

# Evaluation of The New Mothers' Writing Circle 2022-2023

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<b>Executive Summary</b>	2
<b>Introduction</b>	4
Background	4
Methodology	6
Key Impacts	6
Funders & Supporters	8
<b>The Project</b>	9
Inclusivity & Participation	12
Young Mothers	13
A Space To Be Visible	14
A Space To Come Together	16
A Continued Sense Of Connection	18
Case Study A	20
Case Study B	21
Case Study C	22
Case Study D	23
Case Study E	24
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	25
<b>Additional Information</b>	26
Creative Scotland Video Case Study	26
BBC Culture Scene Short	26
Reading List	26

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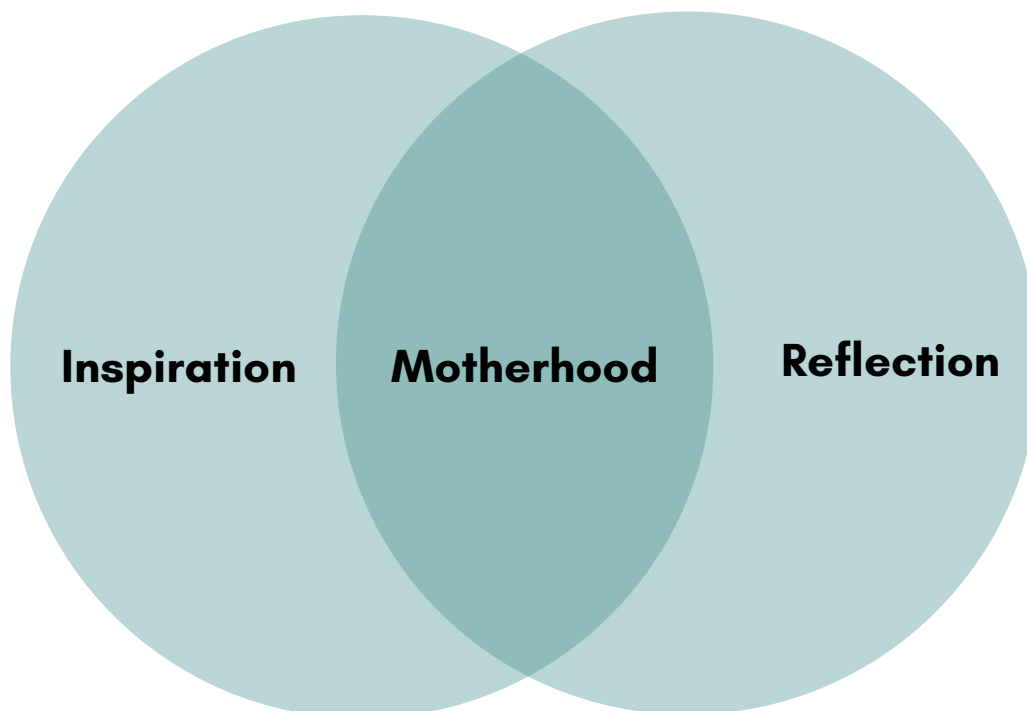
# Executive Summary

The workshops are underpinned by the idea of matrescence, acknowledging that every mother goes through a sudden and yet incremental metamorphosis across each aspect of her life: Her identity is blown apart, her relationships with others and herself shifts, how and where she spends her time and with whom changes and, for many, there is a dawning realisation that how she is seen by society is now radically different.

The New Mothers' Writing Circle is a place to explore this metamorphosis through creative writing and discussions, centring the woman's experience rather than that of their baby. It is not a therapeutic space but many of the women who have taken part talk about the benefits to their mental health and the sense of community.



Founder and Director Catrin Kemp's work intersects literature, motherhood & artistic development to build communities, elevate voices and improve maternal mental health.



# In 2022-2023

**48**

Workshops held in  
4 venues in Glasgow

**78**

new mothers supported to grow their  
confidence and creativity  
through the programme – while 79  
babies watched and learned

**72**

hours of workshops  
delivered

**8**

co-leads brought fresh  
perspectives on motherhood  
and writing to the groups

**100%**

of participants said they learned  
something about themselves,  
produced new writing and said  
they gained something from the  
workshops

**54**

participants continue to share  
their writing after the  
workshops through a dedicated  
Whatsapp community



**“**  
*I learned things  
about myself, in  
the company of  
other mothers  
who understood.*  
**”**

A Village Gathering at the end of the project brought together 28 mothers, 7 fathers, 1 grandmother and 20 babies and children to celebrate and discuss the impacts of the NMWC so far



# Introduction

## Background

The New Mothers' Writing Circle (NMWC) 2022-2023 supported the creative and personal development of 78 new mothers through 48 facilitated creative writing workshops in 4 venues across Glasgow.

Participants were predominantly new mothers with children aged <12 months, who had registered interest via the project website (some also had one or more older children). Between November 2022 and December 2023 6 groups of 10-15 women met for 8-week blocks of creative writing workshops.

“

*I hope you know how much of a blessing it was to have this space as a new mum!”*

“

*The writing exercises were really helpful for breaking down the anxiety I had about writing and let me just relax into it. I absolutely loved all the readings and the discussions we had off the back of them - they're absolutely the most interesting, vulnerable and honest conversations I've had since becoming a mum.”*



The project was designed and led by Founder and Director Catrin Kemp, assisted by a rotating mix of co-leads. Catrin is an award-winning Creative Producer whose work intersects literature, motherhood & artistic development to build communities, elevate voices and improve maternal mental health. Having worked with nearly 100 mothers in Glasgow since 2020, her ambition is to grow the transformational 8-week programme of the New Mothers' Writing Circle to reach more women.

Catrin Kemp's rigorous approach to researching and developing the project's unique concept and content has been ongoing since 2019. Themes have been drawn from over 25 books of poetry, prose and memoir – alongside podcasts, speeches, imagery and articles.

“

*I learned that you can write something quite beautiful in the time it takes to breastfeed.*

Catrin continues to invest significantly in staying abreast of new publications and developments in the broader fields of matrescence, creativity and mental health.

Across the 8 weeks of workshops in 2022-2023, topics and themes (which form part of the Intellectual Property of the NMWC) included:

- Lack of Language/Shock
- Identity
- Sleep, Rest & Productivity
- Culture & Difference
- Friendships, Relationships & Community
- Love & Wonder
- Rage & Shame
- Time & Legacy

The programme's design was further shaped by learnings from an initial pilot programme in 2020. This pilot held a single in-person group session in March 2020 before the Covid-19 restrictions led to a swift pivot to a further 11 on-line sessions, supporting 14 new mothers and culminating in the digital publication of a group pamphlet of creative work, which can be [downloaded as a PDF](#) from the NMWC website.



“

***It felt like a wee moment in time each week to connect with the person I was before I was a mother as well as the mother I am now and want to become.”***

“

***It opened up a whole new world of reading and writing to me. The reading curated for us was a really powerful prompt for reflecting on our own experiences. It made me feel connected to a global motherhood, part of a movement.”***

The project aimed to be intersectional, anti-racist and welcoming of mothers and non-binary people who self-identify as mothers, including those who adopt, foster, use a surrogate, are the non-birthing mother within a Queer relationship, or are step-mothers. It was open to those becoming mothers whether in their teens or later in life, whatever level of schooling and no writing experience was necessary.

“

***This kind of thing should be happening more and on a larger scale – and should be well funded so that as many women as possible have the chance to be heard and supported.”***

## Methodology

This short evaluation report analyses quotes from and summarises key findings within 60 participant feedback forms from The New Mothers' Writing Circle workshops 2022-23, 19 participant feedback forms from A Village Gathering in January 2024, alongside images from the workshops, other data from the project and publicly available social media posts and comments.

“

***I found a wonderful sense of connection to the other mothers, and also to myself. I came to the writing circle with no experience of creative writing, and feel I've really found my voice. It's shown me that writing is such a powerful tool for expressing myself and processing my emotions. Through our discussions and readings, I feel validated in my experiences of new motherhood so far, with all of its beautiful and challenging facets. Being part of something where talking honestly about motherhood has been so refreshing. I've heard others use the word "transformative" and I really do think it is.***

## Key impacts

The project aimed to bring together groups of new mothers in Glasgow and – through 8-week blocks of creative writing workshops – encourage and empower them to reflect on their personal journeys during the transformational first year of motherhood.

“

***I hadn't done any writing since [my child's] birth because so much of what I was feeling and thinking felt too dark and ugly to write about. I was too afraid to write things down that I might look back at and think "I'm a horrible person". Hearing from other people at the writer's group made me feel less alone, and less insane. It really helped me look back at the very rough beginning bits and find some beautiful moments.***

100% of survey respondents reported having got something out of taking part in the NMWC – 100% of survey respondents reported having learned something about themselves through taking part in the workshops





“

*I have relished the opportunity to process some of the emotions attached to my new life, to give them time, energy and focus in order to understand what I'm feeling and why.*

**Key impacts reported in feedback surveys included:**

- A significantly increased sense of connection – with other mothers in the group, with their baby, with their own sense of identity.
- A significantly decreased sense of isolation, loneliness and disconnection
- Learning new approaches for processing, understanding and adapting to motherhood
- Positive impacts on mental health
- Learning new creative writing skills, gaining confidence in creative abilities, reconnecting with previous creative pastimes
- Gaining or regaining a sense of purpose, voice and resilience
- A better understanding of self, confidence in expressing needs, acceptance of a range of emotions
- Making new friends, feeling part of a community, feeling more socially confident
- Seeing positive benefits in their baby's development/socialisation from spending time at the workshops



Participants commented favourably on the depth of connections they'd managed to form in the group, compared to other groups, attributing this to the workshops being centred on their own experience rather than that of their baby. They made direct connections between these deep bonds and their own ability to be vulnerable, to trust the process and to learn. This also opened up significant opportunities for peer-to-peer support and learning.

Many participants commented on how unusual it was to be given space and opportunity to acknowledge 'less attractive emotions connected with motherhood', and the significant difference it made for them to discover they were not alone in having a full range of emotions and experiences connected to becoming a mother.

Dedicated, supported time to try out or re-connect with creative writing and reading was cited as bringing a wide range of benefits, including positive impacts on mental health; increased confidence across a range of activities; better relationships and a sense of pride. Participants repeatedly praised how Catrin Kemp created and held the space, the perspectives the different co-leads brought, the range of different excerpts they were introduced to and the confidence they were given that a door had been opened for them by taking part.

## Funders & Supporters

The New Mothers' Writing Circle 2022-2023 was supported by the National Lottery through Creative Scotland.

During the project, Catrin Kemp built relationships with organisations working with pregnant women and new mothers across Greater Glasgow to support best practice in specific elements of the design and advertising a call for participants. Some organisations were keen to understand more and engaged in spreading the call for new mothers and pregnant women across Glasgow.

Partners, supporters and project champions included:

- HomeStart & Home Start Young Mothers (aged 25 and under)
- Stepping Stones for Families (Glasgow & Paisley)
- Who Cares Scotland
- Rosemount LifeLong Learning
- One Parent Families Scotland
- GGC NHS 3rd Sector Perinatal Mental Health Service
- Amma Birth Companions (Greater Glasgow & Clyde)
- Birth Baby & Beyond
- CrossReach Bluebell Perinatal Services
- Maternal Mental Health for Scotland
- Inspiring Scotland
- Merry Go Round
- Glasgow Women's Library
- Glasgow Zine Library
- Scottish BPOC Writers
- Scottish Book Trust
- Creative Scotland's Opportunities page
- Maryhill Integration Network
- Action For Children (Clydebank)
- Family Matters (Cranhill - East End)
- Quarriers Maternal Wellbeing (North East Glasgow)
- Mental Health Network (Greater Glasgow)
- Glasgow South PANDAs Support (Greater Glasgow)
- COPE Scotland (Greater Glasgow & Clyde)
- ConFAB (Greater Glasgow & Clyde)
- Barnardo's Scotland (Greater Glasgow & Clyde)
- Mind Mosaic (Greater Glasgow & Clyde)
- National Childbirth Trust
- La Leche League
- Amina Muslim Women's Resource Centre (Greater Glasgow & Clyde)
- Refuweegee
- Heart of Scotstoun
- 3D Drumchapel
- Rainbow Families
- Whats On Glasgow
- Positive Birth Glasgow Facebook group
- Scottish Book Trust - Steering Group Glasgow / Writing Community Team / Reading Team
- East Dunbartonshire Health & Social Care Partnership



ALBA | CHRUTHACHAIL

# The Project

The New Mothers' Writing Circle 2022-2023 was a radical intervention which placed the mother at the heart of the creative experience. Through the fundamentals of creative writing craft, new mothers were encouraged to reflect on and explore their experiences at this significant transitional moment in their lives.

For this edition of the project, 6 groups of between 10 - 15 women (and their babies) ran between November 2022 and December 2023. Each group met in a warm, private space set up to provide a creative, welcoming environment.

“

***I really appreciated the honest and open space that was held for us. As a new mum who doesn't have a huge support network in Glasgow I felt like I got a lot out of having somewhere to go that I could be open and honest, as well as hearing others stories and real life experiences of mothering. It helped to lighten the load somehow.***



“

***I discovered that I can write for no formal purpose and feel great enjoyment, accomplishment and joy from doing so. The group gave permission to do this. I also have discovered how helpful writing is to reflect and process situations in real time. The reflective nature of the discussions in the group really left me considering my approach to mothering long after every session.***

Toys and changing facilities were provided for the babies. Notebooks, pens, and copies of workshop reading materials were provided for the participants. Refreshments were available for participants, as was an informal library of creative books about motherhood.

“

***I used to paint but don't get the time now. Finding a new creative outlet has made me feel more like myself and given me a new medium to communicate. The meetings and writing at home have been really nourishing, a place to be honest and hear honest accounts of this new role. It has really helped my mental health, and encouraged me to continue to prioritise keeping myself well.***



Each session was led by NMWC Founder and Director, Catrin Kemp. Catrin was supported by a variety of different co-leads, who brought in diverse lived experiences of motherhood, creative practice and perspectives on writing for the groups to learn from.

- Group 1: 3 November – 22 December 2022
- Group 2: 5 January – 23 February 2023
- Group 3: 16 March – 4 May 2023
- Group 4: 11 May – 29 June 2023
- Group 5: 17 August – 5 October 2023
- Group 6: 26 October – 14 December 2023



Each mother was also given a set of web addresses and phone numbers, signposting how to access maternal mental health support:

**MIND:**

0300 123 3393

**The Samaritans:**

116 123

**Glasgow Pandas:**

glasgowsouthpandas@gmail.com

**Glasgow CrossReach Bluebell:**

0141 221 3003

**NHS 24:**

111

**In an emergency:**

999

“

***Meeting the other mums was brilliant - I loved listening to all their stories and hearing their writing read aloud. Their anecdotes about everything from night feeding to feelings of anger made me feel so much less alone. Having it in my mind to write down my feelings each week really helped me to document what can at times feel like a big blur. I know I'll value being able to look back on these records of what it really felt like, when time has passed and it feels more hazy.***

*“Through my relationship-building work, I made a key contact within the Greater Glasgow Health Visiting team and through her, 500 printed leaflets were distributed from a central hub in Drumchapel to every new mother in the North West of Glasgow.*

*“I placed A3 laminated posters within 5 wards and one outpatient service across the Queen Elizabeth University Hospital, West Glasgow Ambulatory Care and the Glasgow Royal Infirmary. I posted about 200 leaflets and covering letters out to all 33 libraries across the city. I also put posters up in many of the libraries local to the 4 workshop venues.*

*“This ‘boots on the ground’ work was essential for engagement – librarians, midwives and ward sisters were, on the whole, very keen to know about the project firsthand, so that they could accurately describe the workshops and encourage more marginalised women to sign up.”*



For this stage of the project, 119 expectant or new mothers registered interest in a place in the workshops. Selection for the 80 spaces available were limited to those currently living in the Greater Glasgow area and prioritised first-time mothers, mothers from deprived communities, mothers from marginalised backgrounds, and mothers whose children were aged <12 months (with the exception of Group 2 – the ‘Young Mums’ group - as noted below).

Retention rates across the workshops were high. Out of 85 registered participants, only two mothers left (one linked this to a recent ADHD/ADD diagnosis, one felt the workshops were just not for them). In Group 2 one registered mother came to no workshops, and two chose to leave (one to return to education, one gave no reason).

“

***Attending the writing circle has been the most enjoyable and meaningful group I have attended since having my baby.***



## Inclusivity & Participation

The NMWC encouraged potential participants to register interest through the online form if they had a baby/babies <12 months, were pregnant, adopting, fostering, having a baby through surrogacy, or were a Queer parent who identified as a mother.

The use of the word 'woman' was explicitly stated as inclusive of any person who 'births' or identifies as a 'woman', 'mother' or 'gender non-conforming parent'.

Recruitment materials heavily emphasised that no experience in creative writing was necessary and that the workshops were open to women from all walks of life.

“

***I came to the writing circle with no experience of creative writing, and feel I've really found my voice. It's shown me that writing is such a powerful tool for expressing myself and processing my emotions.***



Workshops were led in English, but participants were encouraged to write in whatever language they felt most comfortable expressing themselves in.

A suggested sliding scale of payment for the 8-week blocks of workshops was available, ranging £0 – £40 – £80 in order to reduce financial barriers for participants—with the higher suggested figure being a 'pay-it-forward' model. The project was made possible and accessible through funding from The National Lottery through Creative Scotland.

Interested participants were invited to note any access needs/requirements, including requests for a translator or interpreter to be provided, when registering interest.

## Young Mothers

Group 3 prioritised reaching 'Young Mums', targeting recruitment of new mothers aged <25 years old (or <26 if care experienced), living in Greater Glasgow. Participation in this group was free (rather than a sliding scale) and there was additional budget to cover travel expenses. On the advice of The Family Nurse Partnership the times of this group were adjusted, lunch was provided (for free), and the age limit for babies was raised from <12 months to <2 years old.



“

*I've learnt that being a mum is just hard at times and that's not me failing, it's just how it is! I've learnt about motherhood from other cultural and personal perspectives too, widening my understanding of this huge life-changing event.*

Compared to the other workshops, both recruitment and retention was more challenging. Only 3 Young Mums signed up in advance, so the group was opened to those who had expressed an interest in general. One (aged 16) left to return to education but the other two (both aged 21) continued to engage with the project after their workshop series ended and attended A Village Gathering at Glasgow Women's Library at the end of January 2024. They summarise their experiences at the workshops as:

“

***“[Taking part gave me] friends, time to write, open and honest discussion about early motherhood without judgement – and a modicum of my sanity back! [...] It was better than I could've imagined. Catrin really creates a space where self consciousness can be left at the door.”***

***“[The New Mothers' Writing Circle] rekindled my love for writing. I met some amazing mothers and the group gave a real sense of community, which was just lovely. [...] I'm so appreciative of this group and Catrin and I feel excited for any mums getting to take part in future.”***

## A Space To Be Visible

Underpinned by careful research and advance planning, the workshops were designed to feel relaxed and informal. Participants were provided with notebooks, pencils, and printed copies of all workshop readings. Tea and coffee making facilities, water, biscuits and fruit were available. Safe, welcoming spaces with toys were available for the babies.

The sessions invited participants to respond to a wide variety of creative prompts themed around motherhood. They heard extracts from books, poems, podcasts and articles. These were used as jumping off points for discussions and creative writing exercises.



“

*Taking part in the writing circle was really the first thing I'd done as a new mother that gave me autonomy after a long stretch of my own needs being secondary to my baby's needs.*

Plenty of space was given for participants to discuss their own thoughts and words. The focus of the workshops was for participants to explore and respond creatively to motherhood. Through this it aimed to empower participants to reflect on their own journey and experiences in their first year of motherhood, in a safe and supportive group of their peers.

“

*I liked that [the NMWC] ASKED something of me, from me.*

“

*It is the first thing I have done for myself since having a baby, and the first place I have felt visible as myself, not just someone's mum. I felt seen, accepted.*

“

*The new mothers' writing circle gave me a sense of purpose amongst the endless demands of motherhood, a time for me to do something for myself.*



***“For me, the format with the co-leads has been a key element of The New Mothers’ Writing Circle’s success. They add a richness and variety of knowledge and topic-specific texts, lived experience, facilitation and learning styles. Their honesty in sharing their experiences as mothers helped bring different creative perspectives to life.***

***“For example, Ishbel McFarlane – who is interviewed in the BBC Culture Scene documentary about the project – was originally a participant in the pilot in 2020. Ishbel was already a playwright, but had found motherhood robbed her of a way of expressing in language her new-found life.***

***Saima Sheikh was also originally a participant in the pilot, who came back as a co-lead. Saima was key to the week that focused on Culture and Difference. In the final Group of the series – Group 6 – I stepped aside completely, allowing Saima to co-lead with a participant from the previous group, Nicole Jodoin. Nicole, who is of mixed-Black Canadian heritage, and Saima, who is Glaswegian of Pakistani heritage, brought their experience of naming their children into the group. This led to light-bulb moments for many of the women.”***

**– Catrin Kemp**



Sessions were led by Founder and Director, Catrin Kemp, supported by a rotating mix of co-leads.

**For The NMWC 2022-2023 these 8 co-leads included:**

- Genevieve Herr
- Acura Onashile
- Ishbel McFarlane
- Saima Sheikh
- Laura Bissell
- Cynthia Rogerson
- Leah Hazard
- Nicole Jodoin

“

***Having the different co-leads was refreshing. Each of them really took part and listened to what we had to say which meant each session was richer for it. Particularly the culture and diversity week with Saima and Nicole. That week really dug deep and has stuck with me.***



## A Space To Come Together

Each of the 8-week blocks was held on Thursday mornings. To support reaching out to participants in different parts of Glasgow, 4 different venues were used across the city.

Venues were selected for being able to offer a warm, private space that resonated with the project's values of creativity, inclusivity and motherhood. This included access to changing facilities and tea/coffee making facilities. All 4 venues were accessible by public transport and suitable for a group of 10-15 people accompanied by babies, buggies and car-seats.



The venues in 2022-2023 were:

- Group 1, 2 & 6: The Reading Room at Arlington Baths
- Group 3: Maryhill Central Halls
- Group 4: Glasgow Women's Library
- Group 5: The Pony Club

“

*I got so much confidence from the group. Having never really written before and certainly never having shared any writing I am really proud of how much I have developed with the help and support of the group. I found so much comfort in hearing everyone's stories of motherhood, I felt so much less alone.*

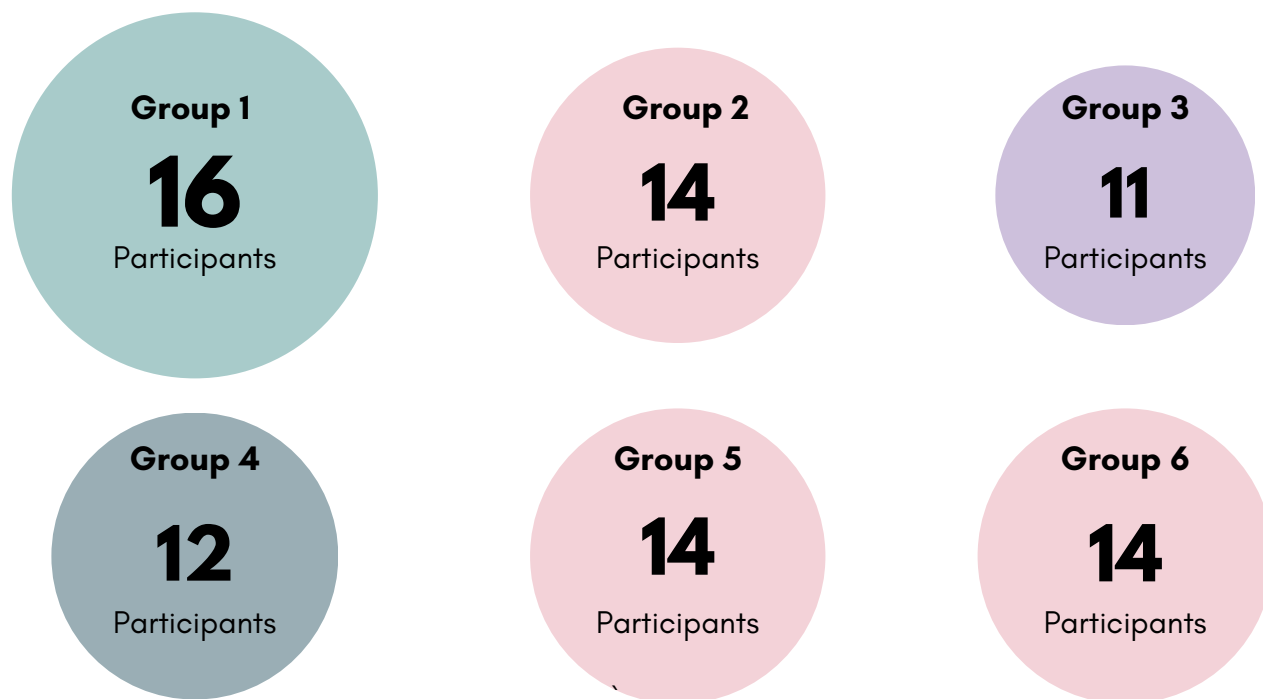
“

*Loved my experience with newmumswriting, truly is a safe space to explore motherhood and meet lovely mamas ❤️*

“

*I feel that the group enhanced my life in so many ways. It allowed me space and time to consider motherhood, what it had meant so far and what I want it to mean in the future. It gave me time to reflect on the relationship I am developing with my baby and with the other mothers and adults around me. [...] The confidence that this group, and especially Catrin's leadership of this group, has given me has been life altering.*

In feedback forms, participants commented favourably on how the groups brought them into contact with mothers from different backgrounds, cultures and lived experiences to their own. Participants expressed an increased sense of empathy and understanding through having found commonality through the workshops. They formed key friendships and repeatedly describe the group as a “community” or having found a sense of community through it. All participants spoke fluent English (although this was not a requirement for taking part).



<b>Group 1</b>	14 UK White	1 White Eastern European	1 UK Asian	
<b>Group 2</b>	10 UK White	1 Mixed Ethnicities	2 UK Asian	1 Spanish
<b>Group 3</b>	10 UK White	1 Black (African)		
<b>Group 4</b>	11 UK White	1 Canadian White		
<b>Group 5</b>	12 UK White	1 Mixed Black Canadian	1 Pakistani	
<b>Group 6</b>	11 UK White	1 French White	1 Italian White	1 Asian/ USA

“

***[Being part of the NMWC gave me] a close up look at others' experiences of mothering, that has changed the way I think about and approach other mothers - personally and professionally. [...] The most honest, raw and unapologetic conversations about motherhood that I have ever had the privilege to participate in, with a group of wonderful, engaging and charismatic women that I very much look forward to seeing and sharing writing with again.***

## A Continued Sense Of Connection

The clear benefits of peer support and friendships struck up at the groups are something participants have carried with them beyond the workshops, alongside the positive impacts on their confidence, sense of self, mental health, understanding of motherhood – and their enhanced creative writing and reading skills.

“

*[the workshops gave me] something to talk about with family and friends rather than ruminate on sleep deprivation and the colour of nappies.*



“

*I felt a great sense of community while part of the workshops. It was amazing and something to look forward to on a weekly basis. I feel like I really miss out on that feeling now.*

- Participants from both the initial pilot and these 6 groups have expressed a strong desire to continue to engage with and support the project.
- 2 participants from the initial pilot group in 2020 joined the 2022–2023 groups as co-leads (Saima Sheikh and Ishbel McFarlane).
- A participant from Group 2 – Ashley McPhie – who has experienced motherhood both as a teenager and in her 30s returned to talk to Group 3 (Young Mums) and lead a creative writing exercise on the theme of Shame.
- The website now has an online Forum where previous participants can share their writing.
- Since the final workshop series ended in December 2023, a Whatsapp Community has been established, with current membership sitting at 54. This brings together participants from across the 6 workshops groups in 2022–2023, as well as participants from the initial pilot in 2020. Catrin Kemp uses this as an ‘announcements’ group to update community members on upcoming opportunities and events, shares weekly writing prompts that build on from the original 8-week programme, and shares writing from within the community (with permission from the authors)
- The end of this stage of the project was marked with an event at the Glasgow Women’s Library on Saturday 27 January 2024, at ‘A Village Gathering’. Mothers from across the different workshops came together – some accompanied by their children and partners – to celebrate the New Mothers’ Writing Circle and feed-in to potential next steps.
- A micro-residency at Cove Park – which will include creative workshops led by author and journalist Chitra Ramaswamy – will be held 23–25 February 2024, with initial registration restricted to previous participants.

Participants who came to A Village Gathering at the Glasgow Women's Library on 27th January 2024 – a cumulative celebration to mark the end of this stage of the project, after all the series of workshops had finished – either strongly agreed or agreed with the following statements about their participation in the workshop series:

100%\*

*I was introduced to extracts of writing and other media about motherhood that were new to me*

90%\*

*I was introduced to new ways of thinking and talking about motherhood that were new to me*

90%\*

*I learned new techniques and developed my creative writing skills*

90%\*

*I felt more confident in my writing abilities*

95%\*

*I felt more connected to other mothers and parents.*

90%\*

*My confidence as a mother grew*

95%\*

*My mental health improved*

“

***I particularly enjoyed reading the writing excerpts that were selected each week to fit around each week's theme and I actually found the process of being guided into conversations about them quite relaxing, and at the same time energising, as it had been some time since I'd been in a learning environment. The co-leads were all inspiring, warm women whose different experiences, strengths and discussion styles kept me engaged.***

“

***Through readings and conversation it gave me a language to articulate my feelings and experience as a mother.***

“

***I continue to be connected to a community of mothers I met at the group. They are my lifeline.***

## Case Study A

The workshops are not therapy, but many participants commented on how taking part had had a significant, positive impact on their mental health through providing the skills and space to express themselves creatively, spending time regularly with other women sharing similar experiences, feeling safe and socially engaged as an individual as well as a mother.

This writer took part in Group 1 at The Arlington Baths.

***“The adjustment to being a parent has been much more difficult than I expected. In the time prior to my baby's birth I was very isolated because of Covid and I had less resilience when the birth didn't go to plan as a result. Dealing with extra challenges has meant I've had very little time for myself and to connect with other mothers to find support.***

***“The writing circle has really helped with this. It's been a way of sharing experiences and hearing from other mothers that I'm not alone with my experience, but I didn't feel I had to share every detail of my traumatic experience, since the focus was on addressing the subject of motherhood in a much more creative way. While taking part in the group I began to realise that I was more traumatised by my recent experiences than I'd acknowledged and taking part in the group has given me the confidence to ask for help with this.***

***“I really looked forward to the group each week because it gave me a little bit of time for myself – for my creativity to come through - while my baby met and played with the other babies, which was really great for him. So often it's not possible to do things where I can meet my needs and my baby's needs at the same time, so I especially appreciated this.”***





## Case Study B

The New Mothers' Writing Circle model gives participants the opportunity to gain creative skills and make bonds that can flourish outside the workshops as well as within. As part of this process, WhatsApp groups for each cohort were set up at the outset of each block, and advice and support for participants wanting to continue their creative journey – as individuals or as a group – was provided as each workshop block drew to a close.



This writer took part in Group 1 at The Arlington Baths.

***“It all started about a year ago, when I joined The New Mothers' Writing Circle. I expected to do some writing, I hadn't expected to make friends and find solidarity with so many other wonderful new mothers. I can't recommend the group enough to new mothers looking to connect with others and share their experiences.”***

***“Once the group ended, a squad of us decided to carry on meeting weekly to write, create and connect while juggling the madness of motherhood. The numbers have dwindled as people moved away or returned to work after maternity leave, but a few of us have managed to persevere and meet more or less on a weekly basis.”***

***The group began to include art making alongside their writing, which has led to a display of their work at GoMA ([Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow](#)).***

***“I'm so pleased that my Artist part, My Writer, and My Mother part are so closely connected now thanks to these projects. I'm so grateful to the other mums, all fabulous in their own rite [...] who have been hugely supportive and encouraging, as well as listening to my various rants. That we somehow still manage to meet up regularly and occasionally manage to do some writing feels like a precious gift that keeps on giving.”***



## Case Study C

The workshops gave some mothers an opportunity to re-connect with a creative practice that had become side-lined during the transition to motherhood – but for many of the participants it was their first experience of a creative workshop and the first time they'd spent time as an adult exploring the idea that they had a creative voice. The 8-week programme gave them confidence in their ability to keep learning new skills, in discovering modes of creative expression, and in sharing their work with each other.

This writer took part in Group 5 at The Pony Club.

***“New motherhood is so busy, it can be heard to pause and think about the big questions – what kind of mum do I want to be? Who am I now that I am a mother? How can I support other mothers around me? But the writing circle gave me time to reflect, time to read, time to listen, time for quiet. It helped me start thinking about some of these big questions.***

***“I learned that I am braver than I sometimes feel. I learned to process some of the big emotions I'm feeling through writing. I learned about the experiences of other mothers and how we are connected. I learned that I am creative - something I have never felt before.***

***“The New Mothers' Writing Circle should be a national programme for any new mother who wants to take part. It's a generous, caring space where mothers can go with their babies and explore their new selves. Being part of the programme has changed my own perception of myself and my aspirations for me and my baby. I feel more emotionally literate having been part of this programme. I can't ever thank you enough Catrin.”***



## Case Study D

The New Mothers' Writing Circle model is carefully designed to be sensitive to the particular pressures and vulnerabilities common to motherhood. It holds significant potential to support targeted groups who also share additional characteristics beyond their matresence. For this stage of the project, a pilot group – working in partnership and consultation with relevant organisations – explored the challenges of recruiting “young mums” in Greater Glasgow and understanding how their particular needs (as a group and as individuals) might be supported through the workshop series.

This writer took part in Group 3 at Maryhill Central Halls.

***“The group was honestly a lifeline for me. Having a space, judgement free, open, and welcoming of me in any state with the kids in tow was huge. Being a young mum I’ve never really felt welcomed into a group and I’ve always felt there has been extra eyes on me and that I’ve been judged purely for my age before anything else. From the moment I walked into the NMWC I felt so at ease and welcomed.*”**



***“I’ve managed to rekindle my love of writing, found a new way to express myself and write about motherhood and feel like I managed to find a way to do something for me, without having to place the kids in someone else’s care. It meant so much to be welcomed into the group and to be able to take part – and no matter my financial status too, as that is normally a massive barrier in us being able to take part in anything.*”**

***“I became a mum at eighteen and would’ve been twenty-one whilst taking part in the group. As a young mum it’s very common to be judged just for your age – before people have even said hello to you – so walking into groups is very daunting. But it felt like all the mums there were all just so supportive, understanding and it felt like the perfect little group. I thought we got super lucky until we all met up again recently at The Village Gathering and I realised everyone who seems to have done the project is just as lovely and wholesome. I felt part of a community, and I felt seen.*”**

***“Normally if I missed a week [of other groups/workshops] I would have insane anxiety to go back not knowing what I missed out on and feeling like a bit of an outsider for not being included – but I couldn’t wait to go [to the NMWC workshops], even if I missed a week, and felt like I was counting down the days to the next. It was a highlight of my week! I have immense gratitude for being accepted, welcomed and having taken part in the project.”***

## Case Study E

Rather than one-off workshops, the 8-week programme for each group gives space for trust and bonds to be built, maximising the possibility of peer support and peer learning alongside support and learning from the co-leads. Both during the workshops and in the following months, participants are given opportunities to share both the highs and lows of their week, and encouraged to see value in the pieces they have written and the perspective they are sharing with the world through their words.

This writer took part in Group 3 at Maryhill Central Halls.

***"Often when you go to other groups, mums know each other. You go in wanting to make friends but end up sitting on your own. But with this group I never felt isolated."***

***"Being care experienced we have trust issues with services and adults. But this was immediately a safe space, I was spoken to like everyone had known me for years. From the start I built relationships which have continued after the group. Because it was a long-term programme I got a chance to build relationships."***

***"It was such a positive experience. Before I took part I never would've read my work aloud. But the repeated praise from the group and the leads built resilience in me."***

***"I wouldn't have shared my work or applied to the poetry competition before, but I did and I won! And I didn't think I'd win because what I wrote was so raw – but I did! I have grown in confidence through taking part and I now want to do a Masters after my degree."***



The New  
Mothers'  
Writing  
Circle



ALBA | CHRUTHACHAIL

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breaking project.

To stay up-to-date with news, please visit the  
website and sign up to the newsletter.

[newmumswriting.co.uk](http://newmumswriting.co.uk)



@newmumswriting



## Additional Information

### Creative Scotland video case study

The New Mothers' Writing Circle will be part of Creative Scotland's Our Creative Voice, featuring a short film made during the final stages of 2022. Look out for this film here <https://www.ourcreativevoice.scot/stories> from late March 2024.

### BBC Culture Scene short

#### [Empowering New Mothers Through Creative Writing](#)

*Catrin Kemp started the New Mothers' Writing Circle in 2020, after struggling with her own mental health in early motherhood. Catrin's eight-week course of themed writing workshops for new mums aims to centre the experience of the mother and her transformation in motherhood, as well as empower women, build community and elevate the new mums' voices.*

*New Mothers' alumni, and writer, Ishbel McFarlane joins Catrin's latest cohort of new mums, and their babies, in Glasgow's West End as they draw on diverse narratives of motherhood, from Liz Berry to Toni Morrison, and share some of their writings from across the course.*

9 mins

First broadcast on 24 January 2024.

### Reading list

A selection of the books which have been part of the journey of the New Mothers Writing Circle are available via Bookshop.org: <https://uk.bookshop.org/shop/newmumswriting>