



## **WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?**

**Mothers Who Make** is a growing national initiative aimed at supporting mothers who are artists - professional and/or passionate – writers, painters, actors, dancers, musicians, film-makers....every kind of maker is welcomed, and every kind of mother.

**MWM** was born in London in 2014 with Theatre Maker and Improbable Associate Director, Matilda Leyser. The initiative grew from Leyser's sense of there being experiences and challenges specific to being both a mother and an artist. She noticed many parallels between the two roles: both are concerned with creativity and play, both require stamina, patience, sensitivity, both keep her up at night. At the same time she was struck by the strength of the cultural assumption that the two were incompatible: she was told she must compromise on either her creative work or her mothering. She wanted to challenge this. She put out an invitation to mother-artists, across art forms, to join a peer support group to which they could also bring their children of any age. The response has been extraordinary.

**MWM** has rapidly spread across the country. There are currently regular peer-support groups meeting at 22 major arts-related venues in different regions, with more groups in the process of starting across the UK in 2019.

## **HOW DOES MWM WORK?**

**MWM** meetings take place monthly in an arts-related venue. It is critical that the meeting is given the status of a participatory workshop, a rehearsal or class. A local mother-artist acts as a facilitator and participants are supported to exchange and work in a variety of ways. They explore emergent themes in their mothering and their making, points of connection between the two roles, points of dissonance, particular challenges, helpful resources. Examples of recent themes include: how to change and maintain your practice; the positive impact of motherhood on your work; housework – who does it?!

Every **MWM** meeting models a rare space in which participants are recognized and valued equally in their dual roles of mother and artist. The sessions are adult-centred but children are welcome to attend. Each MWM group shares a common ethos and practice but is able to grow and develop in response to the needs and interests of the regional artists that attend it. We want as many people as possible to be part of the unfolding MWM conversations. We do not seek to define who is a 'mother' or an 'artist'. Our reach is across generations and artforms - we are thrilled by the plurality of voices that are part of this discussion.



Current MWM hub-venues (in order of opening):

1. Home, Manchester
2. Craftlocker, Halifax
3. York Art Gallery
4. Bristol Old Vic
5. Exeter Phoenix
6. Northern Stage, Newcastle
7. Sheffield Theatres
8. Battersea Arts Centre, London
9. JW3, London
10. Theatre Deli, London
11. Oxford Playhouse
12. Clay Factory, South Devon
13. Atelier Arts in Stroud
14. Cooper Gallery, Barnsley
15. Chapter Arts, Cardiff
16. Unity Theatre, Liverpool
17. South Street Arts Centre, Reading
18. Peredur Eurythmy, East Grinstead
19. Theatre Royal, Brighton
20. The Point, Eastleigh
21. The Junction, Cambridge
22. The Herbert, Coventry

Coming soon: Leicester, Northampton, Birmingham, Hull, Torbay and Edinburgh Fringe

Find your nearest hub here: <https://motherswhomake.org/map/>

For national discussion please see Facebook group:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1484128908536006/>

## ***WE'RE GROWING!***

In June 2018 we announced an exciting initiative to seed new. 7 artists who are mothers have been awarded micro-commissions. The aim of each commissioned artwork is to explore the experience of holding the dual roles of mother and artist. Read the commissioned artists here:

<https://motherswhomake.org/about-commissioning/>

Each artwork created will act as a resource and participative invitation to others, through workshops, digital engagement and a live sharing which took place in December 2018.

This flagship strand gives artists the opportunity to develop, execute, share and showcase their ideas. MWM aims to reflect the plurality of ways that artists make meaning of motherhood and communicate the complex diversity of experience present within the field.



## **MWM MEETING PRINCIPLES**

**By Matilda Leyser (2014)**

### **CHILDREN WELCOME**

The events are adult-centred but children are welcome to attend and participate. One of the motivations behind MWM was my experience that there are two kinds of spaces which most mothers must navigate: child-centred ones with the adults needs marginalised (playgrounds, one o'clock clubs) and adult-centred ones with the children absent or unwelcome (rehearsal rooms, meetings, offices). MWM events model a third kind of adult-centred, child-friendly space. The space should reflect this – bring toys and lay on the crayons and paper!

### **ANY KIND OF MOTHER**

Events are open to all mothers, expectant mothers, new mothers, mothers with older children, grandmothers, mothers who have adopted, mothers who breastfeed, mothers who bottlefeed. Mothers of any race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity. Mothers with a disability.

### **ANY KIND OF MAKER**

All art forms are welcome – writers, musicians, actors, film-makers, dancers, visual artists. We've also welcomed producers, architects, historians – in short anyone engaged in a creative practice that they hold dear. Makers can be professional and/or passionate. No particular level of experience is necessary to attend – women at any stage of their careers or creative journeys are welcome.

### **MOTHERING AND MAKING VALUED EQUALLY**

Each participant is recognised and valued in her dual roles of mother and maker – these are held with equal esteem and regard, in contrast to the wider cultural trend which consistently values professional work over and above personal, domestic or emotional labour. We also hold space for exploring the ways in which the two roles might inform each other, rather than the assumption that they must be always be in conflict.

### **PEER SUPPORT**

The events held under the MWM name are egalitarian and collaborative in nature. We sit in circles, not in chairs in rows. We listen to each other with respect and empathy and without judgement. We share experiences and resources. This is a non-hierarchical model– we work collectively and are our own experts.

### **DIVERSITY**

We respect and recognise that there is no one kind of mother or maker, and no



single solution to the myriad challenges facing a woman who holds these two roles in her life. Each woman's experience is valid and welcomed.

## **What are others saying?**

*Once a month, at HOME, a truly fantastic group of talented women come, some with their children in their arms, and talk about what it is to be creative and a mother, what they want, why they want it. Every session leaves me feeling encouraged and supported and galvanised to dig deeper and keep making in anyway I can.*

**- Felicity Goodman**

*That's why I think the Mother Who Make groups are important. They allow us to interrogate these notions. To question the pictures we are given of perfect mothers or of selfish artists in their studios who are feted with great success but are monsters in their personal lives. I think meeting and talking to people who are neither perfect nor monstrous but can still claim to be mothers and artists will help break these images into pieces.*

**- Lucy Tomlinson**

*I heard about Mothers Who Make through a friend, an actor who'd been to one of the previous Manchester sessions. I thought it was an excellent idea for a movement because the relationship between artistic practices and motherhood seems, to me, to be a very fraught one, both in terms of practicalities (time, money) and in terms of how mothers, especially mothers who make, are positioned in (and often judged by) society. .... And so, the idea of finding a peer network of people who were trying to negotiate the same territory was very exciting. The Mothers Who Make sessions have been truly inspiring: having these conversations about expectations and assumptions and problems, and hearing about other people's practices and ambitions and coping mechanisms, has been an overwhelmingly positive and galvanizing experience. Writing, as a career, can be quite solitary, so the opportunity to build a network of like-minded people, even if we're working in different fields, is stimulating – we're all facing broadly the same challenges, and it's fascinating to get to know how we're each doing it.*

**- Valerie O'Riordan**

*Since joining Mothers Who Make in the Spring of 2016, I've been able to share some of that excitement again, and to become excited about other people's creative epiphanies. Creativity is contagious. And I don't need to over-explain the challenges of being an artist and a parent. It's a given, a common understanding, a shared frustration, a grief even, for a part of us that can so easily become lost in the day to day. ... Through the support of MWM I have gathered up enough confidence and momentum to go for a number of writing opportunities and even manage to hit some deadlines.*

**- Crystal Stewart**

And Venue producer Jodie Ratcliffe at HOME says:

*When we first heard about Mothers Who Make we just knew that we needed HOME to be involved in it in some way, although we didn't really know then the positive impact that it would have 12 months down the line. As an organisation it's wonderful to be able*



*to open our doors to creative Mothers and their children, bringing spaces to life in a way that doesn't happen often enough. The Mothers are so talented and inspiring and although I do not sit in on the sessions I can see from their feedback and minutes that they each leave the session feeling a little bit more motivated to continue their creative practice. It's not hard to facilitate these sessions; we simply block a space out for 2 hours per month, and have a regular volunteer (a Mother) to help set up the chairs, tables, tea and coffee. It's also really rewarding for me as I am able to let the Mothers know about opportunities in our building, whether that's a baby friendly screening, a workshop or an upcoming production. Mothers Who Make Manchester is a vital and encouraging community and we are in no rush to stop it.*

## **Who we are**

Mothers Who Make is a movement run 1 day a week by  
Matilda Leyser (Founder, Artistic Director, Writer, Mother) [matilda@motherswhomake.org](mailto:matilda@motherswhomake.org)  
Lizzy Humber (Producer, Artist, Mother) [lizzy@motherswhomake.org](mailto:lizzy@motherswhomake.org)  
And a wonderful network of 30 Hub Coordinators across the UK

We are supported by Arts Council England, Improbable and Crowdfunder sponsors.