

**Alice Ellerby** talks to **Eva Fernandes** about projects that connect her to people and planet



Eva, left, with Baby Bank Network co-founder, Becky Gilbert



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You can find out more about Eva's work at [balancecarbon.org](https://balancecarbon.org) and [babybanknetwork.com](https://babybanknetwork.com).

**Have you always been a social entrepreneur?**

**What motivates you?** Questioning the normal way of doing things is how I'm wired. I can put that down to my ancestry. My parents were refugees from Kenya and my mum was pregnant with me when she arrived in London in 1970 with my two older sisters. Both my parents were born in east Africa because my grandparents moved there from India when the British took labourers to build Africa's infrastructure. We have a Goan (Portuguese Indian) culture, so I've inherited a cosmopolitan mindset; we are people of Earth, not of a specific country carved out with imaginary lines by warring men! I suppose I have maverick tendencies. I ask why and I question the status quo. I'm also an optimist. I have hope for a positive future, one that is fairer for everyone and where we are not damaging Mother Earth. I want to see that for my children, grandchildren and future generations. Playing a part in helping that unfold motivates me.

**Is there a common thread between the projects you've been involved with?** Yes, it's around mothering, and by that I don't just mean the relationship between a mother and her child, but the way we take care of one another, animals and our planet. Mothering also reminds us to go back to the basics of what's important – having our basic needs met and being in connection with another being. Children need 'presence not presents', yet through marketing and the undermining of the importance of mothering, there is a belief that buying stuff will make you a better parent. We are beginning to realise this is not true.

**Can you tell us about your new venture, Balance Carbon?** I've always dreamed of being a philanthropist and of the projects I'd support if I had the money. Balance Carbon is me getting to do that but with money from companies that have lots of it but don't know the not-for-profit carbon avoiding world like I do. When I started Baby Bank Network Bristol, the motivations were to help people and also to create a way for baby kit and clothes to be reused. When we reuse, we help avoid emissions from new things being made. In 2022, I helped set up the Baby Bank Alliance, which supports the now 300 plus baby banks in the UK. While doing that, I asked myself whether we could raise money for baby banks by selling carbon credits. The answer is yes, but there is a way to go before we can do that. To start with, we are working with companies' ESG funds. They can't claim to be offsetting, but they are still able to support the

organisations. It also occurred to me that there are a lot of other carbon avoiding projects that need financial help and are being overlooked because there isn't a process like this. Right now, the only options companies have are to plant trees or invest in projects overseas, which are questionable in terms of how much carbon they actually sequester or avoid.

**Where do you think our focus should be in terms of the balance between carbon sequestering and carbon avoidance?** We need both. That's why we will support local tree planting and food growing as well as other projects. Prevention has been massively overlooked. We've had 40 years of thinking that recycling is the answer and that we need to make and buy more stuff to help the economy. It's just not true. The next big money-making idea is to build carbon capture machines – it's madness when we have brilliant natural ways to sequester carbon, it's just no one is going to get mega rich from them.

**What has been the impact of the Baby Bank Network nearly 10 years on?** Since our inception in 2015, we have distributed over 411,000 essential items to 10,000 families experiencing poverty or crisis across Bristol. Bought new, these items would have been worth nearly £3 million. Each bundle is a lifeline for a family in need. From safe sleep kits with cots and new mattresses to toiletry packs and pre-loved clothing, these essentials make a tangible difference in the lives of parents and children.

**Your approach seems to be both systemic and grass roots in tackling sustainability. How do these fit together in your thinking?** Without wanting to sound too woo-woo – I see myself as a part of Earth. I'm a human animal and have a connection to all living things that are also a part of the Earth. My purpose in this lifetime is to enjoy the experiences, and I've found the things I have done enjoyable and meaningful. There is a selfish aspect too; being of service to others and Gaia is incredibly fulfilling. A labour of love, if you like.

**Where do you feel your work has made the biggest impact?** I think that is still to come. I know I've made a difference to many mothers. What I love about my work is connecting the dots – seeing things that other people don't because they don't have my lived experience and my unique perspective on things. ●