



**mothers  
at home  
matter.**



Autumn 2020

# Mothers at Home Matter

## A Voice for Thirty Years!

**G**ood gracious! What a difference six months can make to the way we live our lives! When we last went to print we were on the edge of the beginning of lockdown and had a mad rush to find a printer who could work from home, while travel to “non-essential” workplace was stopped.

Our volunteer committee is always busy behind the scenes but, during the Covid-19 restrictions of the past months, it feels like we have been busier than ever. In between covid-schooling and extra washing of hands, adapting to lines in supermarkets and wearing of masks, we have developed a new look to bring MAHM’s reach to the millennial mother.

You will notice our new logo on this newsletter and, if you’ve been on our website since mid-July, you



will have seen our website has changed considerably. And that’s not all. We’ve brought our annual conference online for the first time too.

While we shall certainly miss meeting and networking in person with like-minded mothers and groups, the online conference this year will enable many more members the chance to participate without having to trek into central London.

The past several months have provided

opportunities for my family to deepen a sense of local community, especially while helping older neighbours with their grocery shopping, and seeing others out exercising more. But there have been changes in so many parts of life this year; I think we are all at least a little weary of it and ready for life to feel more stable.

The importance of connection and relationship has never been more clear.

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That is why it is a delight, in our thirtieth anniversary year, to see the launch of local support groups for mothers — do see page 9 for a roundup of what’s been happening there.

Emily Tredget has been working incredibly hard to bring the needs of new mothers to the forefront of government policy. While this issue often seems to have fallen on deaf ears there is still a way you can help petition the government and we’ve included details in this issue.

Campaigning for the mother at home has been at the heart of our organisation for the past three decades. Collating the relevant research and information is vital for this. MAHM members worked to the very last minute to prepare submissions to the Early Years Commission and the Treasury Select Committee Inquiry and, while the full submission documents are available on our website, we feature summaries of each in this newsletter.

Meanwhile, life is getting back to some semblance of normality for Claire Paye, so we can look forward to the release of further inspiring episodes of her podcast, Mothers Matter (see page 10).

Please do contact me if you have article ideas or written contributions that we could use in future newsletters and on our website. We love to hear from you!

*Philippa Nicholson, Editor*

# From the Chair

*Anne Fennell is a busy mother of six boys but still manages to pour a huge amount of time into Mothers at Home Matter. She reminds us of current attitudes towards motherhood and the importance of being a voice of the mothers who are based at home to care for their families.*

## From Doubt to Courage, Self Worth and Confidence

“You think what I do is worthless.”

It was these words spoken 10 years ago by one of our members at the time, Laura Perrins, to then Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg on Nick Ferrari’s breakfast radio show that not only caught media attention but echoed the feelings of so many mothers across the nation. At the time the Coalition government had not only removed child benefit from the higher earner in a way that most unfairly disadvantaged stay at home parents but also introduced advantageous tax reliefs for families where both parents worked. It was another nail in the coffin for families trying to live in a way that they thought best for their children, community and society.

The Coalition government at the time seemed obstinately blind to the effect these measures had on the family. When David Cameron took over leadership of the Tory party his rallying cry was the creation of a ‘Big Society’, however he didn’t seem to see that the Big Society was already happening in a quiet but effective way. Many stay at home mothers helped in schools, looked after grandparents, visited elderly and sick, ran the toddler and church groups, PTA, scouts and a number of other voluntary ventures. With the advent of austerity the Big Society was forgotten and the Tory party became the advocate of the ‘hardworking mother working all hours to give her child a better start in life’.

Targets were set to get mothers back into work, mothers on benefits had to ‘be looking for work’ when their child was three years old to receive their benefits. ‘Hard working families’ became the buzzword and by implication mothers at home were idle and the invisible Big Society was weakened further as mothers were forced into work by government and taxation policies.

George Osborne described staying at home to raise children a ‘lifestyle choice’ associated with the ‘yummy mummies of Kensington and Chelsea’ or those on benefits, whilst



Nick Clegg saw this choice as ‘sepia-tinted’.

For those actually doing the work of raising children at home self-worth fell to an all time low. Numbers of working mothers rose dramatically. In April 2011 66.9% mothers with dependent children were in employment, in April 2018 this figure had risen to 74% (ONS). This would be a good thing if mothers wanted to ‘be liberated from their burdens of childcare’ and felt it beneficial for the family but there is evidence for neither of these. In 2011 according to a survey by Centre for Social Justice “88% mothers with young children said the main reason for returning to work was financial pressure. (See Who Cares about the Family? booklet on our website [mothersathomematter.com/economic-justice](https://mothersathomematter.com/economic-justice)).

Today mothers are still saying the same thing. The Department for Education & Childcare conducted a survey last year which reported two thirds of mothers with children under the age of five would rather work fewer hours and look after their own children.

And what about the children? There are no signs of happier, healthier children as a result of mothers returning to work and billions being spent on ‘affordable high quality’ or taxpayer’s subsidised childcare. The opposite is true. A new report by UNICEF Sep 2020 ranked the UK 27th out of 41 nations, just behind Slovakia, Romania, and Iceland in levels of children’s wellbeing.

I had hoped that the pandemic might herald a new way, with a renewed focus on the family. The family has been the rock in this crisis and the home the centre of both schooling and economic activity. A light has been shone on the importance of family and the work of the home, and the disadvantages exacerbated where families are troubled. Yet in ‘building back better’ it seems unlikely that the important work of care and raising children will hold much prominence. Indeed

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many new mothers feel more isolated than ever and two large petitions asking the government for an extension to maternity leave so that mothers have a chance to care for their own children and slowly introduce them to wider circles (prohibited by lockdown) and external childcare has fallen on deaf ears.

Do consider joining our committee and adding your voice to our campaign.

Whilst every effort should be made to restart and strengthen the economy it also seems a good time to look at how to support families to be able to care, particularly at a time when grandparents are self-isolating and when unemployment looks set to rise. For *Mothers at Home Matter* the time is right for all of us to cast aside doubt of our own self worth, take courage, have confidence and speak out. Over the summer we have completed three large bodies of work with the launch of our new website, public submissions papers (see pages 6 - 7) and the launch of our local support

groups. We're working to create a campaign tools web page with a more systematic campaign strategy and while also developing courses to connect and inspire mothers, do look at our website for details.

This year marks our 30th Anniversary and I am delighted that Kathy Gyngell, founder of our movement, will open our online Conference and AGM on 3rd November this year. I am equally delighted that Professor Pat Preedy has agreed to be our speaker. Pat has had a long and distinguished career in education and maintains that if at all possible the best place for a child in its early years is with their parent in the home.

During our AGM, do consider joining our committee and adding your voice to our campaign. We are looking for a secretary, campaign strategy manager, marketing manager, somebody to help us with our database, and any other role you feel your talents can help us to flourish.

Let's stand up together and be counted. It is time to challenge the government to prove that they are doing a better job raising our children with taxpayer's money than we can do with love. I look forward to seeing you all on 3rd November. 🏠



# Full Time Mothers



as I grasped the ideological nature of feminism's war against maternity (modern women do actually have significant choice) how feminism deliberately denied and relegated motherhood, the crosser I got. The more I was asked what I 'really' do, when I said I was a mother, the more upset I felt. For nothing I'd done compared for me with the role and responsibility of bringing up babies.

So, I persuaded the Daily Mail to publish an article from me on the subject. Headed, 'Why must we treat mothers as second-class citizens?', it was an account of my decision to give up my job as a TV editor to look after my baby myself. In it I accused the women's movement — as I still do — of browbeating women into avoiding

motherhood altogether and losing sight of all important of feminine goals and fulfilment.

It touched a nerve. A huge (physically) postbag was delivered to my front door a week later by the paper. I still have the letters in an ageing file at the back of a cupboard. They were heart breaking.

One mum after another wrote of the pain and wretchedness, they felt at going back to work, how they hated leaving babies in daycare when they knew they were too young but how they had no choice financially. They were angry too that feminists had failed to give status to motherhood it needed.

I wrote back to as many of them who gave addresses. Would they like to join a Full time Mothers' Group? On the back of this nascent membership, with likeminded women introduced to me as a result of the article, Anna Lines<sup>1</sup>, Ruth Liley, an existing group run by the late Frances Savin<sup>2</sup>, and the backing and moral support of Rachel (now Lady) Griffiths, the late Valerie Riches, and sociologist Patricia Morgan — intellectual mentor to the group — we founded Full Time Mothers. Later of course to be renamed Mothers at Home Matter.

Its survival is a tribute to the many mothers who've come on board in the intervening years. Today you are more important than ever. With more mothers in full time work with children under four than ever before understanding about babies and children's needs is threatened. Working mothers are understandably defensive about criticism. The social and financial pressure to return to work early has intensified. Choice

Our founder, **Kathy Gyngell**, tells us why she founded Full Time Mothers — our original name — with that name and why it still matters, thirty years on.



**S**ometimes lonely, often hard work, always challenging but never ever boring. That was my experience of the full time motherhood that I opted for, one year after the birth of my first baby and from then on.

Leaving my baby everyday was simply too painful. I gave in. He'd won, thank God! I am talking about 32 years ago when, with the zeal of a convert from working mother feminism to my new maternal consciousness (and new understanding of babies' unique need for their mothers) I decided the world needed telling my news too.

Reading John Bowlby's *Attachment and Loss* trilogy had a profound effect on me. It made sense of the battle that had raged in me. It told me it was a biological imperative that women could not — or should not — ignore for the sake of children, for sake of each new generation.

Organised outsourcing baby and infant care for the sake of female equality was not just fraught. It was insensitive unintelligent, bad for baby and bad for me. It was, I learnt over time, bad for families too. Motherhood was not an inferior role — it was the prior one. A working woman can be replaced. I as a mother, could not be.

I have always been a contrarian. The more I was told that babies were fine in 'other care' (thank you to Patricia Morgan for your great writing and research on this) and

1 <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/letter-mothers-are-forced-back-to-work-by-social-p pressures-1543406.html>

2 <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/letter-child-care-needed-at-school-age-too-1361466.html>



## Full Time Mothers, contd...

has diminished. There is little sympathy from women in Parliament for financial recognition of the mother's role or financial choice regarding childcare to be given to the mother.

We appear to be no nearer to making our elected representatives understand than when I wrote to every female MP 30 years ago. Then as now 'family friendly' work and workplaces and ever more round the clock 'childcare' is the solution, never home-based mother-care.

Yet mothers at home have never mattered more. Children need them. We need to keep relentlessly fighting the cause. We know most working mothers would rather work less or not at all. We know they want more time for their families; we know there is no

solution to working mother stress. We know that babies were not born to be herded; we know they suffer separation anxiety and even maternal deprivation if they are put too early and for too many hours into day care. We know this can have consequences on their development.

No one is asking for women to be tied to the kitchen sink for ever. Our life adult life spans are long. Childhood is short but critical and once gone cannot be retrieved. Our working lives can be. 🏠

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## Back to School

*Judith Suckling left her career in television production when she had her first child. Now her two children are back at school, she writes about what she now does to fill her time in-between school runs.*

The bell goes, they rush in, and your work is complete. You have spent the last few weeks (possibly months) getting the right shoes, tights, jumpers. Labouring over name tags and book bags. But once you get home, make that warm cup of tea you've craved for the last six years, what next? People start to ask; *What are you going to do with all your free time?* And you might wonder that too.

I decided to leave my career in television production when I had my first child. The long hours and travel didn't seem to fit with my idea of motherhood. My priorities changed from work life to home life pretty quickly. My husband works in the industry too, and with no family around us, it seemed impossible for us both to be working that hard. Friends told me of these wonder nurseries that were open from 7am – 7pm. *That's the whole time that your child is awake!* I wanted to shout.

So that first school run happens. You get home to an empty house, and what do you do? There are always jobs – cooking, cleaning, mending, shopping. But that's not really why I stayed at home. I left my career to watch my children grow. That same isolation that was felt in new motherhood starts to creep in. The day to day support of playgroups has been taken away. Your little adventure buddy is no longer by your side. Is it still ok to walk around a museum, mid-week, without a child in tow?

The obvious answer to this solitude would be to go back to work. I have been out of work for six years now. The

thought of someone else being in charge of my time feels wrong somehow. I have two little people to care for. What could I go back and do, anyway? My children are at school for six hours a day. They have school holidays every six weeks. I want them to be at home whenever they can. We need to slow down and take time to listen to our children's thoughts and feelings. We only get the chance to raise them once. When they have grown and gone, that's it. You can't go back and do it all over again.

I had a quick google to see if there was any support for mothers in my position. The only group that I could find for mothers of older children are the new local groups that MAHM have started to run. It seems the mental health support for school-age children is all aimed at the child rather than the parent. Recognition for PND is finally being talked about. The empty nest syndrome for university students has been in people's vocabulary for years. But what support is there for this significant change? The mothers who have lost their purpose when their child first goes to school?

The way I have coped, so far, is to try and keep my mind healthy. Find some joy in those day to day tasks. I like to set myself challenges. Something like a 30-day yoga challenge on Youtube or the couch to 5K app by the NHS is fantastic. I listen to interesting podcasts or audiobooks while I'm cooking or cleaning. I get outside for a walk. I reach out to people who are in a similar position to me. What I 100% don't do, and what I'm sure all my single working friends think I do, is sit and watch daytime television or engage with social media. I don't want to waste the precious time that I have for myself. Personally, I need to be active, be motivated, and be strong. Do all of the things that I used to dream about when I was chained to a desk. And don't worry, it'll be half term soon! 🏠



# Submissions to Government

*Our volunteers have been working hard over the past several months bring together our campaigning information along with research from our partner organisations ready to submit to Government Commissions and Committees looking at these relevant topics. Thank you to the mothers who have been carving out time to work alongside with our Chair, Anne Fennell, to meet the submission deadlines. The full submissions are available to read on our website.*

## June 2020: Early Years Commission

We were invited to submit our research evidence to the independent, cross-party Early Years Commission (chaired by Sharon Hodgson MP and Edward Timpson MP) to build a consensus on the future of early years policy.

The commission looked at the long-term implications and the policy solutions needed regarding the critical importance of a child's early years. However, whilst they stated that they would 'draw on evidence' their focus was 'on establishing consensus' on existing proposed solutions. In this light our submission did not answer the exam questions but challenged current orthodoxy by making the point that the optimum carer for a young child is its mother and, rather than penalise this form of childcare, we should support it.

### Mental Health

Babies need their mothers: The crucial role of early infant attachment has been widely researched and shown to affect brain development and the ability to cope with stress. We also emphasised that mothers need to be cared for too. Factors influencing maternal depression are complex and diverse but research indicates that social isolation, financial worries and a sense of disempowerment are significant contributors. Support peer groups are extremely valuable to combat loneliness.

### Choice

We argued that parents need a real choice as to who cares for their child and how they balance work as a household. Choice should be made by the family and parents should not be forced into work due to government funding and taxation policies favouring dual income families.

The subsidisation of childcare should be supported in the same way whether that is a parent at home, care from a grandparent, home carer or an external care setting. Penalties for staying at home to care should be removed while the government should support more flexible working and working from home alongside longer maternity allowance.

### Listen to mothers

The political consensus that all mothers want to return to work has been consistently contradicted by polling data spanning the past 14 years. In 2020 a Centre for

## MAHM's Summary of the Current Early Years Landscape

- Mothers wish to be with their children and very young children are designed to be with their mothers.
- For the last 15 years mothers have been saying that, if it was affordable, they would rather be at home with their infants or spend less time away from their children.
- For a baby or young child the optimum carer is the mother. Yet no political party is prepared to advocate this and every so-called 'family policy' in the last 15 years has sought to separate mother from child at an ever younger age and for ever-increasing hours.
- During this time we have seen a sharp decline in maternal mental health and in that of children and young adults. Parents who are primary carers feel little valued whilst society values careers as more worthwhile.
- We need to radically rethink our childcare policy empowering families to make their own decisions about what is in the best interests of themselves and their children.



Social Justice poll reported 78% of mothers with pre-school children would rather work part time or not at all. We want families to have flexibility to choose how many hours both parents work and how many hours they can care for their children.

### Support parents

There needs to be consistent care throughout pregnancy, birth and peri-natal to support families. A better understanding of children's developmental need for loving and consistent care needs promoting to both parents and policy makers.

We need to remove the focus on getting mothers back into work as an objective and replace it with raising the status of those caring at home. The financial penalties which force mothers into work need removing. Government funds from additional investment in childcare could be diverted into establishing a fairer family tax system.

Free classes on taking care of the baby for first time parents could be a valuable service put on by local clinics giving parents, particularly mothers, a chance to meet peers going through same stage.

For further details and references, see the full report on our webpage:

[mothersathomematter.com/articles/early-years-commission-2020](https://mothersathomematter.com/articles/early-years-commission-2020)

## September 2020: Tax Submission

### Treasury Select Committee Inquiry: Tax after Coronavirus.

MAHM's contribution to the inquiry presented evidence to address the question: 'Which areas of the tax system are most in need of reform?' MAHM focused specifically on income tax. It highlights the pressing need for a fairer family taxation system. Our system of independent taxation is not fit for purpose for taxing families; it causes unfairness, injustice and even harm.

#### Tax system is unfair

Single Income Families (SIFs) on lower household income pay more tax than households on higher incomes with SIFs paying twice as much tax as dual income families (DIFs) on a £30K household income. The Child Benefit tax charge is paid by families in the lower half of the income distribution whilst many others higher up keep it.

#### UK system is almost alone in taking no account of families

The UK applies tax based on individual income with almost no allowances for spouses or transferrable allowances. No other large European or Commonwealth country discriminates against the family in this way.

#### The current tax system traps families in poverty

A high marginal effective tax rate traps half of all families with many primary earners bringing home only 25p to every £1 earned. This process destroys the reward of work, career progression and denies the main breadwinner the ability to support the family.

#### Separates mother from child

Mothers are needed to plug the income gap, separating mother and child before either is ready. Yet her high marginal effective tax rate (METR) will mean she will also work long hours for little extra disposable income.

#### Greater cost to the economy

There is insufficient evidence to show the Treasury is better off by the contribution made by those balancing work and care responsibilities as a result of receiving childcare support and tax credits.

Growth is measured in GDP with working mothers, paid nursery workers and commuting expenses increasing GDP. However, transferring care from the unpaid (care in the family) to paid is not an increase of 'real growth'. What is the cost in mental health illness, anxiety and obesity of not allowing parents time to care?

#### Taxation Principles

Income tax principles need to change. Individual earnings are not a good indicator of the prosperity of families. Household income should be.

### MAHM's Summary of the Current Tax System

- UK tax system is almost alone in the developed world in taking no account of the family.
- Single Income Families (where one parent cares for children) are unfairly taxed and miss out on child benefit at a lower household income (£50k) than a dual income household (£100k).
- Tax traps reduce the incentive to work or earn more, damaging not just GDP but career opportunities and self-worth too.
- Mothers are needed to plug the income gap, separating mother and child before either is ready.



Taxation and benefits should not separate a mother from her children. If a family would have been viable on a single income before tax, tax should not render it impossible. The tax system should promote increases in income, aspiration, and social mobility.

#### MAHM Recommendations

Our short term recommendations are to increase the marriage allowance or to bring in a full transferable allowance for families with children under five years old. Providing all families with childcare tax allowances instead of state-funded childcare vouchers would allow families choice as to how they care for their children. Also, increasing the threshold for Higher Income Child Benefit Charge to £99,000 for single income families would balance the effective Child Benefit unfairness in the current system.

Our long term recommendation is to give families the option of being taxed as a household like the USA, where individuals can file their tax returns as either a single person, a married couple jointly, as a married couple separately, or as a Head of Household.

To see our full submission please visit: [mothersathomematter.com/articles/tax-submission-2020](https://mothersathomematter.com/articles/tax-submission-2020)





# Not So Happy



Our Mental Health Representative, **Emily Tredget**, has had busy year juggling homeschooling, running Happity and petitioning the government on behalf of new mums. We caught up with her to find out what has been happening (or should that be, not happening) for new mums and how you can add your voice to help out.

It's been a really tricky time for new parents during Covid (well all parents, but new parents have the added element of their lives shifting hugely to contend with too)! We've seen the creation of online classes, and the start of a few in-person classes, but the overall sentiment from new parents has been that they are left out, and abandoned by the Government.

Emily has been involved in a number of petitions including the maternity petition, which despite over 250k signatures, three Houses of Parliament sessions, and a huge media campaign, the Government pretty much turned down with only an hour to go on the response deadline. So dental provisions that mums have missed out on won't be extended. Provision for mental health won't be made. It really was a sad day for new mums.

The only good news to come from the response was their agreement to talk with industry experts (Emily!) regarding getting baby and toddler groups back up and running. With parents typically not living near their family, these groups have become fundamental in helping new mums create their community.

The second petition, and one which we would appreciate your support for, is to get guidance for baby and toddler groups and classes to return. It is a constantly moving landscape, but as this goes to press mums can no longer meet for informal meet ups larger than six (including

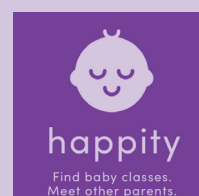
their children in the six if you are in England, but not if you are in Wales or Scotland).

Children's Centres and Community Groups aren't returning as they are tricky to be Covid-secure, and commercial groups, who would love to help whilst community groups can't, are facing prohibitive barriers.

The Government want commercial classes to return to help parents and of course boost the economy, however the new rules and lack of guidance specifically for groups with parent AND child, means most can't as their insurer/council/venue says they can't. There are lots of guidelines if you are sending your child to nursery alone, but none for a group where you also attend as a mother.

Emily appeared on BBC News mid-September about this as the lack of guidelines are causing a lot of problems for parents and providers alike. It was the first week the Government even acknowledge baby classes existed in guidelines, however their use of wording and contradictory guidelines means in reality it is still almost impossible with just 5% returning over the two month period they have been allowed.

It means parents and babies are at risk of being forgotten yet again - facing more isolation, especially whilst partners return to work in the coming months. 🏠



## WE NEED YOUR HELP!

Please join the campaign to get clear guidance issues to help new parents.

1) Sign and share the petition: <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/331261>

2) Write to your MP (this really makes a huge difference) - you can find templates for doing this in the Happity blog.

3) Invite providers (of commercial, or community groups) to join the Facebook Group "Children's Activity Providers Community — by Happity".




# Local Groups!

**Becca Woollgar**, who also volunteers as our Conference Co-ordinator, was instrumental in launching our new Local Support Groups earlier this year. Read on to see how you can get involved by joining this growing support side of Mothers At Home Matter.

**W**e launched our new MAHM support groups back in the spring of this year and it's been a great way to bring local mums together. Our groups have primarily been meeting on Zoom, and during lockdown especially this really helped mums feel connected and supported. Many of our groups are still meeting on Zoom, with some face to face meet ups happening too.

We've found that evening Zoom meetings work really well as the children are in bed, and the mums can talk without any distractions! Some of our groups meet monthly, while others fortnightly or weekly. Each group has a life of its own, depending on what works for the members.

We have 11 groups across the UK, from Scotland all the way down to the Isle of Wight. You can see a full list of our groups on our website here [mothersathomematter.com/our-community](https://mothersathomematter.com/our-community)

We'd love to set up more groups across the country to make sure more mums feel connected and supported. Please do get in touch with me on [groups@mothersathomematter.com](mailto:groups@mothersathomematter.com) if you'd like to find out more. 

I am so very grateful that I found this group. I have been searching since 2018 for a group that fully supports mothers staying at home and recognises the importance of it.

As an ex-corporate and business owner for 10+ years I was in no way prepared for how I was going to feel when I had Zara, now 2! My desire to sit working at a desk for 12-18 hours a day were gone, as was my financial and personal independence... my career and life as I expected it to be (oh how naive I was!) was upside down; and all I kept hearing was "When are you going back to work?"

However, things do change. Not only am I now confident to answer "I am a Stay at Home Mum" when people ask, but most family and friends have given up asking!

I sit and write this as Zara sleeps (which is when I do 90% of my work) and I couldn't be happier. Yes, I get frustrated when my businesses aren't progressing as fast as I would like, but to me there really is no price on time with my daughter and family. If you need support or advice on how to make this your reality - reach out to MAHM.

I can't wait to share the ethos of MAHM with the community in and around Salisbury! There will be a weekly Zoom meeting starting mid-September, please email me if you would like me to add you to the reminders - [salisburymothersathomematter@gmail.com](mailto:salisburymothersathomematter@gmail.com)

*Tamsin Abiola, Local Support Group Leader*

"It's so nice to meet like-minded mums with similar values, who understand the joys and difficulties of being a mum at home. I love that there are mums with different aged children, some are at the same stage as you, some you can learn from who have been there before! Giving up work can sometimes mean you lose a group of people you had something in common with, now I've found some new "colleagues"!"

*Lauren, local group member* 



*Tamsin Abiola and her daughter Zara*

# Mothers Matter – Back with Series 2!



It hasn't  
always  
been easy.

for them, at least in my experience. Working from home when the children are out at school is wonderful, and allows a great flexibility in hours worked (until you get to the holidays).

When I've done jobs I'm paid for, I'm happy to work in the evenings and around the children's key hours. But pre-school children thrive on regular interaction with their mothers, slow mealtimes and being the focus of someone else's life. And older children also benefit from having mothers available to them when they are needed – I think an 'available mother' is a much better term than a 'stay at home' mother. It is incredibly conflicting to need to work on an important project at the same time as needing to spend time chatting with or playing with children, driving them around (the main function of a teenager's parent's life) and even watching TV together (an important family activity I've decided, somewhat conveniently).

So, now I can return to the podcast, which I'm delighted to do. One reason I was reluctant to start up again earlier was because I don't like the quality of a Zoom recording. However, there is a new technical kid on the block – Squadcast – which I've just trialled with my producer and which is much better. So I'm back. I'm very aware that the podcast world is developing quickly and the production quality of many podcasts is absolutely superb. They have musical interludes and bring in a whole host of sound effects. My podcasts are a bit more basic but I hope there is still an audience for them, because my focus is always to celebrate mothers and to talk about topics of interest to mothers in particular.

I am hoping to pick up where I left off – talking about meals, the menopause, gratitude, miscarriage – and a whole load of other issues. The good news is that I can now record remotely, so I'll be able to talk to mothers around the country for the podcast. If there is a topic you would like me to cover, particularly if it's something you have a particular experience of, or interest in, please message me.

You can contact me on [mothersmatter@outlook.com](mailto:mothersmatter@outlook.com). I'm on Twitter and Instagram but not very frequently, so email is best. Please subscribe to the podcast in whichever app you use – I have recently started using Pocket Casts. There are 21 episodes up already and hopefully series 2 will be out by the time you read this. 🏠

**Claire Paye**, of MAHM and the Mothers Matter podcast, updates us on life in lockdown. She has some excellent podcast topics.

**M**y resolutions for 2020 were to watch more TV and drink more alcohol.

And I am glad to say I have achieved these both. I also had a whole range of podcasts planned. After a good start to the year, that has gone by the wayside.

As an advocate of mothers being available for their children whenever needed, I felt I really couldn't take time during lockdown/home schooling/being the manager of a constantly open kitchen to record any podcasts. I felt that my years of being at home paid off, that being a mother in lockdown was a role I had been preparing for all my children's lives. It helped that I don't really have a paid job so I didn't suffer any loss of identity or, in fact, income. It also helped that we have a dog, so we all did a family walk every lunchtime, which was a chance for my teenage daughter to rant at me and get everything out of her system. It wasn't always easy.

I really did appreciate the bonus time I had with my immediate family during lockdown, albeit against a backdrop of worldwide horror. However, having appreciated that time, I am now delighted that the children are back at school (and my husband has returned to work in the office), which gives me the opportunity to 'get things done'. Being able to get on with stuff outweighs the slight heaviness of the silence. And the school day is incredibly short.

I'm nervous that people now equate 'working from home' with 'looking after children'. I fully expect that employers will take the opportunity to reduce maternity leave to the statutory minimum, because new mothers can just 'work from home'. I don't believe that being co-located with children is the same as mothering, or even caring,



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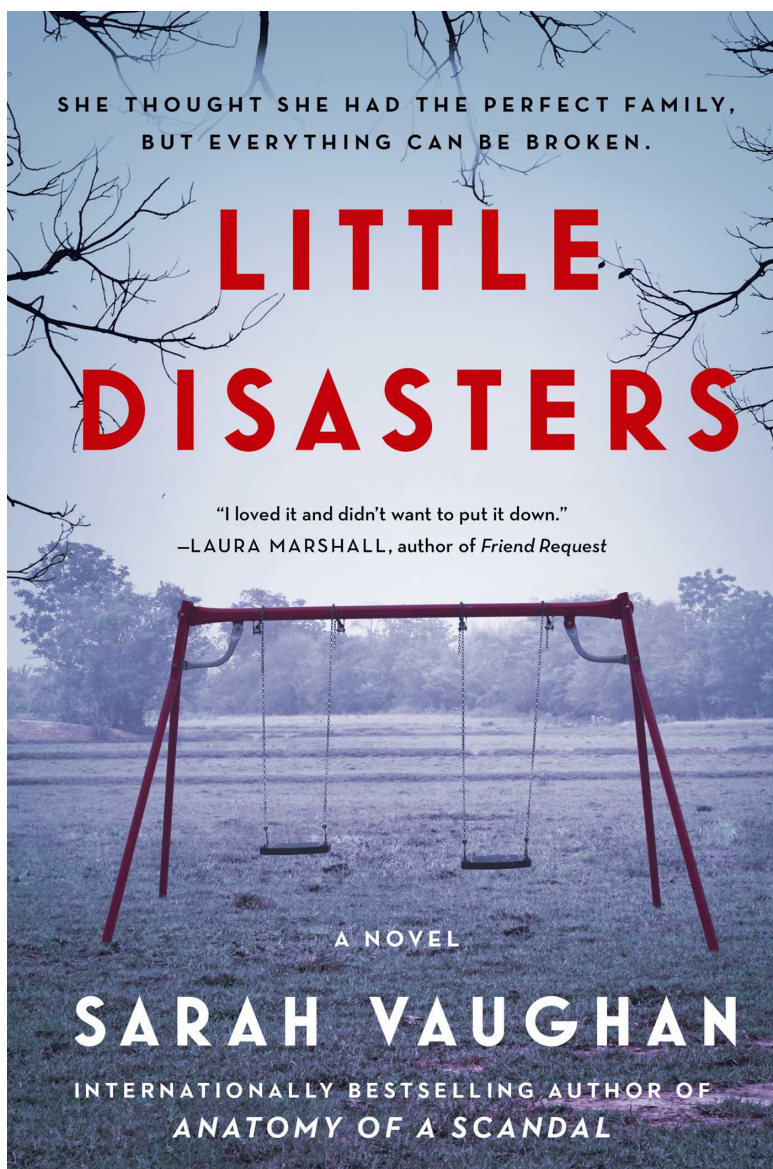
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# Book Review



## Little Disasters

by Sarah Vaughan

Published by Simon and Schuster, 2020

ISBN 978-1-471-16503-0

**T**he title of this book – *Little Disasters* – is ironic as of course the events that happen in this story are not 'little' but quite monumental in the lives of the characters, a friendship group of professional middle-class 30-something mums living, it appears happily, somewhere in north London in houses with gardens and bay trees in pots on either side of the front door. They hold dinner parties and barbecues and belong to book groups; so far so good, you would think.

But all is not as rosy as it appears, at least for one of the mums, Jess, a beauty who appears to have it all: a well-paid – but often absent – husband – the perfect family of two little boys and a baby girl, a nice house and garden

and no need to work, so she is a stay-at-home mother. Her other friends are working mothers but she is held up as the epitome of the 'perfect mother' who seems perfectly in control until the impossible happens and her baby is rushed into hospital with a suspected skull fracture: why?

The whole plot is a psychological whodunit tracing the ins and outs of what has happened to 10-month old Betsey Curtis via the police, social workers and doctors.

The story deals with the subject of maternal anxiety and OCD, as well as the darkest reaches of early mothering. It deals with the judgements we all make on other people's lifestyles, including parenting, but on the plus side it shows the warmth of female friendship and the need to check on our friends to make sure they are OK and happy. The writer shows that most of us have no idea of the traumas others may be going through, behind the smooth exterior of their outward lives.

In a *Woman's Hour* interview (6th April 2020), Sarah Vaughan admitted that the story is loosely based on her own experience of postnatal anxiety and OCD after the birth of her second child, over ten years ago.

She had been a successful journalist on *The Guardian* but had to give up her job when her husband's job moved out of London, so she had to move to a strange place with her first child, where she knew no-one, and endured a problematic birth with her second baby, leading to pelvic problems so she couldn't even walk: a prime recipe for mental anxiety and uncontrollable intrusive thoughts.

The combination of highachieving professional woman plus traumatic birth plus geographical displacement is a classic recipe for postnatal depression, which affects around one in ten new mothers, apparently. But Sarah Vaughan praised modern attitudes to mental disorder – and programmes like *Woman's Hour* – which discuss these issues openly so that help may be at hand for suffering mums. There is no distress to equal the cry of a colicky baby, and no anarchy like the demands of a new-born to intrude upon the most carefully ordered professional life!

This is a highly entertaining read for anybody, not just pregnant mums, and don't worry, it does have a happy-ish ending. 🏠

Sally Greenhill

# Mothers Know Best - but do you believe it?

## MAHM Annual Conference



**Tuesday 3rd November**  
**10am Online Zoom**

**Tickets: £5 members, £10 non-members**

**Book at: [mothersathomematter.com/events/conference20](https://mothersathomematter.com/events/conference20)**

For too long mothers have doubted their self worth in making the choice to stay at home to raise their children. Successive government policies have stacked the economic system against staying at home, whilst a political and social elite have devalued the role and importance of care in the home. It is time now to take courage, stand up and be counted. Find out why the role is so important especially now. Discover why mothers are forced to work sooner than is best either for themselves or their children.

Come, be inspired and join us!

- 09.50 *Webinar opens*
- 10.00 *Welcome by our Chair and by our Founder*
- 10.20 *Main Speaker: Dr Pat Preedy*
- 11.00 *Questions*
- 11.15 *All about MAHM & AGM*
- 12.15 *LUNCH*
- 13.00 *Two Seminars: Valuing Motherhood — organisations around the world*  
*Why Mothers are Forced to Work too soon— the economic causes.*
- 13.45 *Two Seminars: Building MAHM support networks nationwide*  
*Questions for the Chair*
- 14.25 *Farewell roundup*



**Dr Pat Preedy:** Pat has had a long and distinguished career in education including being a global Chief Academic Officer for an international education company, Executive Principal of a school, Head Teacher of one of the first Beacon Schools in the UK and a reporting Inspector for the Independent School Inspectorate. Pat is passionate about early childhood education and has led international research on the development and needs of babies and young children. Pat will explain why the role of mother at home is so important and the optimum form of care if at all possible.



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If you've already organised payment of this year's membership subscription, or have joined in the last six months, please ignore the request for membership renewal.

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