Quote Unquote Collective created the following *Project Field Notes* in 2022 as part of their Balancing Act Level UP! Pilot Project.

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BALANCING ACT

Quote Unquote Collective
Level UP! Care Solutions Pilot
Project Field Notes

The following notes were written in 2022 by Norah Sadava, Quote Unquote Collective's Co-Artistic Director, after Quote Unquote completed their Level UP! Pilot Project.

Project Focus: Family care support for workshop participants.

Project Inspiration: Supporting family care is a core value of Quote Unquote Collective.

Planning and implementation

We began planning our care solutions pilot about six months in advance (Summer 2021). It was important to us to have the funds available to cover family care before we started inviting artists to join our project. We wanted to be able to offer to cover family care in the initial invite, instead of it coming at the contract stage or the artists having to ask for it.

The pilot lasted roughly five to six weeks (November - December 2021), with some writing/creation period and then three weeks of in-studio rehearsal and workshopping. We then had an hour long Zoom debrief session (our workshop ended three days early due to Covid so the session had to be virtual).

We sent out an email to artists where we provided information about care support available. We offered to subsidize family care and informed artists that there would be shorter working days and a five-day week, as well as time to pump/feed and a generally flexible vibe (for example, people could leave early for family care needs or personal health care like therapy).

Before the workshop, our partner producer, *Why Not Theatre*, sent out a questionnaire for each participant to complete which included questions about:

- Covid protocol
- Thoughts about making the workshop run as best as it can
- If they will need family care subsidy

We also added a clause to artist contracts.

During the pilot, only one artist needed childcare, and we covered the cost.

Future planning considerations

During the pilot we offered to cover everyone's family care expenses. This is the ideal version, where we cover any additional childcare/family care costs that artists have due to taking part in this project. For this period—which mainly included a three week workshop that involved 10 people in a room– we only had one person who needed childcare. In the future, the reality is that it may not be possible to cover everyone's childcare/family care costs, so we'll likely have to allocate a certain amount of money for every person who needs it (for example, $500/person/week), and then if fewer people end up needing subsidies, that amount can increase for each person. Having said that, deciding how much to allocate, and to who, needs to be determined on a case by case basis. For example, one of our collaborators for another project needs to fly their partner and child in from overseas, so we will be paying for that as well.

Language considerations

When contracting the artistic team, we wanted to try to cast as wide a net as possible so we used the term "family care". During our workshop, there was a lot of discussion about language. We spent a lot of time talking with the entire group (as we created a collective contract together) about the language around childcare specifically and how gender is wrapped up with it. When is it appropriate to use the word parent vs. mother/father? Chest pump rather than breast pump? Nanny/caretaker/caregiver/ babysitter/ childminder/childcare provider? In general, we tried to promote the idea of being intentional with our language.

Sustainability

It's not a question of whether family care support could or should be a regular part of making art professionally. The fact is, it HAS to become part of everyone's process. Every company/group of people who make a project has to consider family care. That doesn't have to mean the same thing for everyone, but everyone has to consider what they are able to do to help artist parents. Because we are losing this game. Artists have been leaving the theatre industry as soon as they become parents since forever and it's still happening. In fact, I'd argue that since Covid, it's happening at a fiery hot pace and

it's really sad that all of the chief caregivers (mostly women) are not part of the conversation. Theatre plays, in large part, are not made by mothers, and that's sad.

It's mostly an attitude adjustment, more than anything that will sustain this. We need it as an accessibility requirement. Every company must have a family care clause in every contract. Every company must commit to helping with family care in the initial invite to an artist—whether that's a casting call or an email—so that parents know that they might have a shot at taking part in a project. So they know they won't have to beg or simply swallow. If you're a company at the beginning stages of your childcare pilot scheme, and you can only offer a small amount of money, that's still something. The very fact that you are thinking about it really says a lot to the artist who is considering taking part. I can say from personal experience: a) I shouldn't have to ask, and b) even if you offer $20/day, I will be way more likely to agree to be part of the production. Because I know that you are thinking about it, I know that you care, and I know that you would like to give more, but you can't, but you're trying.

Supporting artists to balance family care needs with their work can be done. We take hour-long paid lunch breaks because people need to eat and recharge. It's a no brainer. Offering feeding/pumping time: no brainer. Shorter working days, not working weekends: no brainer. I truly believe it can be done and become the norm. But it takes shifting how we consider family care as much as it takes money..