

Parenting in the Arts: Juggling and Struggling

Held at Cumbernauld Theatre on Tues 10th May

Chaired by Anna Ehnold-Danailov and Cassie Raine from Parents in Performing Arts (PIPA)

Panel members: Cora Bissett (Associate Director, National Theatre of Scotland)

Joe Douglas (Associate Artistic Director, Dundee Rep)

Mhari Robinson (Freelance Producer)

Anna and Cassie chaired an extremely informative session, leading to the following feedback to be addressed by companies, venues and funding bodies in advance of a further session.

Cassie and Anna introduced themselves and explained what PIPA is and has been set up to explore.

Event held in London had 400 attendees and 70 babies. A consortium is in the process of being set up.

A research project involving 15 theatres is underway, with a best practice charter written for theatres/companies etc to sign up to. The aim is to then also roll out across other arts sectors.

Panel introductions

Cora Bissett talked about the Facebook group for arts workers who are parents that she set up to address child care needs and informal meetings throughout the year.

Joe Douglas from Dundee Rep spoke about being a family friendly employer, children are part of the working environment. This has been ad hoc but can become the norm. Childcare issues needs to be seen as an accessibility issue.

Mhari Robinson - freelance producer is currently looking for a best practice ideas to accommodate the needs of parents.

Cora – how do we schedule rehearsals to accommodate this?

Anna – undertook casting day with children there and works around school schedules to avoid high childcare costs.

Issues unique to arts sector for parents:

Last minute nature of work and jobs

Antisocial hours, tech week and to 12 hour days.

Inflexibility of childcare, nannies are much higher cost.

Can actors help each other with childcare?

Joe – there needs to be a shift to see it as part of the creative process it's part of being human. In tech week in Dundee, they finish at 6pm - the cost of overtime was halved by extending tech period over additional 3 days which works out financially as the same.

This does mean more dark time for the theatre, ie restaurant business, but everyone involved has more energy and it works for peoples childcare needs.

It works for Dundee but might not work for

Lyceum or producing companies who can't get the additional tech time in a theatre.

Maryam Hamidi suggested starting earlier in the day as childcare is available then - work 9am - 4pm for example.

Kirstin McLean suggested being more efficient with time (tea breaks often stretch to 30 mins for instance). Working shorter days and being more efficient helps everyone - actors have time in evening to learn lines; production meetings not eating in evenings by happening at the end of rehearsals.

Inflexible working practices - some theatres won't allow people access to the building before 10am.

Glas performance spoke of how they work with participants and have to fit around their needs. They do worker shorter hours and more efficiently to fit with childcare 9am - 3.30 and they find they get a lot done with this approach.

There were comments re: how other industries have had to make a shift due to childcare needs and we also need to make that shift; any industry can change so why can't we? People commented on finding it hard to go and see work now that they have children - could theatres provide crèche facilities to accompany certain productions - I.e. This restless house trilogy - impossible to attend for whole day otherwise.

An example was given of the Royal Court holding a relaxed performance with babies - the actors were fine about this as they were prepared for it.

Could matinees be earlier? 12 or 12.30? Theatres would find this difficult both in trying to make other audience members make that shift to a different time but also in terms of staff scheduling as it would mean a longer day and high wage costs - could be trialled as one off with the evening performance also earlier.

Childcare costs in CS applications as an access need - this can only be included for participants, as it removes barriers to their attendance; staff need to pay this out of their fees.

There was an example of a sole parent of a nine year old and the issues of working in the sector with childcare needs for older children, not just babies. There are very few single parents working in the arts and many women having to step back from careers in the arts when having children - stage managers for example who can no longer tour and so dropping out of the industry. There needs to be more government funding available at a higher level to support this rather than the already stretched arts funding having to support this.

Maternity pay was referenced as a real issue for the sector.

Freelance pay is very poor and it means weighing up whether some jobs are worth it - working for Equity minimum is not viable. However for actors, visibility is an issue - if you disappear to have children someone else will just take your place. The reality of working for 30 years and not having a pension - is it worth it?

The pressures are different if one partner is employed and the other is a freelancer - if both parents are freelance it is much harder to juggle.

Comment re: gender as a protected group and gender not featuring in CS Equalities plan - Christine Hamilton looking at issue of gender info not being requested or recorded.

Equity in England are lobbying strongly re: childcare issues. ACE - don't have policy in place re: childcare costs - people are building into their apps.

Suggestion that childcare issues are treated as a diversity issue and not a lifestyle choice or a luxury.

Jennifer Paterson - for a dancer it is a huge decision to take time out to have a child due to the time it takes to get your body back to the same level and train.

Best practice - could there be subsidised childcare for this sector? Irregular childcare with different people all the time is not nourishing for the child. Could a model be set up ie NTS having a crèche with additional subsidy from government?

Issues around tax credits and childcare vouchers - needs investigation of issues for freelancers. Confusion around what you're entitled to and how to navigate this.

Issues with maternity pay only going to the mother rather than both - if mother works more than 10 days she loses maternity pay - could this be shared between both parents?

Could FST arrange a training/advice session?

Freelance fees need to increase to reflect the cost of childcare - ie it's a business cost for some people. Freelance rate shouldn't just be the living wage - it should reflect experience; holiday pay; business rates - it should be a proper daily rate.

Could there be best practice guidelines for theatres and organisations?

Group Feedback

Are there examples of best practice, existing or ideology?:

- Changing the culture and setting examples of asking about parental issues
 - Recognising it's a requirement
 - Effective/Flexible scheduling- - daytime production meetings/ sticking to scheduling
 - Informal crèche
 - Non face-to-face meetings
 - Baby/child friendly accommodation when working away from home
 - Relaxed performances (explore options)
 - DSM job-share
 - Possibilities for alternative matinee performances
-

What can RFOs and building based theatres do to support both employees and freelancers?

- Stand up and be counted as family-friendly
 - Sign up to the PIPA charter
 - Be open about values and policies
 - Integrated policy (eg. BSL) it should be an access requirement with no judgement
 - Job-share; Networks to be put in place to find partners, and be open to discussion
 - Take note of smaller companies' flexibility:
 - host discussion/conference
 - joined up thinking
-

Key recommendations/solutions for funders and organisations to undertake?

- Childcare digs list (babysitters/nannies etc)
 - Parenthood is power versus parenthood is weakness
 - Shaming of archaic policies and perceptions
 - Spearheading implementation of change to policies/flexible working
 - Building focused 'Utopian space' for creatives/hotesk/childcare
 - Agencies for advice locally and nationally
 - Forums such as these to feel empowered and continue to effect change
-

PRACTICAL STEPS MOVING FORWARD:

More regular discussions

Room for application forms including access

Participants can have it as an access costs, this should be interrogated for wider use

Discussion on recurring issue: Rates of pay too low. Pay a higher rate - a living wage

Meeting of big companies and building based theatres

FST expert panel, advice (tax credits etc)

Artist focused child care area

Flexible working practices

Supporting ourselves and creating initiatives