



nurture

A UX case study for a social app to help new mothers
combat loneliness.

Context

Nurture was a project a colleague and I took to [Ignite Pre-Accelerator](#) in 2017 in response to the growing problem of loneliness in the UK. We won a place on the pre-accelerator programme with this tech startup idea. Ignite provided support, mentorship and networking opportunities to help us figure out what steps to take next.

New mothers are a group particularly vulnerable to loneliness but often overlooked. Research by the British Red Cross and the Co-op, found that 82 per cent of new mothers under 30 feel lonely some of the time and 80 per cent of mothers under 30 meet their friends less after having a child.

The concept was to create a friendship app that could help new mums connect and facilitate open and honest discussion about the full experience of being a new mum - even the difficult parts.

My role: Lead UX Design/Research

Team size: 2 me + CFO

Duration: 4 Weeks

The challenge

An old proverb says, 'it takes a village to raise a child' but today, often in cities, new mums can be left feeling like they don't have the support they need.

Nurture aims to help women establish contacts with other expectant and new mothers. Particularly mothers without family and friends close by. It also aims to be a way for new mums to keep mentally and emotionally healthy and access mentors and support.

Problem statement

How might we create an app that makes it easy for new and expectant mothers to connect with each other in their local area and arrange to meet up, socialise and support each other?

Personas



Karen, 26

Recently had her first child

Motivations: “moving to a new place four weeks after my baby was born meant that I had no network around me and no-one to share the ups and downs and a cup of coffee with”

Obstacles: “life with a newborn is so unpredictable and tiring, I find it hard to find any time for myself and I never know what will come up each day.”



Ellie, 30

Expecting her first child

Motivations: “I’d like a space where I can ask other expectant mothers questions - even stupid ones! Question I might not feel comfortable asking my friends or family.”

Obstacles: “I see images of smiling mums and dads in the media that I can’t relate to. I prefer to see honest images of families and families that look like mine.”



Suzannah, 34

Just had her second child

Motivation: “after I had my first child I felt really isolated and lonely. That experience showed me how important it is to have people around that understand what you’re going through.”

Obstacles: I don’t have a facebook account, I prefer signing-up to new apps using my email. I want to be able to control what information I share online.”

Research goals

I put together a one page research plan that was clear and digestible for stakeholders who needed to believe in what we were doing, act on our research results, and ultimately, invest in our idea.

We decided to dedicate the full four weeks of the programme to refining the idea through research and testing. After that we would engage a visual designer and developer to take the product further.

I identified three user research goals to focus on:

1. Easy on-boarding

An estimated 77 per cent of users abandon an app within the first three to seven days of downloading it. This gives us a very small window in which to impress first-time users and show them the value of our app. How can we create an on-boarding experience that shows users the benefits of *nurture*?

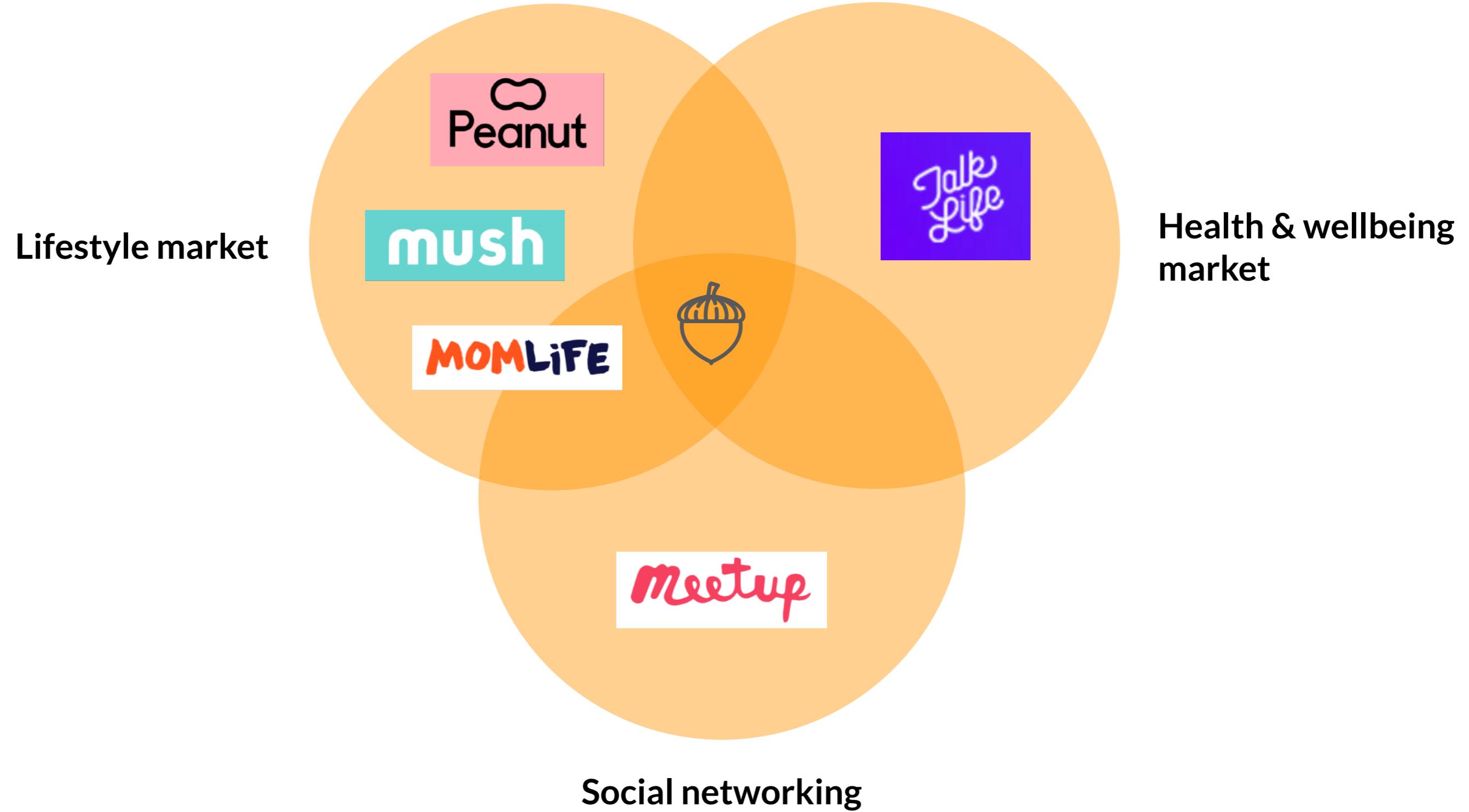
2. Inclusive and welcoming vibe

How might we foster a platform that promotes support and well-being? What features will make mothers feel supported? What type of content will be reassuring, friendly and non-judgemental?

3. Notifications that add value

How can we use notifications to hook users in so they keep engaging with the app. The more they engage the more likely they are to make connections. How can we make sure notifications don't become annoying or intrusive?

Competitor analysis



Competitor analysis

Indirect competitors

Features	mush	Peanut	MOMLiFE	Talk Life	Meetup
iOS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Android	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Web					✓
Cost	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
In app purchases	✓			✓	✓
Search by location	✓	✓	✓		✓
Forum/Public posting	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Messaging	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Marketplace	✓		✓		
Sign-up with social	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Competitor analysis: insights

Pain points

A significant number of reviews for *Mush* and *MomLife* showed some mums were discouraged from using the forum feature because other mums made judgemental comments or responded critically to their questions.

182 of 683 reviews for *Peanut* on the app store mentioned being frustrated by the fact that the app requires the user to have a facebook or gmail account to sign-up.

Bugs - the app crashing and freezing. Coming across a lot of fake user accounts.

Pleasure points

Having the option to message another mum at any time, even at 4am when they are also awake feeding their child.

The 'ask an expert' feature allowing users to ask a question through the app and get a personalised email back to their inbox as soon as the Expert has answered. Paid feature.

Filtering mums by the age of their child. This helped women find mums with children that were at similar developmental stages to their own and share knowledge and wisdom.

User scenario



Karen wants to know if there are any good cafés in the local area that are welcoming for mums with newborns.

She asks google but can't find anything specific. Some cafés say 'child friendly' but she really wants to know where she can breastfeed without getting glared at.

Pain point
If the sign-up process is lengthy or requires too much personal information, Karen might decide it isn't worth the effort.

Karen goes to the app store and searches 'apps for mums'. She finds *Nurture* and downloads it.

She searches for mums in her area and sends a question: "Hi, anyone know a cafe in Totnes where I can take my little one? Preferably somewhere I can breastfeed if I need to, without getting any funny looks!"

Karen is very busy and might forget about the app if she isn't reminded.

Sam sends Karen an invite to meet up on Tuesday at 10. *Nurture* sends Karen a reminder before the scheduled meet-up time.

Sam is added to her network so Karen can now message her directly.

Pain point
Karen doesn't know how she will be feeling on Tuesday. If she misses the group meeting she still wants a way to keep in touch with Sam.

She replies, "Great thanks Sam! I'll try and make it on Tuesday"
She requests to add Sam as a connection.

Karen receive a reply: "Hey Karen! My friend's husband runs a small cafe on Longcombe Street called *The Terrace*. I go there with my little one all the time. A mums group meet on Tuesday morning at 10am. Sam"

Audience

Who?

- New mums who have given birth in the last five years.
- Aged between 18 and 50.
- Mums looking for more support from other mums
- Mums looking to meet other mums with small children
- Pregnant women
- Mums wanting to socialise/share wisdom/ask questions about motherhood

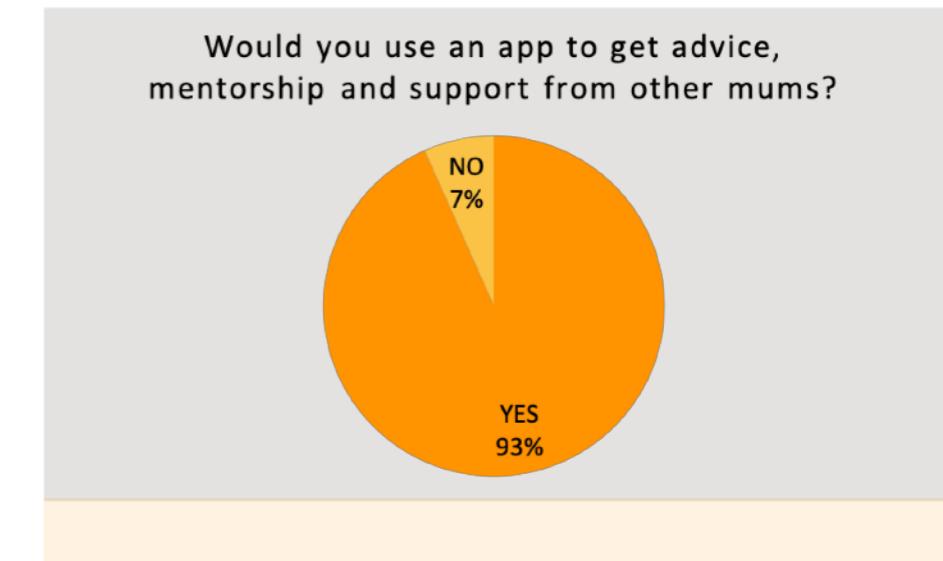
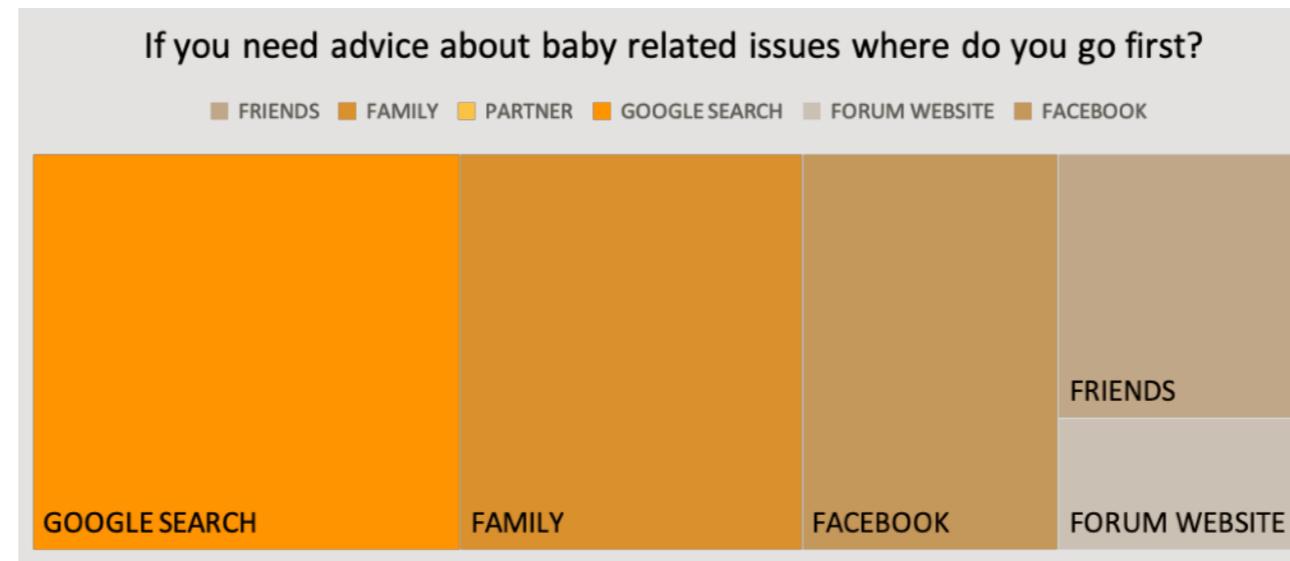
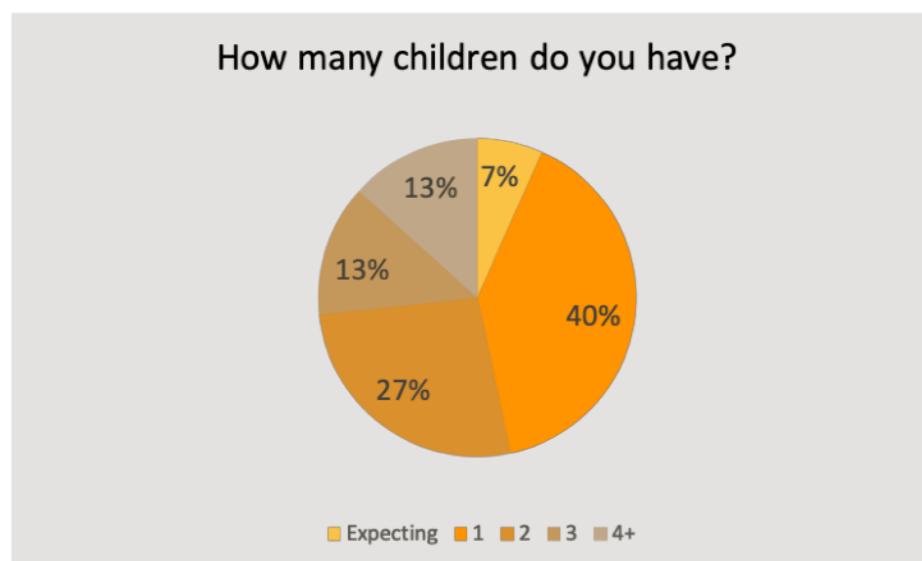
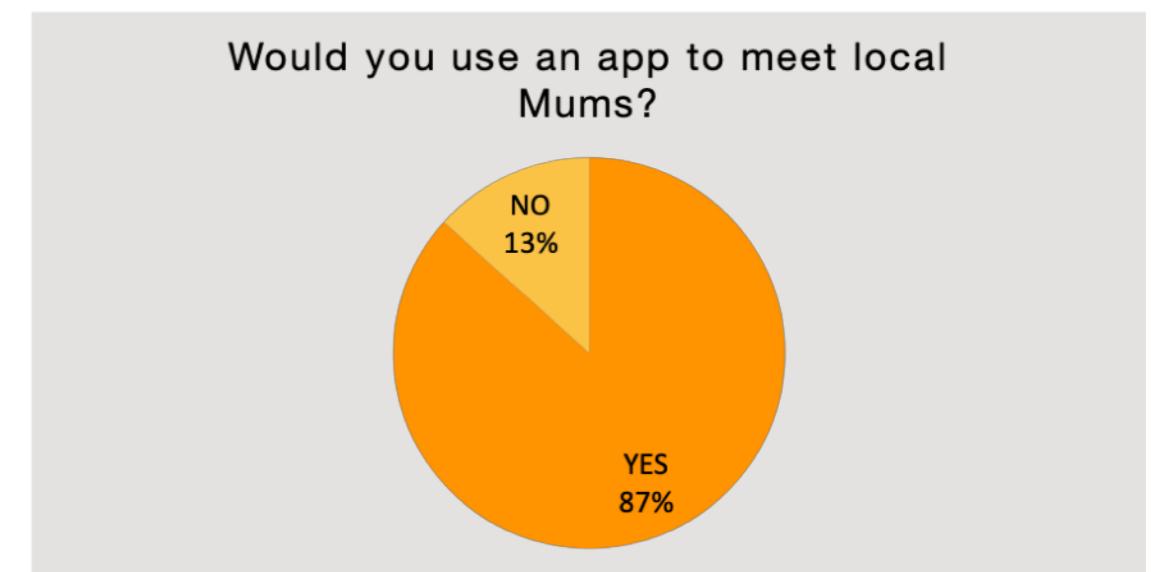
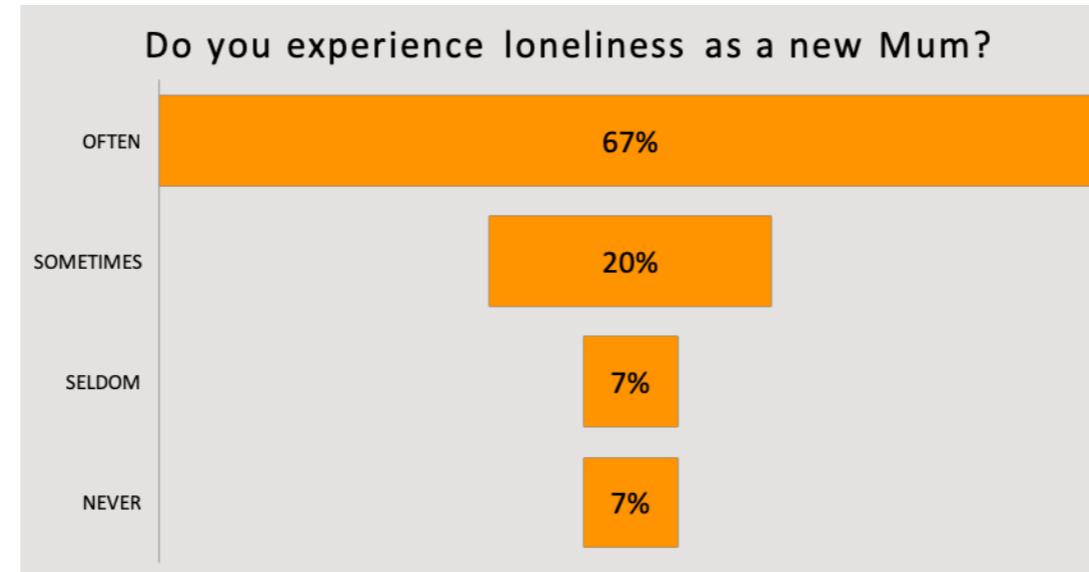
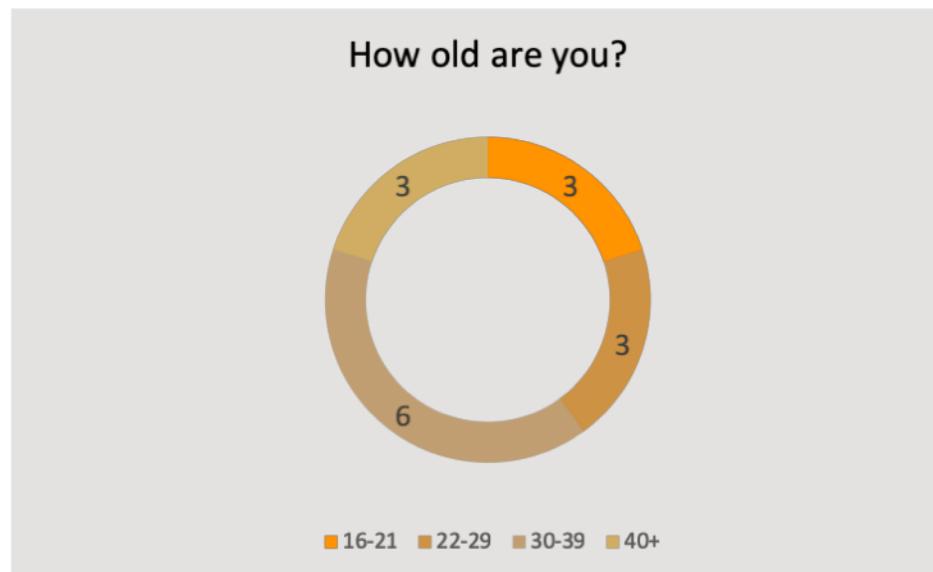
Where?

I placed a notice in my local library where 'Rhyme Time' sessions for babies and parents takes place on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 10am. The notice summarised the app idea and invited anyone fitting the criteria to follow a link to complete a short survey.



Survey results

I had 15 recipients respond to the survey. I found the results supported the hypothesis that new mothers sometimes struggled with loneliness and would use technology to seek out advice on parenting issues.



User interviews

The pre-accelerator programme took place in a co-working space. As participants we were able to use the space to conduct user interviews and later, to test our paper prototypes.

I interviewed each participant for 1 hour asking 15 questions. I recorded the interviews on two devices and asked my colleague to take notes so I could focus on conducting the interview.



Recording interview results

Question	Time	Key	Comment
Tell me about the type of features you use on social apps?	10:15 10.23	q p q n	<p>"I like the idea that this could open up a pool of new friendships. Would I be able to create groups? I create groups on Whatsapp."</p> <p>"I think I would feel awkward or too shy to ask personal things to strangers. I like dating apps that make it easy to send messages to people by matching them."</p>
How is being an expectant or new mum making you feel?	11:22	q i	<p>"People keep asking if I am excited, I am but I'm also actually quite scared. There is this expectation that I should only be feeling positive emotions about being pregnant. Maybe the app could be a place where people talk about this?"</p>
Which features on your favourite social platform could you not do without?	11:04	q u	<p>"I'd want to be able to hide information on my profile or block people."</p>

Key

u -usability
 p -positive
 n -negative
 q -quote
 b -bug
 i - insight

My assumptions and why they were wrong

- Not being a parent, I assumed it would be easy for new mums to arrange to meet up in person but my research showed me that life with a new born is unpredictable and plans often need to be cancelled at the last minute. Similarly, pregnancy can be tiring and expectant mothers might not feel like going out. Lack of childcare and money are also barriers to socialising in person.

Potential solutions: in app calling/messaging

- I assumed all mothers would be supportive and welcoming but feedback shows that judgemental attitudes and unrealistic expectations prevailed. This made it hard for mums to be open about certain topics for fear of judgement.

Potential solutions: establish community guidelines to encourage kind words and behaviours

- The mums who really need this kind of app might be too shy to actually use it. Approaching someone either online or in-person is intimidating for some people and might mean they don't send any messages.

Potential solutions: recommended friends/groups and events based on location or age of child

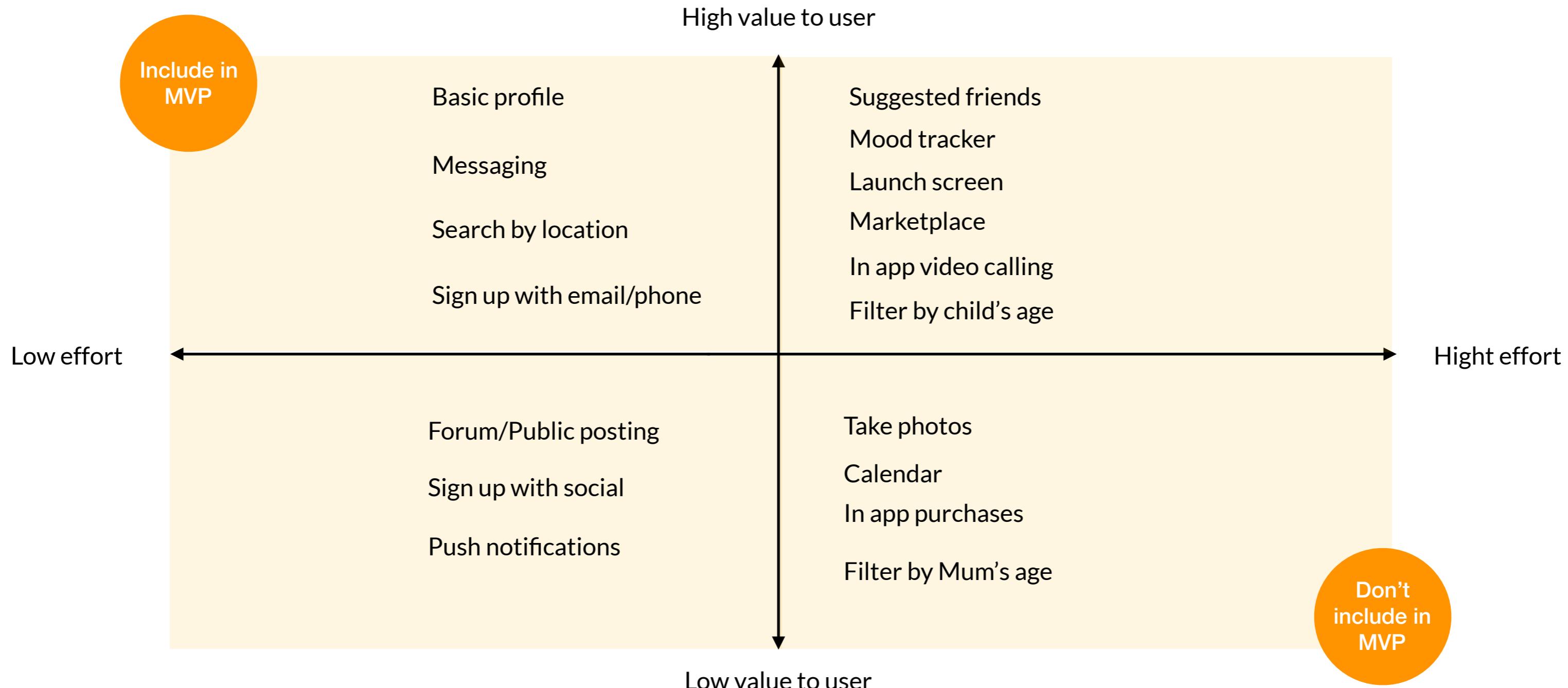
The (new) problem statement

Problem statement

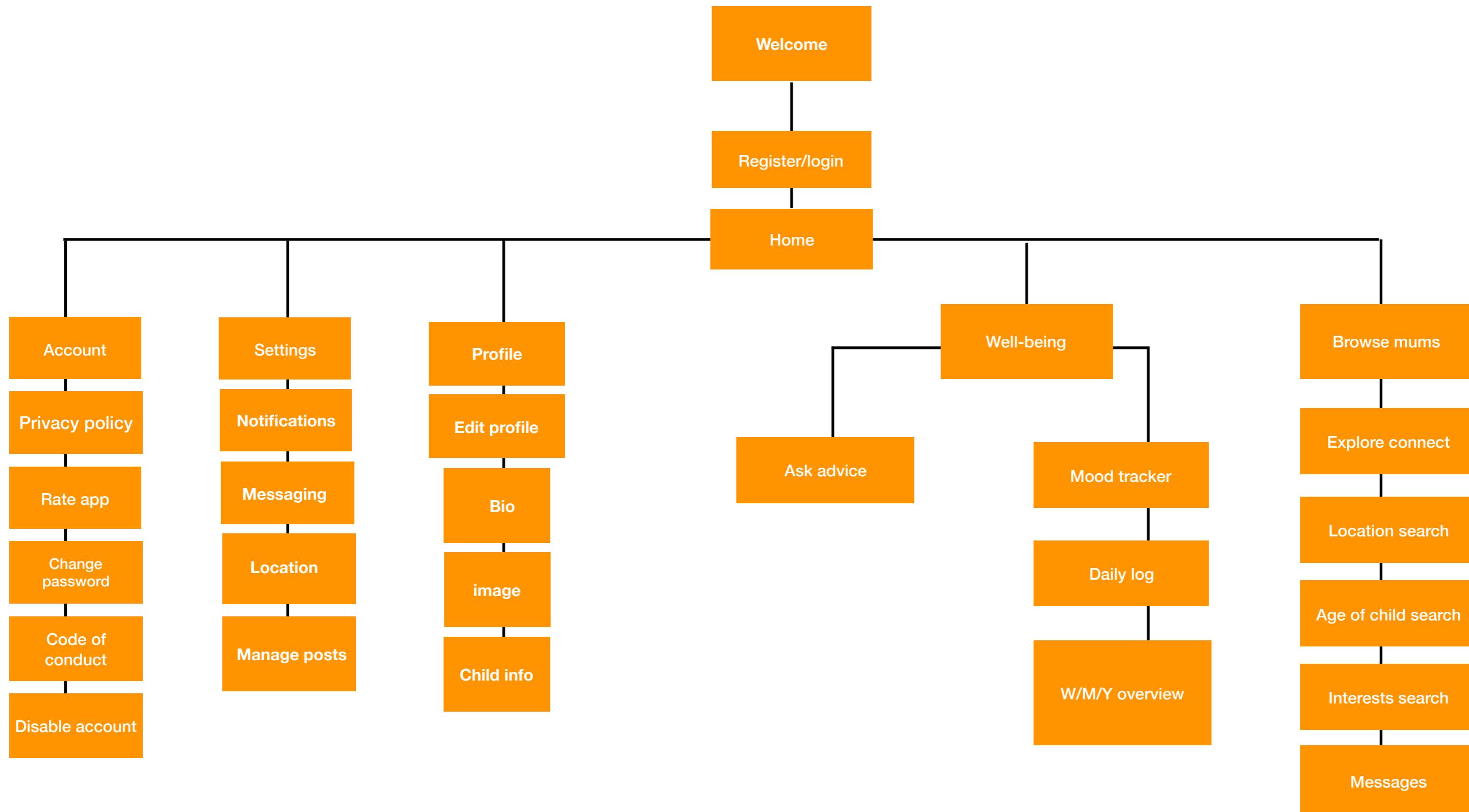
How might we create an app that makes it easy for new and expectant mothers to connect with each other, either in person, over the phone or through messages. How might we help them support their own well-being and give each other advice led by kindness and without judgement.

Feature prioritisation matrix

A prioritisation matrix was the most suitable technique to identify features to include in the MVP.



Information architecture



Using the hook model

I looked at the hook model as a solution to driving continuous engagement within the app. Users are turning to the app to solve the problem of loneliness or lack of adult social interaction. This is the initial trigger.

I wanted to imply an 'action, variable reward, investment' pattern to keep users willing to offer information but to always offer something in return that added value to them. I tried to build this into the apps launch experience:

For example:

Please tell us your location, this will help us connect you with mums local to you. [investment]

There are 212 new or expectant mums in your local area! **[variable reward]**

Please tell us the age of your child, this will help us connect you to mums with children who are a similar age. [investment]

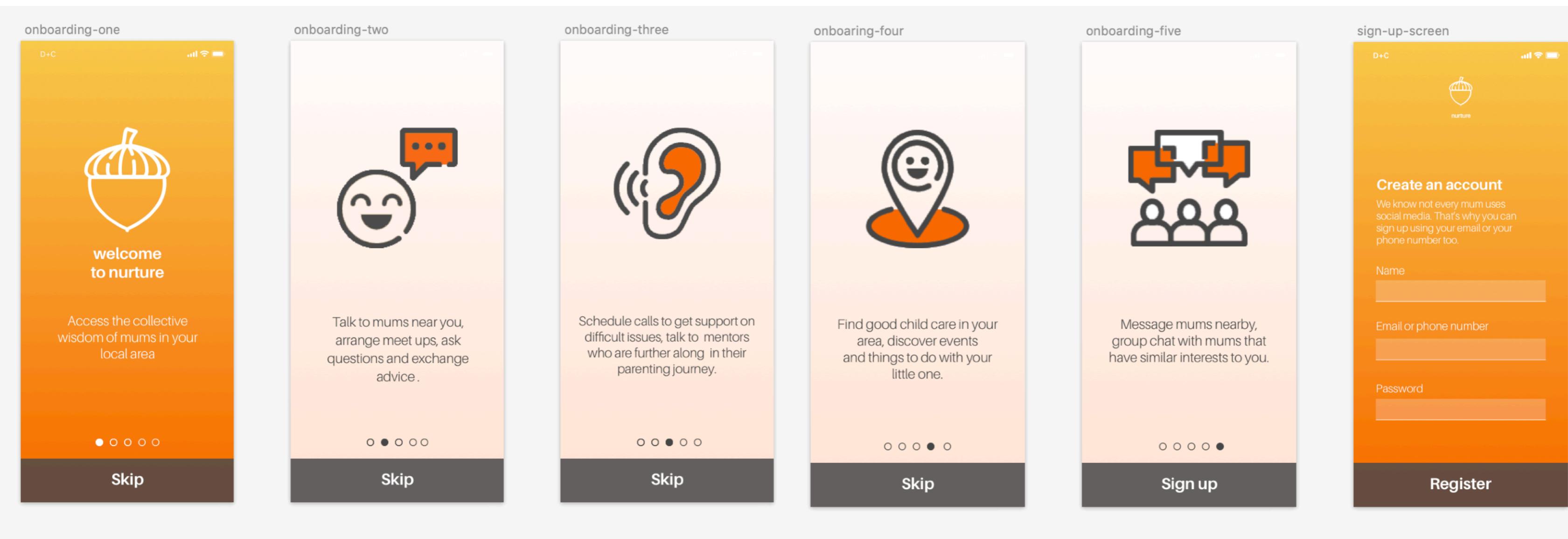
98 mums near you have children the same age! Say hello. **[variable reward]**

The Hook



Launch experience

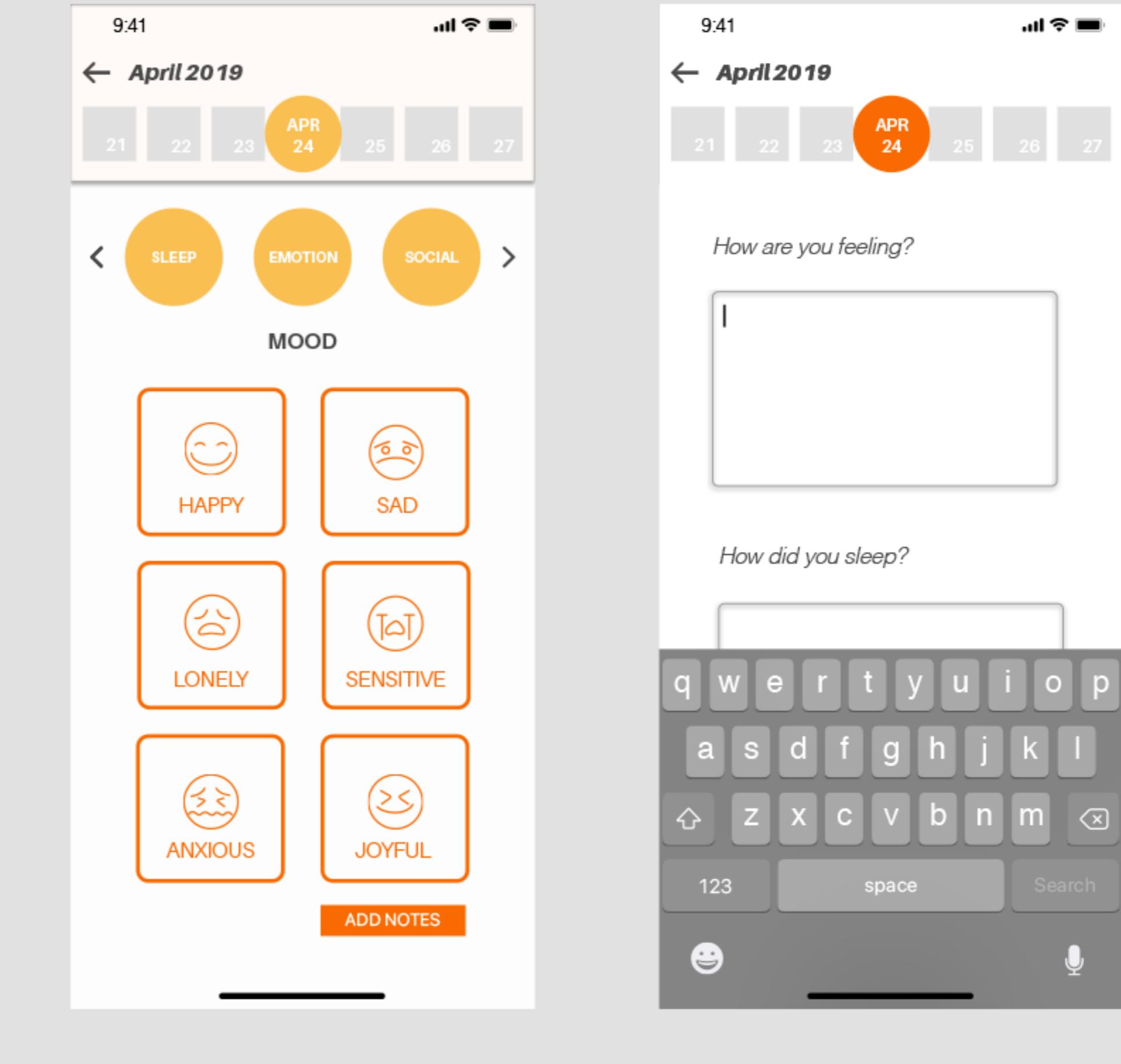
Peanut's on-boarding experience was frustrating. There were too many steps involved in creating an account and too much personal information required upfront. I designed *Nurture*'s launch experience with the aim of telling users exactly what they were signing-up for by highlighting the key benefits of the app before they were asked to input any information.



Mood tracker feature

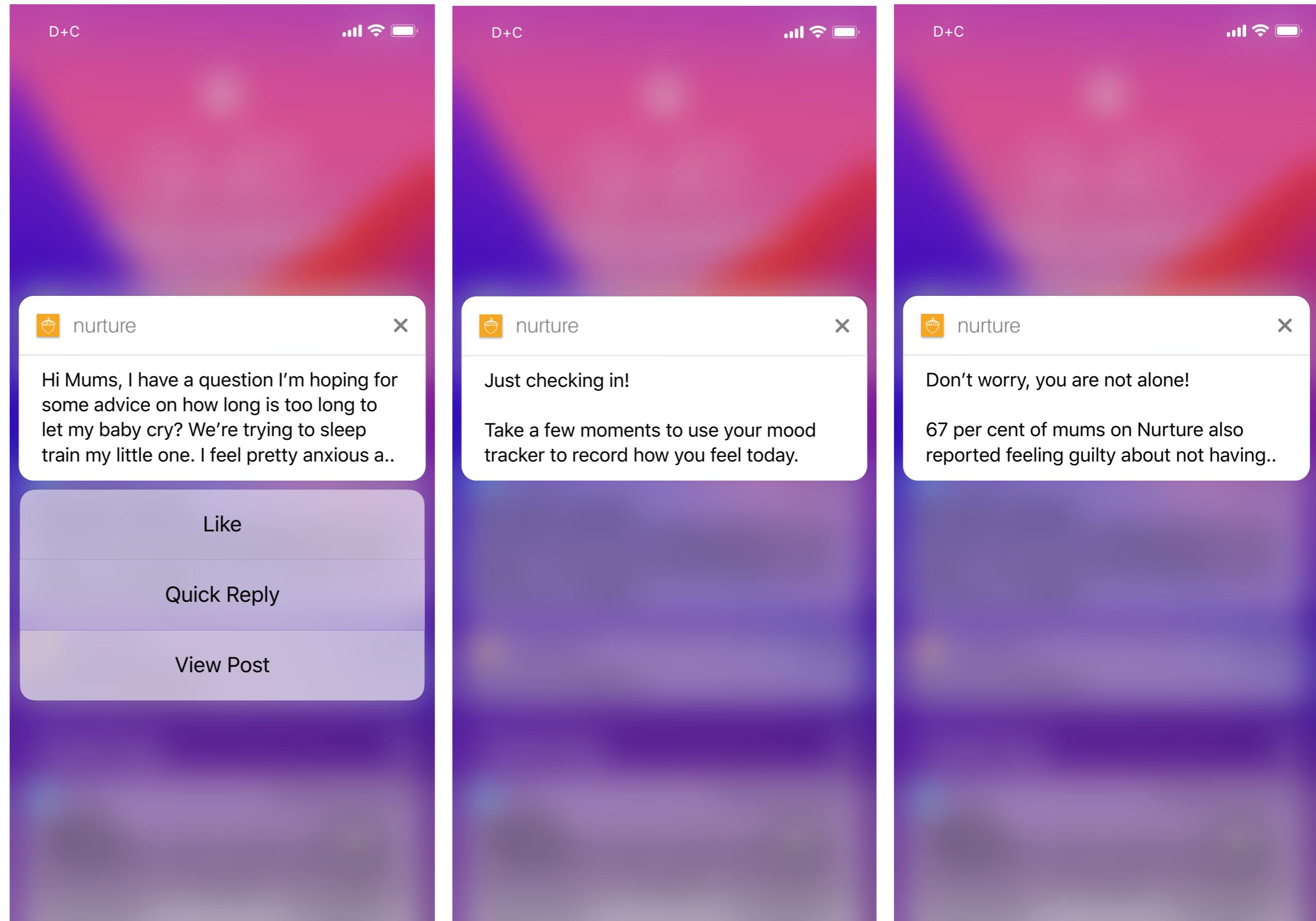
Another way to add value to our users and help the app support the user's health and well-being would be by introducing a mood tracker feature.

Tracking daily mood may help mums notice if they experience changes in relation to their pregnancy or after having a child. Tracking mood may also help them identify other aspects of their life that may be influencing their mood like sleep, stress and the support (or lack) of family, friends or others in a similar situation.



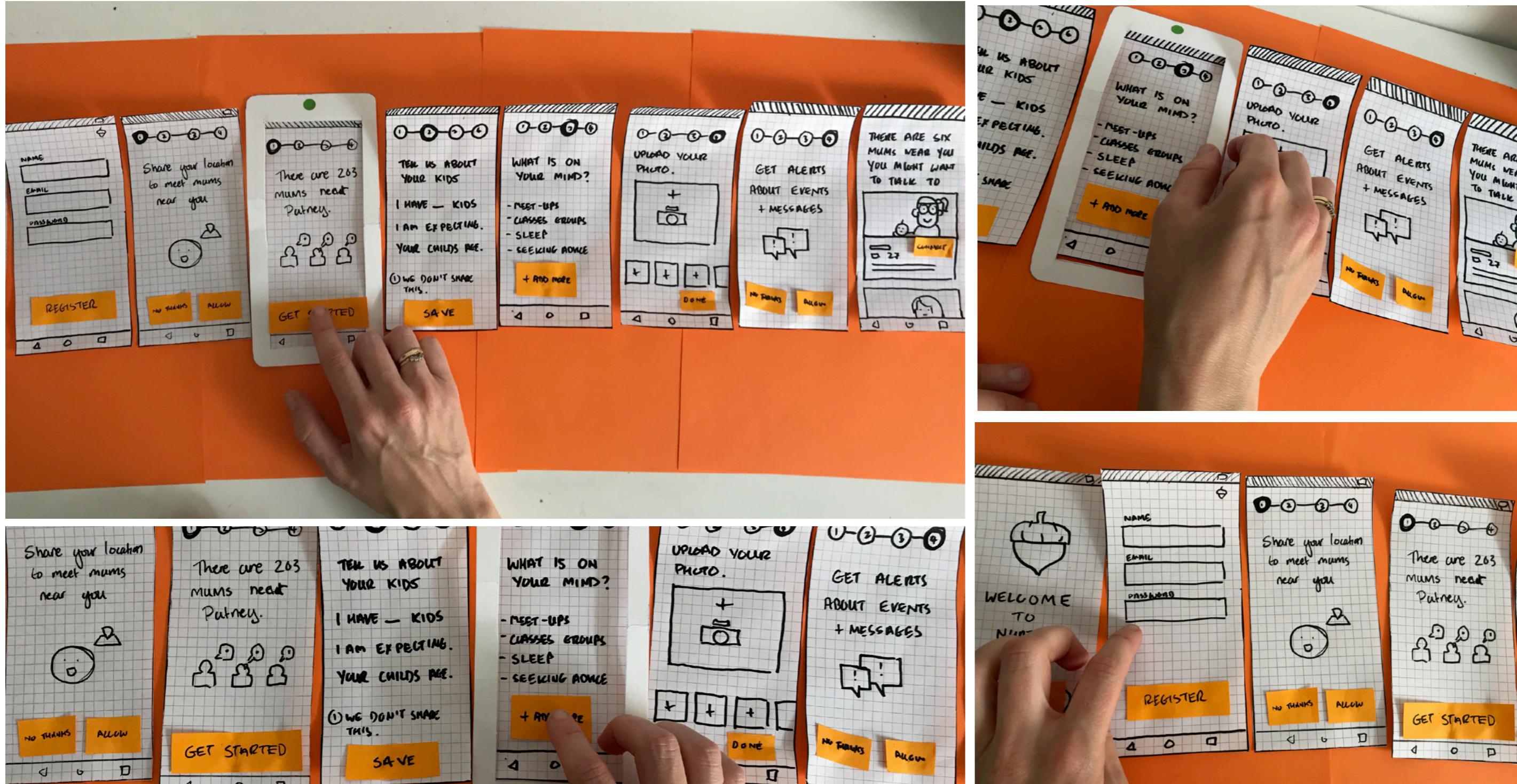
Notifications:

Rather than bombard the user, we would use push notification to reassure them that others shared their experience, prompt them to use the mood tracker to spend a few minutes thinking about their well-being, or inform them that other mums near by needed their advice.



Testing with paper prototypes

The main goal of user testing with paper prototypes was to establish the best flow through the product and gather feedback about ways to improve it.



Visual identity guidelines

Logo

“Mighty oaks grow from little acorns” - this is the inspiration behind the logo for *Nuture*, a stylised acorn. The idea is that by nurturing something well, there is no limit to how big or strong it can grow. This could apply to friendships with other mothers or a mother’s relationship with her child.

Images

My research showed that some mums feel alienated by stock images of unrealistically good looking smiling mothers. These images can re-enforce unrealistic expectations. I decided to use universally representative graphic icons instead of photos. This will be friendlier and less likely to alienate users.

**Abstract icons rather than images
of specific people**



**Clean san serif
font**



nurture

Vibrant colour palette



Next steps

By the end of the four-week pre-accelerator we had taken the idea from an initial concept to a tested prototype that we could put into development.

We pivoted slightly in week two because we realised our assumptions were wrong about new mums being able to make plans easily. Our users told us that the app made more sense to be less focused around meeting up and more focused around peer support.

From customer development to pitching and product development, the accelerator helped us push the product forward. The next step was to find investment for the idea and a CTO to make it a reality.



Thanks for reading!