

FIRE STARTER MUM

FIELD NOTES • VOL. 1

“What would you say to a mum who feels she’s lost herself?”

A street-interview archive on motherhood and identity.

BRISTOL • WESTON-SUPER-MARE • BATH • CARDIFF

UNITED KINGDOM • 2025 TO 2026 • FOUR CAMPAIGNS

Field Notes

For the past year, I've been asking strangers one question, in public, across UK cities, and letting the pause before their answer speak.

This isn't a mental health project, and it isn't coaching. I'm not here to give advice. I'm here to witness and record. What follows is a small collection of what mothers have actually said, when someone finally asked.

Some of it will feel familiar. Some of it won't. That's the point: there's no single right answer to this question, only honest ones.



FOUNDER • DOCUMENTARY STORYTELLER • MUM

Gosia Scarrott

Gosia is a mum based in Nailsea, near Bristol. In 2025, she founded The Firestarter Question, a public storytelling project that stops everyday mothers on UK high streets to ask what they carry beneath the surface. This is the first volume of an ongoing field archive on motherhood and identity.

The pilot campaign

BRISTOL • WHERE THE QUESTION BEGAN

“It gets easier and easier, is what I tend to say to mothers, because no one wants to hear it gets harder. Once they start school, you get more of your own time back to do your own things.”

MUM, BRISTOL

“You’ll find yourself again. For sure. It looks like not, but you will at some point.”

MUM, BRISTOL

“We all feel that way, sometimes. You’ll come back. You just get your points back eventually. Everyone’s been there. So you’re not alone.”

MUM, BRISTOL

“Sharing experiences, knowing that I wasn’t alone, was the main thing.”

MUM, BRISTOL

“When Ayan was born, I thought, I have lost myself. I could not find the courage to drive the car, go to work. We got better. So it might feel really overwhelming in the minute, but there is light at the end of the tunnel.”

MUM, BRISTOL

Campaign one

BRISTOL • FIRST FULL CAMPAIGN

“You raise another human being. It’s a big, big job, even bigger than working in a corporate job, or even as a CEO. Raising a human being is a great, is a big thing.”

MUM, BRISTOL

“I definitely think that we are lacking that element of support in hospital when you’ve just had a baby. It’s all then just on you at home.”

MUM, BRISTOL

“I think you do lose yourself when you’re a new mum. But it does come back. It took me a long time to realise that you do matter as well. You have to reach out.”

MUM, BRISTOL

“I don’t know. I feel the same, actually. It’s a hard situation. I just keep doing it because of my daughter, and I don’t give up because of her.”

MUM, BRISTOL

“Really get involved in local play groups, and speak about the problems, because you can lose yourself. Swimming is one of the best things, I think, because it’s therapeutic.”

MUM, BRISTOL (A GRANDMOTHER)

Campaign two

WESTON-SUPER-MARE • BY THE SEA

“It’s normal to ask for help. It’s normal to say, I’m not okay. I need you.”

MUM, WESTON-SUPER-MARE

“Maybe I haven’t found myself yet. Maybe I’m still waiting.”

MUM, WESTON-SUPER-MARE

“I don’t think you ever truly find your old self. I think you find a new self. Everything’s new, so your life’s always going to be changed, but I prefer it now.”

MUM, WESTON-SUPER-MARE

“Support, yeah, having people around you. That’s what really helped.”

MUM, WESTON-SUPER-MARE

Campaign three

BATH • THE WEIGHT OF THE MIND

“I think you lose a part of yourself, but you gain a new self, and you’ve got to try and integrate them a little bit.”

MUM, BATH

“I think losing myself felt like I was in a very mundane day-to-day life, and I was sort of just existing.”

MUM, BATH

“Your brain is always thinking of the baby. Your mind never switches off. It’s constant, it’s like a mental load. The mental load is heavy.”

MUM, BATH

“I think society has lied to us, saying we can do everything at the same time without having to pay a price.”

MUM, BATH

“I’m still looking in the mirror, and I’m like, who’s this person? You need to understand it’s a new version of you, and learn to embrace it, because it’s beautiful. I don’t want to go back to being who I was before.”

MUM, BATH

“It’s a twenty-four hour job. There’s no rest. No lunch breaks.”

MUM, BATH

“All your brain chemistry is designed to want to look after and care for your beautiful little baby. It really, really takes an effort to remember that you are more than that.”

MUM, BATH

“I wish there was more emphasis on what’s happening to the mum, as well as what’s happening to the baby. You’re going through the biggest psychological change since becoming a teenager.”

MUM, BATH

Campaign four

CARDIFF • THE FIRST CAMPAIGN IN WALES

“You think because you have a child, you’ve always got company, but actually you just never have any time to think for yourself.”

MUM, CARDIFF

“[This is] my fourth child. I still don’t feel myself.”

MUM, CARDIFF

“Sometimes you feel depressed, ill, not yourself. But you still have to get up and keep going with the day.”

MUM, CARDIFF

“I probably would be a lonely mother if it weren’t for my sister.”

MUM, CARDIFF

“People start thinking, oh, it’s all about the baby, and I don’t think they look after the mum as much.”

MUM, CARDIFF

“In society, yeah, you’re just a mum, and that’s what it feels like.”

MUM, CARDIFF

“You’ve caught me on a good day.”

MUM, CARDIFF

The pause

The most powerful moment in this project rarely happens in the answer. It happens just before it.

When I ask the question, almost every mother pauses. Not because she doesn't know what to say, but because, often, no one has asked her this before. Not "how's the baby." Not "how are you managing." This. Her.

That pause is not hesitation. It's recognition. She is feeling into a question that has been sitting, unasked, for longer than she realised.

We are, generally, good at supporting mothers in crisis: postnatal depression, burnout, breakdown. We are not very good at seeing them before they break. The gap between "fine" and "in crisis" is where most mothers quietly live, and it is largely invisible.

This project doesn't try to close that gap. It just tries to make it visible, one pause, one honest answer, at a time.

Keep going

In Cardiff, the village was everywhere. Mothers talked about sisters, mums, other mums, health visitors. They talked about asking for help, and getting it.

“Keep going.”

“Keep strong.”

“Hang in there.”

But being held isn't the same as being seen.

A village can carry the load and still miss the woman underneath it. Sometimes, being well supported makes the struggle harder to say out loud.

What repeats across the archive

Reading back across every campaign, a few things keep surfacing, in different voices, different cities, again and again. These aren't conclusions. They're patterns worth naming, starting with the one this whole project was built to answer.

PATTERN ONE

Invisible motherhood

This is where the project started, and it is still the pattern underneath all the others. Mothers describe being reduced to a function rather than seen as a whole person. The role is acknowledged constantly. The woman inside it, much less so.

"You have them, and then you're forgotten. Everything is about them."

PATTERN TWO

The village instinct

In England, almost nobody credited an app, a service, or a system. When mothers described what actually helped, it was nearly always other people: baby groups, a friend going through it at the same time, a partner taking the night feed. In Cardiff, that shifted: mothers named Flying Start, health visitors and midwives, unprompted. But the village still came first.

"Going to some baby groups, talking to other mums, it was very, very good. Knowing that I wasn't alone was the main thing."

PATTERN THREE

Small returns to self

Nobody describes one big turning point. What comes up instead are small, specific, ordinary acts, a run, a face mask, twenty minutes with a book, that quietly signal: I am still here.

"Doing things for me that weren't mum related. Anything that isn't related to your baby, and makes you feel good."

What repeats, continued

PATTERN FOUR

The mental load

Several mothers, unprompted, described a kind of exhaustion that has nothing to do with sleep. A mind that doesn't switch off. A job with no clock-out. This weight is rarely visible from the outside, which may be exactly why it's rarely spoken about out loud.

"It's constant. It's like a mental load, they call it, don't they? The mental load is heavy."

PATTERN FIVE

New self, not old self

Very few mothers spoke about "getting back" to who they were. More often, they described becoming someone additional: not a replacement, an expansion. The language of loss shows up early. The language of expansion shows up with time and distance.

"I don't think you ever truly find your old self. I think you find a new self."

PATTERN SIX

The support gap

Not every story was the same. Mothers without nearby family, younger mothers, and mothers without a partner present described a visibly harder road: less time, less permission, less of a village to lean on.

"If you don't have family around, it's very hard."

THE EXPANSION THESIS

NOT LOST. NOT NEW.

You are not replaced. *You are expanded.*

People keep promising mothers they'll "get back to themselves," as if she went missing.
She didn't go missing. She got bigger than the word "mum" can hold.

I am not a new person. I am the same woman, I just expanded. Motherhood didn't erase
who I was. It added a room to the house that was already there.

*Not lost. Not new. Just more of you than there used to be
room for.*

The woman in you still matters. *She always did.*

This archive is ongoing. Here is how to stay with it.

01 • THE LIVING ARCHIVE

Read every voice, or leave your own.

Search the full street archive, and answer the question anonymously. No name, no email.

firestartermum.com

02 • FIELD NOTES

Receive the next volume.

New voices, new reflections, and where the project goes next, straight to your inbox.

firestartermum.substack.com

03 • BRING THE QUESTION TO YOUR CITY

Partner with the project.

For funders, organisations, press and brands who want to help mothers be seen before they break.

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