomes of future generations if current trends continue. During the same time-period when rates of childhood obesity have increased, employment rates for women have increased.

The most dramatic rise in employment has been observed in mothers with pre-school children - from 31% in 1980 to 58% in 2008 amongst mothers with children under five. (Fagan & Norman, 2012; OECD 2011).

The obesity crisis has measurable economic consequences. Our NHS in the future will have to fund spiralling costs of treatment for heart disease, high blood pressure and type-two diabetes. These are direct and proven results of obesity in adults. Less directly, obesity is linked to low self-esteem and depression in adulthood with economic effects on lifetime wages, years spent in work and the risk of future offspring also being obese.

The Cancer Research UK publication, ‘Tipping the Scales, Why Preventing Obesity makes Economic Sense’, warns that if current trends continue almost three in four adults will be overweight or obese by 2035. It calculates that this level of obesity would lead to an additional £2.5bn in NHS and social care costs based on a predicted overweight/obesity level in the adult population of 72%. This publication calculates that if we could reduce that to 65% (similar to current levels) by 2035 this would save £300 million in NHS and social care costs for that year alone.

So now we have evidence from recent UK data of the obesity crisis being fuelled in part by the increase in mothers taking on full time employment away from their young children. With the future costs to taxpayers caused by rising levels of obesity in the adult population, it would be reasonable to expect that policy makers should be keen to support young mothers in a way which means they are not forced to into full time employment while their children are very young. Sadly this is not yet happening but I do hope this data cannot be ignored for long.

A surprising finding from the Fitzsimons-Pongiglione study is that having a grandparent in the home has a beneficial effect on children’s BMI. The data cannot lie – but

is this really a surprise? The authors simply conclude that close adult supervision of

young children has a beneficial effect on behaviour and health related

outcomes. My interpretation:

Where a parent cannot be at home full time with very young children, having Granny living with you is beneficial, possibly because fewer hours are spent in formal child care, more time is spent running around outside and maybe Gran does a bit of home cooking too? This adds to my own

conviction that having a parent at home

with young children is important to create life-long habits of family cooking, family mealtimes and healthy active lifestyles resulting in secure, confident and healthy children. This benefit to the younger generation has a lasting economic benefit for all if healthy diet and lifestyle choices are handed down within a family.

Another striking conclusion from the Fitzsimons-Pongiglione publication is that the adverse effect on children’s BMI is

“An even playing field should be created for any family choosing to forgo a salary completely.”

The Childhood Obesity Crisis, contd...

pronounced for single mothers who work full time (full time is defined as 35 or more hours per week), with significant and slightly lower effects seen for part time employment of single mothers. This flies completely in the face of current government policy goals which emphasize the need for single mothers to be supported into full time work as soon as possible. The conclusion I draw is that, in order to provide maximum health and economic benefit to the children of single mothers, the lone parent should receive sufficient financial support to avoid having to take on full time work, if that is their preferred choice, while children are young. It seems obvious that being a single parent and having to work full time hours away from the home is difficult and this particular study provides proof of the significant negative effect on long term health of children in this situation.

Does the age of a child influence how much their mother's full time or part time work affects them? A paper published in 2008, by Stephanie von Hinke Kessler Scholder, asked this specific question and looked at data on a nationally representative British birth cohort - the 1958 National Child Development Study.

“The results show that the timing of employment matters: it is early as opposed to later maternal employment that positively and significantly affects the child's overweight status.”

There may still be discussion and disagreement on the reasons why the connection between mothers working full time during early years and childhood obesity exists. A study (Hawkins Cole & Law 2008) based on five year olds in the Millennium Cohort Study also found that any maternal employment after the child's birth increased childhood obesity incidences. It found that children with working mothers were more likely to consume sweetened drinks, use TV/computer at least two hours per day, be driven to school and eat less fruit and vegetables. The conclusion:

“Long hours of maternal employment rather than lack of money impeded young children's access to healthy foods and physical activity. Policies supporting work/life balance may help parents reduce potential barriers.”

However, while we can still argue about the mechanisms, the facts appear indisputable. Due to the lack of financial support for mothers in low income families to stay at home and care for their children themselves, many are forced out to work in order to avoid poverty. The results of the 2018 Fitzsimons-Pongiglione analysis of UK data indicates that encouraging all mothers of young children back into full time employment helps to fuel our obesity crisis. This will be uncomfortable reading for policy makers but it does support our MAHM aim of calling for fairer family taxation, and significant financial support for single parents. An even playing field should be created for any family



choosing to forgo a salary completely, or reduce hours worked, in order to prioritise parenting during the pre-school years.

Any parent who wishes to stay at home to look after their young children should be encouraged and supported to do so by a child friendly tax and welfare system. This is a family choice that is almost always best for the health and well-being of future generations; it is of economic benefit to our wider society, with proof of that last fact just beginning to appear in science journals. 

Tara Easton

Sources:

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Mothers Matter – the Podcast

Despite resigning from her post as Editor and Vice Chair of this organisation, Claire Paye is still as busy as ever working for the cause of 'mothers based at home'. Her latest, very exciting venture, is a podcast called 'Mothers Matter'.



Inspired by Will Young, who said that podcasts are easy to put together, and incensed by the constant media denigration of the role of mothers, I have launched a podcast called Mothers Matter, available at the link below and on iTunes soon.

My aim is to give a voice to mothers 'and the children who love them'. I want to put children's needs centre stage as so often the debate about the role of mothers is couched solely in terms of mothers' 'right' to work, rather than their children's 'right' to spend their days being loved by their mothers.

So much of the media space is taken up talking about how anyone other than the mother should be looking after children. If mothers are mentioned, it is to highlight how they are failing their children by not talking to them enough, or not feeding them the right food, or pushing a forward facing pram around, without any awareness that many mothers are absent from their children's lives for many hours of the day and therefore it is their absence that is making the difference, as much as what they are doing when they are there.

The media is staffed, necessarily, by mothers who are being paid to work outside the home and who are outsourcing childcare. Mothers who do not get paid because they are caring for their children themselves full time do not get a voice. If they are interviewed – as Lynne and I have been, frequently, for Mothers at Home Matter, it is by a man (who would not dare follow a line of questioning that might suggest he wishes his children's mother was caring full time for their children) or by a mother who has her own sense of guilt that she is not with her children, or who genuinely believes her children are better off in nursery than at home with her.

In my podcast I want to celebrate the vital and irreplaceable work that mothers do and look at a whole host of issues through the prism of the mother who is primarily caring for her children. (Note how hard I'm trying to avoid the phrase 'stay at home mother'. I hate it. Listen to my podcast for why!) Some of you know that I have been involved with Mothers at Home Matter for several years, latterly as the newsletter editor and Vice Chair. I stepped down in November in order, partly, to give more time to the solar light charity I run – the Mwezi Foundation. However, having recently got into listening to



Mothers Matter

podcasts, I feel they are a significant medium through which to communicate and may be especially useful for busy mothers who are cooking, running parent taxis, breastfeeding or doing the other many tasks that are required to get the family through the day. I am very grateful to Anne and MAHM for some financial and lots of emotional support as I set up the podcast.

I'm keeping it independent of MAHM for now to give me some editorial leeway and also to draw any flak away from MAHM. I should be able to be a bit more direct than MAHM would be able to be.

Will Young, I must say, is wrong. It is not easy to set up a podcast and having wept my way through Audacity and Wavelab, trying to sort out 'gain' and 'denoise', I have now engaged the paid services of a podcast audio expert. I expect Will Young is surrounded by such gems.

I would love to hear from anyone who has a story to tell and would like me to talk with them on the podcast. Topics are going to include: maternal mental health, housing, family taxation, mothering children who are high achievers at sports, universal credit, mothering teenagers, identity, loneliness, boys and why they struggle more in childcare, returning to work, childcare and a whole host of other topics, many of which I've covered in the MAHM newsletter over the past few years. Please do get in touch on Mothersmatter@outlook.com if you have a story to tell or any topics you would like me to cover. 



<http://mothersmatter.libsyn.com>

 <https://www.instagram.com/mothersmatterpodcast>

 <https://twitter.com/PodcastMothers>

 <https://www.facebook.com/mothersmatterpodcast>

Tax and the Family

MAHM have for some years been working closely with CARE and Don Draper and Leonard Beighton on making the tax system fairer for families. **Don Draper** tells us about the new website, 'Tax and the Family', which expounds the problems and injustices of family taxation in the UK.

Tax and the Family was set-up in 2018 to make people aware how the income tax system works in the hope that it will be made fairer for families.

The website reveals that even when tax is defined widely to include both income tax and social security contributions, and child benefits and tax credits are treated as tax offsets, some families with an average income are paying significantly more tax than in other countries.

If income tax is taken on its own, the latest figures (those for 2017) show that a single-earner family with two children can be paying 85% more income tax than a comparable French family, more than twice as much as a US family, and eleven times as much as a German family. A family in poverty who may have a four-figure income tax liability here would not be paying any income tax in these countries. Moreover, some UK families face very high effective marginal rates. They are financially locked in – they can't get out of poverty by earning more.

This happens because the tax system we have in the UK takes almost no account of family circumstances. The income tax systems in the France, Germany and the US, do. The High Income Child Benefit charge does take account of family income, but in this case it disadvantages single income couple families. The charge was supposed only to apply to the wealthiest 15% of families. The reality is that the charge applies to single income families, who are far from being wealthy.

The Tax and Family website has much which will be of interest to Mothers At Home Matter members. As well as news items there are many informative articles. Two recent articles added to the website deal with the High Income Child Benefit Charge and the problems of the rate's high marginal so many families face. Whether they realise it or not, almost 50% of families are likely to be facing a marginal rate of 75% or more.

The website contains an interview with Lord Lawson who, when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, created the system we have today. He had wanted to make the income tax system fairer! This is not what has happened. He says joint taxation was implicit in his original proposals. There is also an interview with a stay-at-home mum with three children living in social housing, which highlights so much that is wrong with the income tax and benefit system. Many Mother At Home Matter mothers will identify with this family. **M**

Tax and the Family is a charitable trust and can accept gift-aided donations. To access their website go to:

www.taxandthefamily.org



Your Letters



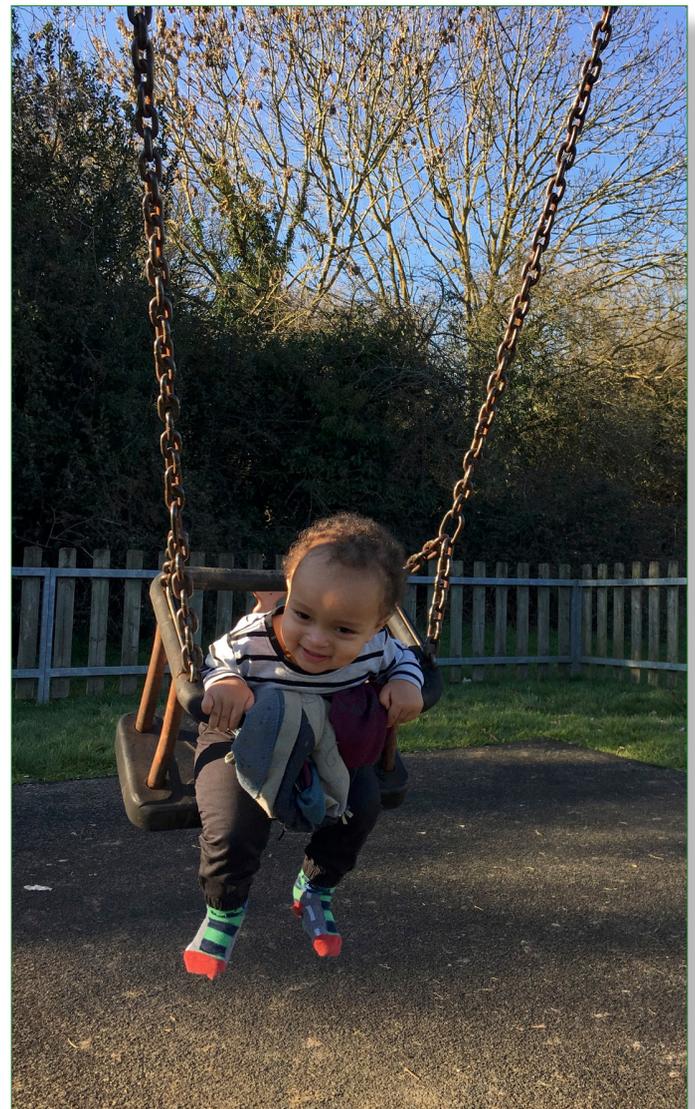
We love to hear from our members (or future members). Please feel free to write to us about your experiences or reflections at info@mothersathomematter.co.uk

The mental health of children has rightly been highlighted in recent months and, as a mother who was at home with her children but also worked as a dinner lady and volunteered and continues to be involved with Pre-schools, I have often wondered about this.

What is the effect on children being put into nurseries from an early age and the effects of children being in wrap around care from Breakfast clubs to After School Clubs on their mental health? Are there any studies? Maybe there should be.

Anecdotally, as a dinner lady I could always spot the children who had spent many hours in nurseries, and now with 30 hours funding for working parents I really wonder when parents ever have any time with their children. Wouldn't it be nice if some of that money funding working parents could be spent on mothers who wished to be at home. I'm sure the mental health of children would be improved too. **M**

Julia Leigh, MAHM Member



We Need You To #ShoutieSelfie!



Our mental health expert, Emily Tredget, is once again running her hugely successful campaign called #ShoutieSelfie. Please read her article below about maternal mental health as it affects so many – and get involved if you can!

Do you know five mums? One of them is struggling with a maternal mental health issue. And the likelihood is that all of them struggle with loneliness as some point each week.

Do you know which of your mum friends are struggling? I bet you don't. And not because you're a bad friend, but because they are probably hiding it from you.

This is what #ShoutieSelfie is all about. It's about showing mums that are struggling that you understand and support them. That they are not alone, and that it's ok to feel the way they feel.

Luckily maternal mental health issues have been getting more and more airtime. Celebs are talking out about it (look out for their #ShoutieSelfies!) and normal mums like me are too. And it's important, because no mum should feel alone in this.

When I had my son four years ago I struggled with terrible post-natal depression and anxiety. But I hid away. I went from being a confidence and ambitious woman, to a nervous new mum who tried her best not to be left alone with her baby, and got panicky about the thought of her closest friends popping round for a coffee.

Luckily it didn't take me long to realise what was going on. The difference was so pronounced that it was hard to miss. But this isn't the case for everyone.

But even though I knew what was going on, I still felt ashamed.

I felt like a failure. That I'd let me son down, my husband down, my family and friends down. Most of them were supportive, but let's be honest a number of them weren't. And that made it ten times harder. Comments to "pull yourself together", "everyone is tired", or "you just can't be bothered" shattered me.

I'd been trying my hardest every waking moment to "pull myself together".

That's what in hindsight actually made it worse – if I had just known how normal this feeling was and that I could get help I might have stopped beating myself up about it and recovered sooner.

But instead I battled on for a good (or bad!) two years. Pretending to be fine to many. And hiding away in my house when I just couldn't face the world. Most of my friends and family don't know the half of it because they only saw me when I was ok.

Most of them didn't know that hardly a day, let alone a week, could pass without me wanting to run away. I truly believe that my baby and my husband would be better off without me. One less person to look after and worry about.

But I'm glad that I didn't run away - or worse - but there were times when it was close.

Luckily that isn't the end of my story. I started to get better, and started to talk to mum friends about my experience.

And unsurprisingly, given the stats of one in five mums struggling, I found that so many of my friends had experienced similar struggles themselves. Most thankfully not as bad, but a few even worse. And that in itself made me feel a bit better. Not because they suffered too – I wouldn't wish

a mental health struggle on anyone – but because it showed that they understood. They didn't judge me. And it helped me understand that it wasn't "just" that I was an awful mother and person.

So since then I have been creating my own silver lining. I am now on a mission to ensure that no other mum should have to feel like I do. This started by speaking out about my experience on Channel 4 in 2017, and since then it has grown and grown.

I've been in various newspapers, and on the BBC numerous times! Each time sharing my story to help mums currently struggling to know that they are not alone. And also, fundamentally, to help those around them who may be giving them a hard time, to know that it is normal – it's awful and hard work for those supporting them, yes – but it's not their fault.

I also found that loneliness can be a cause of PND and other mental health issues, so I was super excited to finally launch my free app – MummyLinks – last summer!

MummyLinks is the safe place to meet mums for local playdate. It is invite approval so mums know they are meeting a mum friend of a mum friend somewhere along the line. The only way to join is through the MummyLinks Facebook

“When I had my son four years ago I struggled with terrible post-natal depression and anxiety.”

#ShoutieSelfie, contd...



Group so if you are a UK mum and keen to join your local community of mums do ask to join!

And that's why I'm so passionate about #ShoutieSelfie. It helps mums know they are not alone. I launched it in 2017 (with just ten days planning and two months social media experience, but bags and bags of energy and passion!) and it was a great success. It got maternal mental health trending in just thirty minutes of launching, and a million impressions in the first week.

And last year, it was huge! An SkyNews article about my experience trended (<https://news.sky.com/story/newmums-the-devastating-secret-behind-this-photo-11354057>) and the campaign went viral with over eight million impressions!

So this year I would love your help in making it even bigger and better! I can't do it alone – I need your help to spread the word!

So, if you love someone who is struggling – or have/are struggling yourself – or even if you don't know of anyone struggling but want to let those around you know that you support and don't judge them, please sign up to hear the latest updates at: [MummyLinksApp.com](https://mummylinksapp.com).

Don't worry, you won't be bombarded with emails – I haven't sent one since last June's app launch! But I will send some emails in the run up to #ShoutieSelfie this year (29th April) with details on how to get involved. It's super easy though – it will just involve taking a selfie of you shouting and posting it using the hashtag and some wording I'll email nearer the time (if you want, or you can create your own).

If you could share the link to sign up with as many people, organisations, influencers etc that you know prior to the 29th April that would be great too – the more people ready to post and encourage others the better!

If you want to see more updates about #ShoutieSelfie and MummyLinks please follow me on Twitter, Instagram or Facebook @MummyLinksApp.

Let's do something great! 

Emily Tredget

New Committee Members

During the Autumn AGM, we were fortunate enough to welcome some new volunteer committee members. We've asked Emily, Lynn and Philippa to introduce themselves to you.

Emily Tredget - Mental Health

I'm a mum of one, founder of MummyLinks and a Maternal Mental Health campaigner. I set up the free MummyLinks app after struggling with Post-Natal Depression and Anxiety, which aims to help mums create the support village around them that is so often lacking nowadays. I'm running an annual campaign called #ShoutieSelfie to help break the stigma of mental health during motherhood, as well as speaking at events to raise awareness.

[See Emily's article about this on pages 8 and 9. Ed.]



Lynn Thompson - Communication

I live in the north of England with my partner and son. My son is nineteen and his main focus at the moment is travelling. I previously worked in market research and now my main activity is painting. I believe what MAHM works for is of real importance. Being a full-time mother to my son has been one of the happiest experiences of my life and I feel all parents deserve the chance to share that time with their children. I'm happy to help spread the word about MAHM and look forward to being a member of this committee.



Philippa Nicholson - Newsletter Editor & Instagram

I'm a mother of four lively children who keep me and my husband on our toes: our 'bookend' daughters are eleven and four while our two boys are ten and seven. I'm a bookworm and cram in a few pages of whichever book is to hand whenever I have a rare, spare few minutes. In Jane Austen speak, I wish I was a Lizzy yet have come to realise I'm actually an Emma (with a dash of Eleanor). My husband, Andy, and I have been married for thirteen years and our family live in Essex.

I grew up surrounded by little siblings but, on the arrival of my first child when I was twenty-two, I quickly found that no amount of babysitting and nappy changing can truly prepare you for becoming a mother. The juggling act of having three children aged four and under was a shock to my system and I consequently have huge respect for mothers everywhere, especially those with small children. I home-educate my school-age children; it may sound challenging but it tends to feel just like a natural extension of the intense, and often unglamorous, parenting work for which every parent is responsible. I'm excited about becoming involved with Mothers At Home Matter as we plan for the future campaigns and focus on helping you find encouragement along the way. 



Mothers At Home Matter 2018 Conference



The MAHM conference is an annual event, usually held in Central London. This is where members come to hear inspirational speakers, have tea and lunch, stay for the AGM and get re-inspired about their roles as mothers. It is also a chance to meet other members 'in real life' and find what unites us is so much more than what makes us different.

The packed conference opened with a couple of brief presentations from 'Career Break People' and 'MummyLinks'. Emily Tredget spoke about her own experience of becoming a mother, when she suffered from PND after a history of top grades, top university and stellar career to discover that none of these had prepared her for the experience of motherhood. So she started 'Mummy Links' to put women in touch with each other for mutual support.

The First Speaker

These were followed by the first main speaker, the journalist and award-winning author, **Allison Pearson**, who opened her speech by quoting the forthcoming David Attenborough BBC series, *Dynasties*, which asserts that in the animal kingdom, the females are more useful than the males because they hold all the wisdom while the males just charge around fighting and fornicating – not like us humans, then!

Her talk was entitled 'A Mother's Worth' and she contrasted her own experience of mothering, aged 35, to that of her mother, who was 24 when she had her, but of course Allison wanted to

cut a different path from her mother's, on principle, so she went back to work when her first baby was four months old and employed a nanny, whose salary ate up nearly all her earnings.

But Allison soon found that 'having it all' soon turned into 'doing it all' and that she desperately needed time to herself. 'Wine o'clock' suddenly became more pressing as she found herself 'running a small country called Home.' Allison found that this Brave New World of female emancipation and equality at work was all very well, but she kept on thinking, 'But what about the children? How are they faring?' Children don't recognise 'quality time', they just want their mummies.

“Children don't recognise 'quality time', they just want their mummies.”

She was horrified by reports of children starting at primary school lacking all sorts of basic skills, including not knowing their own names. Obesity was becoming an increasing problem for children fed on ready-meals rather than fresh food being cooked from scratch. (Diana Dean expanded on this theme in her talk, explaining some of the hormonal links between obesity and lack of loving attention.)

The Press come down heavily on stay-at-home mothers with images of 50s-style mums in pinnies and hairnets emptying twin-tubs and baking fairy cakes: difficult to fight this false stereotype. And what about language development, with infants being cared for by largely undereducated young women, some for whom English is not their mother tongue, who prefer to chat to their chums either on smartphones or in person rather than making

MAHM 2018 Conference, contd...

conversation with a very small person in a buggy. Allison told us how her own mother used to sing all the songs from Rodgers and Hammerstein round the house, with the result that she became word-perfect in them all!

Although surveys reveal that most mothers would prefer to be at home with their youngsters, this is now a possibility only for the very rich or very poor: a luxury. But the effects of poor early childrearing will stay for a very long time, viz the A&E departments being filled with casualties from stabbings.

Allison ended her lively and stimulating – often funny – talk by quoting WB Yeats:

“The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world...”

Strong words indeed, but let’s hope Mothers At Home Matter will have some small influence in stemming the tide of ‘anarchy’.

The Second Speaker

WATCh?’s Research Director, **Diana Dean**, followed this talk with a hard-headed backup to Allison’s themes, giving the science behind the emotion.

In ‘What I Have Learned About Infant Stress and Its Consequences’, she explained that her interest had been piqued in the early 80s, when the children at a Mother and Baby group she had been running changed over the course of 14 years, and she wondered why. When the group started, there was a happy, relaxed atmosphere and plenty of chat and interaction, with a range of different personalities among the children, from the very shy to the positively bullying.

However, over time as more and mothers went back to work, the ambience changed as mothers were replaced by au pairs, nannies, childminders and family members.

The atmosphere became less convivial and the children seemed to polarise into two camps: the very quiet, often thumbsuckers (mainly female) and the extroverts throwing their weight about (usually male).

With the support of her medical scientist husband, Diana set about researching – before the era of Google – why this should be and came up with startling results. She found that the way a child was talked to affected the hippocampus: a mother speaking more gently to her child than a paid worker, and engaging in more eye contact will make the hippocampus light up. Equally, the amygdala and the pre-frontal cortex are directly sensitive to parental interaction, especially the mother’s voice.

Diana also found that although children appeared to have ‘settled’ at day care after a period of time, swabs of saliva taken at the end of the day showed high levels of the stress hormone cortisol, which directly affects the immune system. This was demonstrated especially among young boys, who seem to suffer separation anxiety from the mother more keenly than little girls. Diana quoted throughout her talk from the scientific studies that prove this, particularly the work of Allan Schore on boys.

Home-reared children do not have such high levels of cortisol



in their systems. Young children cannot manage stress before the age of 3, apart from thumb-sucking, so others have to manage it for them, and only the mother’s voice can release endorphins to calm a crying baby. Although the emphasis nowadays is on getting fathers to help with childcare, there is evidence that only Mum will do at times of high stress. Diana mentioned a test by which men and women were woken by different noises and it was found that the number one noise to wake a sleeping woman was a baby’s cry, whereas a man’s number one wake-up call was the sound of a car alarm! So men are protectors and providers, while women are chiefly carers and soothers of their young.

If stress is not managed in early childhood, the effects may drag on into adolescence, with high anxiety levels in girls and violence in boys. Diana told us that persistent early life stress and maternal separation can alter metabolic rates, leading to obesity and possible addictions. In severe cases, the child’s DNA can be affected and may even be passed down to future generations: a sobering thought. M

Sally Greenhill, What About The Children?

How can YOU get involved?



The fact that you're reading this newsletter is a great start to helping Mothers At Home Matter spread our reach to more mothers and policy makers. We're currently doing the groundwork of getting ready for new campaigns as soon as Brexit takes up less headline space, but we really do need your help.

Retweet and share

Are you following us on social media? We are present on Twitter, Facebook and, as of this year, Instagram. Please retweet or share our posts, it helps spread our message and draw attention to us. See the bottom of the page for our social media details.

Word of Mouth

We all have conversations with friends about our roles as mothers, which nursery or school to choose, or when to go back into paid work, for instance. Please do use these opportunities to mention MAHM, as there are so many mothers still to reach.

Update your details

Do you currently receive our email bulletins? When you renew your membership, do make sure your email contact details are included. We don't send many emails but it's a great way to keep you up to date with our campaigns on your behalf, along with news which may interest you.

Update your Subscription method

If you haven't already, updating your payment method to a standing order helps cut our volunteers' admin time and we can also plan more effectively for the future.

Write to your MP

Part of our campaigning is to raise awareness of the importance of unpaid carers and of the many women who want to have a real choice about whether, and when, to reenter paid employment after becoming mothers. Letting your MP know how you feel and mentioning our organisation will help them represent you better while raising recognition of our wider campaigning work. The letter to the cross-party parliamentary group mentioned in Anne's article on pages 2 & 3 would be an example of this.

Volunteer

Our volunteers are all mothers, just like you, who fit MAHM work around our busy days. We always have space for you to join us on our committee if you are wanting to become more involved. Generating content for social media by editing videos or posting is just one example. Please do get in touch with us if you are interested.

PO BOX NOTICE

Please note that due to low use and high costs, we have closed our PO Box address. If you need a postal address for subscriptions etc, please email Pat Dudley on pj.dudley@btinternet.com.

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