Working parents in arts: conditions are ‘worsening’

MATTHEW HEMLEY

Juggling a career in the performing arts with being a parent or carer has become more “insecure and precarious”, with a study suggesting that conditions have worsened compared with five years ago.

Parents and carers earned £2,000 less than other workers in 2013, when the latest analysis was carried out, compared with a gap of £3,000 in 2018, when the first study was conducted.

Meanwhile, almost nine out of 10 women (89%) surveyed said they had needed to reduce working hours or their availability to manage caring responsibilities, compared with 71% of men, and half of respondents said they had needed to give up a job or paid work, with women the most affected (90%) compared with 75% of men.

The results are included in the second edition of the Parents and Carers in Performing Arts survey, Balancing Act: Take Two. It was commissioned by PIPA and carried out by Birkbeck, University of London. It received responses from 1,215 people, most of whom worked in theatre in all areas such as performing arts, on stage, backstage, administrative and executive, employed and self-employed roles.

More people who responded to the survey (80%) had caring responsibilities than in 2018, when this was 75%.

According to PIPA, the results show “a concerning deterioration in conditions for parents and carers within the performing arts sector”, including “a growing pay disparity, escalating rates of underemployment and the significant toll of work-life imbalance on well-being”.

The key findings of the survey are:

Parents and carers now face a “pay penalty” of £2,000, more than doubling since 2016.

Almost nine out of 10 people (88%) have had to turn down work due to caring responsibilities, compared with 81% five years ago.

One in four people had to borrow money from friends or family. A “small but significant” number of people (4%) have had to use a food bank and or have sold or released equity from their homes (3%).

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Equity takes fight against Spotlight fees to TUC

GEORGIA LUCKHURST

Equity will present its case to end Spotlight’s “tax on hope” to the Trades Union Congress this September.

The union will submit its policy to transfer the cost of finding work from jobbing actors on to the “bosses” looking to hire them at the TUC conference in Brighton. Equity vice president Jackie Cline said challenging that long-standing protocol felt “radical, important and brave”.

It follows a unanimous vote in favour of a motion tabled by equity council member Jassa Ahluwalia at the union’s annual conference, held in Birmingham from May 9 to 10. Ahluwalia emphasised that Equity’s hope was “not to dismantle Spotlight” or similar sites, but to reconfigure its system, saying: “It’s unheard of for workers to be funding the primary recruitment tool on behalf of their employers – it’s absurd.”

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