

WEN Café: The balancing Act of Parenting during COVID-19

25th February 2021

Summary of discussion

Chair: Catherine Fookes, Director, WEN Wales

Speakers:

Bethan Sayed MS, South Wales West

Jack Sargeant MS, Alyn and Deeside

Niki Jones, Mental Health Counsellor & Therapist

Marla Ellis, Self-employed Business Owner and Mother

The pandemic has further highlighted the need for change with regards to childcare and caring responsibilities. In this discussion, we asked panellists about the balancing act of parenting during Covid-19, how the pandemic has affected caring responsibilities, and how we can ensure caring is at the heart of the pandemic recovery.

- The gendered inequalities of caring responsibilities were clear even pre pandemic. The pandemic has only exacerbated these inequalities. For many women this has meant a lack of workplace opportunities, loss of working hours and/or jobs, and time off without pay.
- Many families are reliant on family members such as grandparents and their close network to help manage childcare, however the pandemic has made this impossible and all responsibilities are firmly placed on parents.
- One of our panellists discussed recent research women in which women described a surge in mental health problems during this time that have not been dealt with due to busy work and family schedules, along with the difficulty in accessing healthcare due to the pandemic. Access to health visitors and maternity services has also become a challenge, evidently having a negative effect on expectant parents and new mothers.
- There are hopes that more women and parents being elected in the upcoming Senedd elections will allow for more discussion around further provisions and support for childcare. Diverse and equal representation would allow for knowledge and understanding from a multiplicity of candidates with different cultures, backgrounds and experiences shaping legislation.
- Self-care was a dominant topic within the discussion. It is important for parents to take time to concentrate on themselves and their own mental and physical wellbeing without feeling burdened with guilt. Allowing for conversations with partners to understand each other's needs and boundaries and how to equally share childcare and allow time to put themselves first when it is needed.
- Childcare responsibility should not be solely placed on parents - businesses and industries must adapt and introduce policies to support parents in juggling childcare/home-schooling and their careers. It is important for companies to continue having conversations with their employees and introduce better systems to support parents.
- Data showed that mothers are taking on the majority of childcare responsibilities, with twice as many mothers compared to fathers agreeing that they would have to take unpaid leave if schools/nurseries were closed.
- There must be investment into care and a caring economy model put in place to support parents with childcare and home-schooling to allow for them to balance work, family, and wellbeing effectively.

WEN are calling for political parties to:

- offer affordable and accessible childcare for all children from six months (including disabled children and children with additional learning needs), to all parents, including to non-working parents.
- collect robust equality data as part of the evaluation and monitoring of the Childcare Offer to ensure equality of access and eligibility.
- commit to providing childcare hubs for asylum seeker families.
- progress existing plans to ensure all care workers in Wales are paid fairly and have access to training and clear routes for career progression if they want it.
- allocate funding to give carers a choice of quality respite services and monitor local authority spending on respite care and evaluation of the effectiveness of the funding.