

## **WEN Café: Women's caring responsibilities**

**Friday 17<sup>th</sup> July 2020**

### **Summary of discussion and outcomes**

**Chair:** Catherine Fookes, Director, WEN Wales

### **Speakers:**

Carina White, Dope Black Mums

Sarah Rees, equal parenting campaigner

Speakers shared information on issues surrounding childcare both prior to and during the Covid-19 pandemic. Women have taken on more caring responsibilities in the home since this crisis has started. Speakers shared their own experiences and suggested solutions.

- Many women are juggling their own work and study, childcare, home schooling. Exercising and taking care of mental health has been difficult. Some women have faced increased levels of domestic violence, and single parents have had little support.
- The Pregnant Then Screwed phonenumber has received many calls from parents whose employers are pressuring them to return to work or the office, however they cannot because their children are not in school and there is no childcare provision. The four-week period when children went back to school meant that children had one or two days per week in school, which has meant there has not been a return to any previous level of childcare support.
- As women are still more likely to be the lower earners in a family, many were the first to be furloughed or to request furlough in order to take care of their children.
- Childcare provision is an issue that pre-dates Covid. The cost is a barrier that prevents many parents from accessing it. Ordinarily many parents rely on family members, but this has not been possible during lockdown. Flexible working policies are needed and government should be putting the onus on employers to put such policies in place, including opportunities to work from home.
- The childcare offer should begin from 6 months old and should be more widely available, such as to the self-employed, students etc.
- Alex Davies-Jones MP said women are more likely to work in key frontline sectors such as the NHS and in social care, in supermarkets and in retail. Women are not only caring for children but also for elderly parents or other family members unable to care for themselves.
- Carers need to be able to access mental health and wellbeing support.
- Summer holiday provision is needed, particularly for parents who are key workers.
- One suggested idea is a Universal Basic Income pilot for parents.
- Speakers and participants discussed the importance of normalising bringing children to work and the need for something to be done to encourage men to take extended paternity leave, work from home or leave work early to take care of children etc. A shift in culture is needed.
- Wraparound support and provision needed
- Key worker childcare support for the under-5's has been transformational for women.

- Black women are disproportionately affected e.g. five times more likely to die during childbirth. Many women in the Dope Black Mums group have experiences with racism and discrimination in a healthcare context.

#### KEY POLICY SOLUTIONS RECOMMENDED BY PANEL:

- Free Universal Childcare for all and in the interim, at least free childcare for ALL from 6 months
- Not only is there a Gender pay gap there is an **ethnicity** pay gap – companies should be forced to report on their ethnicity pay gap
- There should be a **cap** on how much private nurseries can charge
- Force employers to offer more flexible working e.g. part time roles, and job shares
- Bonuses for nurseries to open outside of traditional hours
- Build networks and sisterhoods and campaign together