**WHEN YOU BECOME A MUM, NEW FRIENDSHIPS AND NETWORKS CAN MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE. BUT WHERE DO YOU FIND THEM?**

**WORDS NATALIE RITCHIE**

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**Meet Up**

**Up Your Street**

When Melbourne’s Alice Morell became a mother, she was impressed by mothers’ power and contribution, and less than impressed by motherhood’s missing support. She found a solution outside our front doors – *Street Child*. Now download the flyer template on her website and letterbox-drop to your street to start a ‘gang’, or contact Alice to see if there’s already one around the corner (there’s about 60 so far). It’s your ready-made village. Swap practical support like school runs, bike pooling, babysitters, bulk cooking, garden tools or IT savvy, and be one another’s emotional sounding board. Visit themothermovement.com.au

**What Lights Your Fire?**

Have you discovered meet ups? Head to meetup.com and pick a group from their smorgasbord, or start your own. In Perth, you may find the support you need in the ‘TVF Friends’ group or the ‘Solo Mums by Choice’ group. Working from home in SA? The ‘Working From Home in Adelaide’ group may be for you. If you’re looking for a strong network that acts like a family, especially if you have no family in Canberra, the ‘Sisterhood ACT’ may be it. In Melbourne, you could soak up the world’s next great novel at the ‘Melbourne Books and Babies Club’. In Brisbane, swap tips on how to give your kids a love of learning and a positive attitude at the ‘Empowered Parents, Confident Kids’ group. Or maybe you’d like to regenerate bushland, turn the soil in a member’s vegie patch or bring life to neglected urban spaces in the ‘Parents’ Weekday Gardening Collective’ for carers with kids under six in Sydney.

**In Real Life**

Some networks offer face-to-face groups based on your location or interests: try Playdate Australia for local groups, playdateaustralia.com.au or groups like ‘Great New Age Mums’ in SA, ‘Sydney British Expats Mothers’ or ‘New to Inner Brisbane Mothers’ at joonya.com. In Adelaide, check out mumymmeetings.com.au for café get-togethers. Playgroup’s one-size-fits-all option is great, but depending on which state you live in, it also offers filtered groups based on nationality (Asyrian to Thai), parenting style, health issues like postnatal depression or allergy awareness, Montessori or Steiner, and LGBTQI, playgroupaustralia.org.au

**Ground Zero**

When she became a mother, counsellor and events organiser Jasmin Lesniak created retreats to help new mothers re-ground, navigate the overwhelm and work through the disconnect many of us find between the fantasy and the reality of motherhood. Motherground offers weekends and three-day retreats at alluring venues like Continental House in Hepburn Springs, Vic, with a professional nanny to give you time out, counsellors, meals, a massage, yoga, relaxation and visualisation, a workshop on what motherhood means to you, and a judgement-free session in which to ‘unpack’ your birth and mothering experience in a likeminded circle of mothers. A NWG retreat is in the works, motherground.com.au

**Karma Calm**

Mother of two, yoga school founder and author of *Mother Ow*, Leonie Percy runs monthly Mindful Parenting weekends at the Billabong Retreat on Sydney’s outskirts. Chill in the bushland setting and enjoy the yoga and gluten-free organic vegetarian food, or take the optional workshops on how to let go of guilt, find time for you, and interact with your kids from a happier place, yogamamata.com.au

**Move It**

**Mums’ Exercise Group Australia (MEGA)**

When mother of baby triplets Jennelle McAppion moved to Canberra in 2014, she found it isolating. ‘I didn’t want to be by myself in the house, I wanted my kids socialised, and I wanted to be healthy so I started Canberra Mums’ Exercise Group,’ she said. ‘To say it took off is an understatement; it now has thousands of members doing boot camps, lake walks, balance sessions, lap swimming, trampolining, wall climbing and more every week. Sessions are self-organised or led by volunteer trainers, and most are free. “The idea is to exercise with your kids, who might sleep in the pram or kick a ball around in the field or join in,” said Jennelle. The group went national last month, so look for it in your city at facebook.com/imaMEGAmum

**Ride the Crest**

Started by two mothers in Byron Bay, Surfing Mums now has over 30 groups around Australia. Join events like surf coaching and barbecues, and score discounts on surf gear. Membership costs $52. Dads are welcome, and even a few grandparents join in. No need to miss every wave from now on, surfgnumums.com

**Make It**

**Crafting Friendships**

Craft-led Melbourne mother Felicia Semple to a tribe, and then more tribes, which grew into The Craft Sessions, an annual weekend Yarra Valley retreat where mothers stitch, dye, weave and paint among nature, yoga and wholesome food. Mums attend from all over Australia. Read her blog post about the route they took to her tribe – “I will grow old with them” plus the magic of making things in the company of other women, at thecraftsessions.com This year’s retreat is 2-4 September.

**The Collective Consciousness**

Art therapist and mother Anna Kelleher and her creative mother friends formed a small support group in 2013 to help them through the challenges of creating with young children. That morphed into Mama Creatives, a collective of several hundred mothers in Sydney with monthly speaker events by mother filmmakers, artists, photographers and more, morning tea masterclasses (‘Building a Digital Community’, Neuroscience: Are We Wired to Create?’), and school holiday workshops, mamacreatives.com

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**Find Your Mum Tribe**

**Give It**

Help other mums and forge new friendships at St Kilda Mums. The volunteer mothers get together regularly in the St Kilda warehouse to sort and repair donated prams, change tables, clothing, toys and more for families in need. Lots of mums bring their kids. Drop in any time, or make it a date with a regular group. There are off-shoots in Geelong and Ballarat too, stkildamums.org

When Kiren Bigwood realised that not all children get the same good start in life, she and two friends with young kids set up Little Things for Tiny Tots in Perth. Working from their homes in a friendly atmosphere, they sort donated baby goods into starter-kit boxes for distribution to new mothers in need via women’s refuges, government agencies and charities. Anyone is welcome to help sort and pack, including your kids, facebook.com/LittleThingsForTinyTots

**Work It**

**Not the Office**

Co-working spaces are a great solution to isolation for work-at-home mums. Share office space with parents facing the same challenges, bounce ideas around, collaborate, and separate work from home, with perks like 3D printers, meeting rooms, post boxes, and even regular speakers’ events. And coffee.

Co-working spaces with créches are still in their infancy (scuse the pun) worldwide, but in Australia check out happyhubbub.com.au in Melbourne, bubsandboardrooms.com and thelittlespace.com.au in Sydney, and sassplace.com.au in Adelaide. BubDesk opened in Perth’s Northbridge last year with a créche and breastfeeding room, a mobile masseur, business seminars and loan prams for a walk to the nearby park. CID and Fremantle outlets are on the way, bubdesk.com.au

If you have start-up dreams, Founding Mums’ Exchange brings you together with other business-minded mums (and kids). Groups are active in Newcastle, Brisbane and Adelaide; visit foundingmoms.com/meetup, or start a group in your area.

**International Inspo**

A babysitter takes the baby, you take a coffee and mothers talk in a facilitated course of evening sessions over six weeks at Mothers Network in Wellington, New Zealand, mothersnetwork.org.nz

Mix an open-source culture, cool tools, a deliciously creative space in San Francisco Bay Area, on-site childcare and a bunch of ‘make-or-do’ mothers, and you have the Mothership HackerMoms, the world’s first collaborative hacker-space for mums, mothership.hackermoms.org