Julie Tepperman and Aaron Willis created the following resource:
Caregiving in a time of crisis (in the arts)...Or has it always been this way?
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convergence theatre

BALANCING ACT

CAREGIVING IN A TIME OF CRISIS (IN THE ARTS)
...Or has it always been this way?

A Personal Essay / Informal Research Paper by
Julie Tepperman (with Aaron Willis)

Balancing Act – Level UP! – Pathways to Agreement
Convergence Theatre, April 30, 2024

BACKGROUND

In the summer of 2023, we approached Susie Burpee and Lisa Marie DiLiberto at Theatre Direct's Balancing Act because we'd heard rumblings that we could possibly apply for some funding to help offset the growing mountain of expenses we were incurring for childcare while both of us were acting in Canadian Stage's *Dream In High Park*. It turns out that we misunderstood—there was not a fund available for such things—but Lisa Marie kindly invited us to be part of the final (year three) cohort of Level UP!, which paid us a generous honorarium to research and write this report as part of their "Pathways to Agreement" Strategy Area.

Typically, it has been theatre companies and arts organizations who have participated in Balancing Act; we however have participated as ourselves: Julie (actor-playwright-arts educator) and Aaron (actor-director-arts educator). Another "hyphen" we share is being "Co-artistic Leaders of Convergence Theatre", the on-again-off-again "immersively curious" company through which we have self-produced and co-produced shows on an irregular basis since 2006.

Convergence Theatre has been purposely dormant since the second half of 2020, which is mainly the result of having two children under the age of three, with the latter being born just six weeks prior to the "OG" pandemic lockdown of March 2020, and it being just us, stuck at home, for two and a half years. We intentionally have never pursued operation funding or charitable status, nor have we ever had or wanted a Board of Directors. This means that we have had $0.00 in our Convergence Theatre bank account for four years, and have been paying our website and domain name fees with our personal credit card. On the plus side, it also means that we've not been legally bound or fiscally accountable to anyone but ourselves. We have always operated as a "shared partnership", on a project-by-project basis, producing when we have the desire and

ability/capacity to fundraise and build teams. That's not to say that we've stopped having ideas (we haven't!), or that we will never produce again, but for the time being, we are happy to move through life with our own small but mighty team of four: Julie, Aaron, and our two children, who were three and five when we both acted in Dream.

And so, whereas most participants have approached their Level UP! research as a company, we are writing this as just us: two artist-parents who met at theatre school in 1998, and spent the first 18 years of our careers just being artists, not parents. We've often worked together and for the past six years (four of which have been in a "post-pandemic world") we have come to realize that we:

a) probably won't be able to afford to work together again until our children are young adults, unless we hit or create some sort of "theatre jackpot";
b) we've always managed to "just barely make it work" but there's literally not enough work out there for us right now, and even if we consistently hopped from job to job, it wouldn't be enough because;
c) we are absolutely drowning in debt from years of self-producing, and from having too high an overhead and too low (two low) incomes; and so
d) one, if not both of us, needs to find work outside of the arts sector that actually pays, **immediately**, if we are to ever emerge from this avalanche of debt, and dare we say attempt to make a decent wage, and, dare we say, start to...what's the word...oh yeah, save? It's not that we're "calling it quits" or "giving up", it's more that we're doing what needs doing in this moment, which is looking at the reality of the situation and making a responsible *adult* decision to "stop the bleed".

PART ONE: THE RICHEST/POOREST SUMMER OF OUR ADULT LIVES...

After nearly three years of at-home "pandemic bubbling" with our kids (and eventually with my parents), running our own two-child pre-school, graduating from virtual kindergarten, and exclusively doing Zoom work, we both received the offer to act in *Dream in High Park*. After nearly 20 years of auditioning for it each summer since graduating from theatre school, we HAD to both say yes! I mean, Aaron was cast as *Bottom*, and I was cast in a variety of fun ensemble roles, so if one of us turned it down it was gonna be me (how gendered!), but in the end we both decided to say YES! And it was an incredibly fun summer, with a fabulous cast, crew, and creative team—everyone got along, audiences of 800+ people every night, biking away from our children to work together on a project we weren't having to produce ourselves or do the laundry for afterwards! In many ways it was such a "rich" experience, a respite and a gift after the last three gruelling years of domesticity and Zoom...It was a "dream".

And it was also a financial disaster.

We knew this heading into it. Our line was, *"We'll be paying for this for the rest of the year, but wow did we have fun!".* At the time of writing this (eight months after closing) we're still paying it off.

Let us break it down for you...

CAEA's CTA ACTOR AGREEMENT, WEEKLY SALARY:	$1,008.50
AMOUNT DEPOSITED INTO BANK ACCOUNT, AFTER DEDUCTIONS:	$901.30
MINUS 10% TO OUR WONDERFUL AGENTS (+ HST):	$113.90
WEEKLY EARNINGS:	$787.40 each

(We felt incredibly lucky and grateful to have a 10-week highly coveted theatre contract, especially during the SAG/ACTRA strike, etc., but if we told any of the parents from our kids' schools who work outside of the arts sector that that's what we made per week—and that's actually INCREDIBLE in our world—they would be...scared for us. And like, "Why???")

But wait! $787.40 x 10 weeks = $7,874 x two people = **$15,748!!!**

(Are you kidding me?! Two actors making that at the SAME time in ONE household?! In our old lives, we'd be seriously killing it! But wait...)

Our incredible babysitter—a responsible adult theatre artist in her own right, who we trust immeasurably and gave the kids an amazing summer—made $25/hr. for a total of **$4,255**, which is 54% of one of our salaries.

And because Dream rehearses throughout July when there was no school for either of our children, we also relied on day camps, for a grand total of **$2,944**, which is 37% of one of our salaries.

So, we spent a total of (and probably even more than this) **$7,199 on childcare, or 91% of one of our salaries,** meaning **one of us made $675 the entire summer,** meaning **one of us basically worked for free** (or **paid to work** depending on how you look at it). And that was WITH my superhero parents helping us out A LOT. Without them, it would have cost a salary and a half.

BUT IT WAS A REALLY FUN SUMMER!!!!!

Again, we knew this would be the case going in. Our incredible agents joined forces to negotiate on our behalf as a team, but despite best efforts and much back-and-forth, the production had a limited budget and there was just no additional funding to help support our childcare needs.

And so, we changed courses: instead of pushing for even the smallest stipend to help cover our childcare expenses, we wrote the director and asked if he'd entertain the possibility of ten "early-outs" for one of us, it didn't matter who, in the first three weeks of rehearsal. This would allow one of us to leave at 3:45pm to pick up one child from camp and relieve the babysitter (or my tired parents), and ultimately saved us $1,000 in childcare. We are forever indebted to this very kind director (since you could easily look it up, we'll save you the trouble and name him: Jamie Robinson!). Jamie is also a parent and not only *gets it* but was willing to live his values and sign-off on it so we could include the ten dates we agreed on into our contracts and make it official, as opposed to it being an informal agreement. He was willing to fight for us—for *both* of us—when, let's face it, we are a dime a freaking dozen.

Admittedly, because there was just one other parent in the cast who as far as we knew hadn't asked for support, we felt like trouble-makers from the get-go. And because we

were coming to this as a couple who *“didn’t both have to say yes”,* we felt like our presence and what we had to offer wasn’t being valued. The whole negotiation process (even with the arms-length barrier provided by our agents) left us feeling like they could take us or leave us, which was a feeling (despite the incredible rapport with the cast and creative team) that was difficult to ever shake. It’s hard to say if it’s a systemic issue (I mean, industry-wise of course it is) or if it just came down to communication, but we wished the conversation between our agents and the show producer had gone more like this:

“Listen, we’re really excited to have Aaron and Julie be part of our cast. We recognize that there are many challenges for them working on this show together while having two small children at home who need care, and I wish we had a budget line for things like this, but everything is extremely tight and we just aren’t able to help them out financially. That said, we’d love to discuss with you and them if there are other things we can do to help offset some of the burden and stress of childcare so that they can come to this experience bringing their A game. We really value Aaron and Julie as part of this team.”

In the end it was due to the generosity, flexibility, compassion, and understanding of the director and to our kind and highly organized stage manager and stage management team that we made it work. Nobody ever made us feel bad for one of us needing to leave, in fact, the stage manager checked in with us daily, in advance of the schedule going out, to make sure they’d gotten it right. Having it written in the contract made it official and alleviated the daily anxiety of having to make an ask, it kept it professional vs. in the land of “favours”, and allowed stage management to plan ahead vs. scrambling to try to accommodate last-minute asks.

Honestly, we HATED leaving! Rehearsal time is so limited to begin with, and I personally LOVE being immersed in a project, having everything and everyone else disappear while I become hyper-focused on the thing I’m working on, at the expense of everyone and everything else in my life. But now with children, and with both of us in the same show, that’s just not our life anymore. But you know, one of the major rewards of this artist-parent deal was something we had yet to experience: getting to show our kids what we do! They visited backstage, and our oldest saw the show three times. Looking out and seeing her gob-smacked face, witnessing her collapse with laughter while her parents acted ridiculously and 800 people cheered, are memories we will cherish for a lifetime. We can only hope that the memories of the time she saw her mom be a lion and her dad get turned into a donkey will last for her as well. I always have this feeling, which I think is fairly common amongst actors, that I’ll never act again; the fact that she got to

witness me do it just once, and on such a large stage (“but it did happen!”) is more gratifying than any review or paycheque period. So there’s that...

Anyhow...that’s where we’re at in a nutshell, and we hope it sets the stage for the next section, which is the bulk of of this “personal research essay”: other artist-parents’ stories, strategies, and ideas for solutions that might benefit the sector at large; a sector that very clearly is suffering from a “caregiving crisis”.

Which brings us to...

PART TWO: WHAT OTHER ARTIST-PARENTS HAD TO SHARE...

Some context / “field notes”

I reached out (over email) to 53 artist-parents from my own peer circle and I also spoke with three talent agents. Of the 53 artists contacted, a total of 25 people shared (47%).

The agents represent clients who are performers (in both theatre as well as in film/TV/media), directors, choreographers, playwrights, composers, designers, and theatre creators. All are based in Toronto and all have ample experience negotiating for clients on tour / working out-of-town. All three agent interviews were conducted over the phone or by Zoom.

All but four artist interviews were conducted over email; two took place over the phone and two in-person over coffee. Artists were not asked any identifying or statistical questions (e.g. age, race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, income, etc.), but because they are all from my peer circle, I know that **of the 25 artists who shared**:

- 17 are mothers (68%) and eight are fathers (32%).
- Everyone is based in Ontario, either in Toronto or in close proximity to Toronto.
- Everyone works in theatre, with a handful of people who also work in film/TV.
  **Two artists who work in TV shared their experiences working long hours on set: one as an actor in a long-running TV show and one as a TV show-runner and executive producer.*
- Recognizing that artists wear many hats, of the people I spoke with, most are performers, two work solely as writers, one works solely as a theatre director, one works solely as a theatre designer, one works solely as a composer, and three currently work full-time in arts admin.

- Many of the artists I spoke with are also regular arts educators, with two people in full-time positions at universities.
- Three people currently have full-time employment outside of the arts sector, but also continue to work regularly in their field at the same time.
- Two people I spoke with are single mothers.
- 20 of the artists I spoke with have children under the age of 12; the rest have teenagers.
- Many people I spoke with have had past experiences with, or currently find themselves in a “Sandwich Generation” moment, as they care for aging parents as well as their children.

Everyone spoke with me on the promise of anonymity.

Artists were asked the following four questions and given a two-week deadline to respond *(these questions were adapted for agents)*:

- When accepting a contract, are there things you have asked for to help with childcare/caregiving challenges that you've actually received and have helped you?
- Are there things you asked for and didn't receive? What was the rationale of the organization who hired you for saying no?
- Are there things you wished you asked for but didn't, and if yes, why didn't you?
- Feel free to ignore the above and write whatever you want!

Of the 53 artists I contacted, 10 wrote me back (including another designer and a stage manager) to acknowledge receipt of my email, and to say that they had every intention of responding. In the end, these 10 didn’t respond, I’m guessing because they’re busy being, you know, artist-caregivers ☺.

I found it encouraging that artists with older kids (aka more independent humans) had trouble remembering! Of the 10 artists above, a common response from the ones with older kids was:

> *“I’ll have to reach back into the recesses of my brain to remember.”* Or, *“My kids are now 12 and 14 so the clouds have parted, somewhat.”*

A response from an artist with a toddler says it all:

> *TEXT MESSAGE: "Hey Julie! I just wanted to say I got your email and I'm so sorry I haven't responded yet. Things are really slammed right now, we've all had the flu and literally every time I sit down to respond the baby starts throwing up! We're supposed to leave for a trip on Thursday so I'm going to try to respond before we leave but if I don't end up responding please know that I tried and that I really appreciate this essay—so important!"*

Some brief observations

Pretty much everyone noted that they were tired/overwhelmed/burnt out/"run off my feet", but were also very happy to share and very glad to hear that Balancing Act exists. As expressed earlier in our group Zoom meetings, although we greatly appreciated and learned a lot from our consultation with Rebecca from Good Roots Consulting on survey creation and ethics, etc. we felt increasingly overwhelmed each time we attempted to make "the perfect survey", and by the prospect of reaching out to a broad audience of strangers and how vulnerable that would feel.

And so, we decided that a personal ask to our friendship and peer circle(s) was more manageable, and in the end it yielded more than a broader, more formal survey might have. Of course, in many ways sticking to one's own networks can be limiting, but given our limited time/energy/capacity to do outreach and to parse/share the results in a way that would be useful (not being statisticians or pollsters!), as well as given the immensely personal nature of these exchanges, we happily discovered that personal conversations (even over email) yielded a lot. Not to mention the unexpected catharsis these very personal exchanges evoked in us.

And so, what follows is an edited selection of the 16 pages worth of comments I collected, formatted in a way that makes sense for my own brain ☺. There was, no surprise, a great deal of overlap and common themes, and I've made an effort to note when more than one person had a similar experience.

Here we go...

1. FROM TWO MOTHERS WHO CURRENTLY WORK IN TV—THINGS THEY HAVE ASKED FOR AND (MOSTLY) RECEIVED:

- More money to cover a portion of childcare costs (50/50 success rate).
- Wiggle room around the schedule (e.g. to minimize the cost of avoidable childcare, with an emphasis on being able to leave and do pick-ups; and scheduling accommodations when nursing).
- Time during rehearsals to review/prepare work (e.g. run lines) for the next day so they can be present when home with family.
- Help in finding suitable babysitters when nobody from their own network has been available.
- Flights to be covered for partners and children *("I have both once received this and once not received this—it went through my agent."*)
- Out-of-town accommodations to include an extra room for children.
- Children's flight to be covered so they could attend an awards ceremony back home with the only option being to take their child back with them.

Regrets and frustrations...

Both said they wished they had asked for more money in times when they didn't, but already felt like they were getting the maximum amount and asking for anything, especially more money, always feels like such a big deal. One of the artists acknowledged turning down work in another city because she didn't want to be away from her young son. She also shared:

> *"I've also often felt harassed by producers who are insensitive about childcare and who expected I would function as though I didn't have a child."*

Additional...

a) *"A number of us had childcare issues and came close to creating a "daycare" of sorts on set where all of us who needed childcare would chip in and share the cost of one childminder who would watch over kids in a designated area in the production studio. It didn't end up working out because of liability/insurance issues. That was a major stumbling block. It makes sense in theory: if more than one cast member has kids, let's pool resources and pay for only one or two childminders instead of everyone paying for their own respective sitters and dealing with the nightmare of scheduling."*

b) *“As an executive producer on TV, I’ve covered nanny expenses for (lead) actors. As a co-executive producer I have re-organized shooting schedules (which is big when the production employs 400 people) so that a lead actor could fly home for his child’s birthday. I’ve worked hard to anticipate the needs of crew and actors with children.”*

2. FROM A MOTHER WHO WORKS AS A THEATRE DIRECTOR:

On out-of-town work...

“For any out-of-town contract, I always negotiate for a place that can accommodate my family. Minimum one bedroom with two beds. So far, no theatre has said no, although I have turned many places down that were unsuitable for family life (e.g. someone suggested a studio apartment with two beds for a two-week stay—wtf?!). This point is pretty non-negotiable for me. But also, I am at a point in life where I can afford to say no, and that is a privilege I know many do not have.”

On scheduling...

“As a director, I should start asking for a five-day work week. I think I have given up on this point, but moving forward I should push for it more. Six days a week is so stupid, I can't bear it anymore.”

Additional...

“Parenting in this industry is so difficult, yet we just make it work, because what choice do we have? Also, the past (now that [my daughter is] 11) seems so far away, I don't really remember how I survived other than I have an amazing partner. Most of my career since I have had a child has been out of town. That has definitely made things hard for us. It’s amazing how we adapt. I'm also now at a point in my career where I can dictate what I want, but most theatres I know financially can't handle it.”

3. FROM A MOTHER WHO WORKS AS A THEATRE DESIGNER:

Things that have worked...

In those early years, she mainly relied on her mom on stand-by, because she couldn’t retain a sitter due to an irregular schedule as a designer and lots of cancellations (e.g. they’re behind so tech gets moved). She shared: *“If I didn’t have my mom I don’t know what I would have done.”*

Receiving support from an artistic director of a theatre early on to bring her baby to work as “luggage” gave her confidence as a parent to keep asking.

Her core strategy was to bypass the theatre and go straight to the stage manager and/or the director for scheduling considerations:

“I purposely chose not to specify it was for childcare, just called it scheduling and gave the impression that I’m a busy designer with multiple jobs on the go. They didn’t need to know why. I didn’t want to create a reason to not be hired back or get a reputation. People respect when it’s for work. Because of this, my asks never felt awkward.”

As her kids got older, if a babysitter cancelled: *“I knew if I brought my kids, they could sit quietly and colour and not be disruptive. This way nobody had to rearrange anything for me.”*

On working while pregnant…

“I felt valued. Being noticeably pregnant and working on a show, [I] felt I was showing people that pregnant women and parents can contribute!”

During both of her pregnancies, she worked right up until her due date. She chose to be transparent about her pregnancies before she was even announcing to family/friends because she needed the institution’s support in her being able to front-load the work. The theatre’s Artistic Director and Production Manager were very supportive, and even agreed to hire her an assistant. This contrasts with her experience working with a teaching institution where she disclosed her early pregnancy and that the due date would be close to opening to the Artistic Director, and the employment offer was rescinded. She went on to share with me that sadly, she miscarried that pregnancy and then had to circle back to that Artistic Director of the theatre school to let him know, in order to avoid an awkward future encounter. By that point, the job was gone.

On negotiating with women who are parents vs. men who are parents…

The supportive theatre was run by a woman who was also a parent; the person who rescinded the offer from the theatre school was a man who was also a parent.

Additional...

"I had to define what working as a new mom looked like for me. I learned when I hit my work limit...which was when I felt like a shitty mom, a shitty designer, a shitty friend. That limit changes as they change and grow and become more independent. When they were both finally in school for six hours a day I felt like a phoenix rising from the ashes! I'd have a hard in and hard out during their school hours."

"We can make space for this. It's all in the same breath as mental health, as room agreements; it's mindfulness, it's consideration. It's time to put things in writing rather than side-deals and just relying on relationships as I have done."

4. FROM TWO NEW-ISH MOTHERS, AND A NEW FATHER, ALL WITH CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF THREE:

a) *"I haven't had an acting contract since giving birth. The thought of working six days a week, eight hours a day, plus dealing with the tech schedule seems really awful as a parent. Imagining if I was partnered with someone with that schedule and having to take on so much solo parenting...it all seems rough!!! It honestly makes me want to switch careers or find a different way to engage with theatre. I've done some producing since being a parent, which seems more flexible—maybe trying to get a more stable job as a producer (or something else) and then continuing to make my own work, where I can make my own schedule. Why does it have to be like this? Does it?"*

b) *"Since becoming a mother, before accepting any contract as a playwright I have asked for the rehearsal and production schedule up front. It's surprising how many companies do not offer that up automatically. I identify right away how often I will be in the room. If I can be in the room more than originally planned, excellent. If not, people know at the outset that I am only available for certain periods of the process. I have also now requested that I have the capacity to join the room virtually so that I can be available for the process, but it doesn't disrupt my ability to be with my family. So far, everyone has been great about giving me what I need. But I make my needs known as soon as possible to help manage expectations."*

c) *"I value my time differently since I became a parent."*

5. FROM A FATHER WITH TEENAGERS WHO TOURED WITH HIS WIFE AND CHILDREN WHEN THE CHILDREN WERE MUCH YOUNGER:

In his experience: *"Children are basically perceived as inconvenient in the creation of art."* He explained that:

- The theatre was supportive in principle but when they arrived it was very ill-equipped for a baby, and they had to hire a friend out-of-pocket as a full-time nanny.
- Even when a different theatre offered a childcare stipend, one of the caregivers for sure worked for free.
- Moving older children around and disrupting their school year is no longer possible.
- Now with teenagers and aging parents, we don't have additional help and touring together or being away at the same time is impossible.

6. FROM A FATHER WITH TEENAGERS, CURRENTLY ACTING IN A SHOW OUT-OF-PROVINCE WHILE HIS ARTIST WIFE IS HOME WITH THE KIDS:

How his family has made it work...

"The biggest thing was that my wife went back to school. While still working in the arts, she started earning a regular paycheque with flexible hours that helped us navigate the irregularity of mine. She is largely responsible for keeping us balanced."

On specific requests...

- He has made specific schedule requests over the course of his working life and usually makes these requests once he has started working on a contract and when has a feel for the schedule and how much rehearsal time will be required. And they have almost always been accommodated. As the kids have grown older, it has made scheduling a little easier as they can be on their own now.
- When working out of town and his family will be visiting his agent might try to negotiate a larger place.

On "single-parenting" for long stretches of time...

"My wife is now on week seven of solo parenting while I write this before having a pre-show nap, alone, in my quiet apartment across the street from the theatre. So you probably haven't heard back from her because right now the scales are tipping quite heavily on her side."

Additional...

"We got lots to say on this subject! We have complained and stressed and suffered from the un- family friendly demands of a life in the theatre. The six-day weeks, the grind of tech week, the small paycheques... And, yes, it gets somewhat re-balanced by the amount of quality time we have when not working. But the lack of a paycheque then becomes a major stress. It's been our life for so many years but the thought that there is potential change afoot is very exciting."

7. FROM SEVERAL ARTISTS ON WORKING WITH THEIR PARTNER:

a) *"I remember one morning when our daughter—then a toddler—woke up sick, on our second or third day of rehearsals for a play that I had written, that he was directing, that our company was producing. I was like, 'Well, I'm the playwright, obviously I have to be there today!' And he was like, 'But I'm the director!' Today with the option to attend virtually, it wouldn't have been as bad but it was like, 'Noooooooo!' "*

b) *"When we acted in the same show we made literally zero money in the end. We're glad we did it, we paid a bunch of money to hire an amazing nanny the kids loved...but we will never do that again."*

c) *"One challenge we have is that we often work together. The kind of work we can currently accept in this case has usually been online/Zoom gigs no longer than two hours long. Some other context to this is that we don't have a regular babysitter or family in town that we can regularly count on for childcare support. We get maybe one night every four or five months where we can go out and do something together."*

d) *"When we worked together on a summer show out-of-town when our baby was eight-months old, we were given a childcare stipend and both of our rehearsal schedules were staggered enough that we were able to rehearse at different times to take care of the baby, until we got closer to the show and that just wasn't feasible anymore. The childcare stipend did not cover everything but it was a good chunk so that we didn't take as bad of a hit by working at the same time and together. The director was really good about there being no last minute changes (or big changes for that matter).*

"...As for your other questions, we haven't asked for much yet because we still don't know what we need...I imagine that if and when she gets sick and we are both working, that might be the hardest time because we can't send her to daycare sick and we can't ask someone to look after a sick child as we wouldn't want anyone else getting sick from her. A colleague once brought her young child who was sick to rehearsal in a mask with an iPad...Luckily there was a place for her to rest and sleep."

8. FROM AN INDIE THEATRE PRODUCER AND DIRECTOR:

"While we couldn't offer anything additional in terms of money, we did other things like making sure we had a dedicated, private space for pumping for a parent with a baby. We just went ahead and organized it so it was one less thing for her to worry about. We also made adjustments to rehearsal times and call times to allow for easy drop-off and pick-ups for others in the cast with kids, myself included.

"These were two very easy things we could do as an organization (I use that term very loosely) when money wasn't something we could give. We also offered these things straight up, the artist-parents did not need to ask for them."

9. FROM AN ARTS ADMINISTRATOR (WHO ALSO WORKS AS AN ACTOR):

"First, I should say, at this point in my life, I have a lot of privilege and I've been able to use it to navigate most of these challenges. Since I didn't start having kids until I was 40, I wasn't depending on acting as a full time form of employment, and as an administrator, I had access to extended health care benefits, and [Employment Insurance] when I was on maternity leave.

"Now, as one of my organization's leaders, I have a ton of flexibility in creating the culture of care that I want, and it just so happens that my artistic partner finds himself in a similar position of caregiver to his mother, who was in a serious accident, and now contends with mobility issues. Since this is a priority for both of us, our staff benefits from our motivation to create an exemplary workplace culture.

"One of my greatest motivators was having a former boss at a theatre who literally said to me when I told HER I was pregnant, 'What? How could you do this without talking to me first? Don't you know your pregnancy is going to tank this company?' I decided at that moment I would never be the sort of woman who would ever make another woman

feel shame for being a mother. To this day, I recall that feeling when she said those words to me and I use that feeling to remind me when I need to make tough choices about how I can best support my staff/artists with their care-led needs."

On how she approaches care when contracting artists...

"While our organization doesn't have a discretionary funds account that we can share with artists who are in financial need, we do have flexibility. We have been very open to changing rehearsal schedules to meet the needs of the cast. Sometimes this looks like additional days off during the rehearsal or performance period, or sometimes it's just a shortened number of rehearsal hours. Communication, flexibility, and ingenuity. It feels like it could be soooooo easy!

"For me, it's rare that I will say no. Usually the only time someone will get a no from me is if I can't figure it out financially, but even if I can't meet the financial need, I'll work with the person to see if there is something else we could do instead? I think it's really important for Administrators to keep the conversation going once it begins, because we need to realize the level of vulnerability the artist is experiencing by bringing forward such a request. We don't have to work 'the way we've always worked'. That's BS and trauma inspiring and, frankly, just lazy.

"We can work outside the little colonial box we've been living in and we can recognize caregiving isn't just about babies."

Additional: On the double standards for mothers vs. fathers...

"My partner constantly feels shame for needing to take time for anything family-related. There have been instances where it may not have been outright said, but certainly implied to him, that shouldn't I (the mother) be the one to take care of the children for xyz...Which makes me super angry because I shouldn't have to still choose parenthood over my job, just because I'm the woman of the house and I (apparently) made this choice by myself? I don't know and I don't know why there is still so much of this gender bias."

10. FROM A FULL-TIME ARTS ADMINISTRATOR WHO IS A SINGLE MOTHER...

On support during her pregnancy and mat leave:

"The tangible support I was provided around my pregnancy, maternity leave, and return to work is a wonderful example of what organizations could consider providing:

specifically, as part of their benefits offerings, they topped up my government parental leave pay for three months (I have never heard of anyone else in the sector doing this, maybe some of the bigger theatres are?) and allowed me a flexible return-to-work model that had me coming in part-time for the first month to adjust. I can't remember how we accounted for that...I think there was some creative use of past lieu time or vacation accumulation.

"As a single parent (now in a job at a much smaller, yet very busy arts organization), I am learning that it is actually not possible for me to do my job (at both an exceptional level and a basic one) without incurring child care costs."

On needing support during Covid...

"At a time when my caregiving commitments were at their max during the pandemic (child, parents, myself), one idea I had was a shift to a job-share for my role, so that I could reduce my workload and also introduce a new (I was hoping BIPOC) individual to the organization that could contribute to succession planning, but also not override my existing contract should I wish to return full-time. I thought this was such a great idea! I still think it is! I was not given the opportunity to suggest it because I got laid off instead...I suspect because my care duties were affecting my work too greatly."

On being a single parent working full-time in this industry...

"I don't think there is a full comprehension of just how wide the time/capacity gap is between being a partnered parent and a single one. People understand that it's 'hard', but I think the reality of 'there is literally no one else but me' is slightly beyond what most traditionally coupled parents can conceive of. I don't write this to elicit sympathy, but to underscore the value of built in systems of care in rehearsal rooms and workplaces towards greater inclusion in the sector.

"Most single moms are women of colour. I don't equate my experience with theirs, but there needs to be a greater awareness of the way care plays out in different kinds of families, and especially in different historically-excluded communities, if we want to see more diverse artists on our stages and leading our organizations. Balancing Act has done a really wonderful job of expanding the definition of care, and I think we can extrapolate that further and not assume that we understand all the intersectionality inherent in care."

11. FROM ANOTHER SINGLE MOTHER WHO WORKS AS A COMPOSER:

"I was lucky to have a kid just in time for the cheap daycare program that currently exists, so I have affordable care from 7am to 6pm if I need it, with meals covered. But when my child starts attending JK, I'll need to be making enough money to justify paying for before/aftercare, otherwise I'll have to get used to cramming all of my composing work between the hours of 9am and 3pm."

12. FROM SEVERAL ARTIST-MOTHERS WHO ACT AND ALSO CREATE AND PRODUCE THEIR OWN WORK:

a) *"As an actor, I feel vulnerable and dispensable and generally lucky to even get an audition let alone a job, and I just assume no one would ever provide me with an accommodation. I once tried to coordinate a slight schedule accommodation with a mid to large size theatre when I had slightly overlapping contracts and they were complete assholes about it and it was shitty so I never tried that again. I also once lost a contract I really really wanted because I was transparent about a pregnancy and that was equally shitty. So I guess I have no faith and no trust that anyone wants to hire me enough to accommodate. I think I had kids about ten years too early."*

b) *"I will say that my husband has always been better than I have been when it comes to asking for parenting-related 'extras.' And sadly, that's just for the obvious reason: he was always working at bigger theatres, in bigger roles, and he has a more impressive resume than me. I always felt that I was more replaceable, so I didn't push as much. I probably should have pushed more. I also kinda just stopped auditioning eventually since all my work was fairly low-budget anyway and wouldn't be worth it if it meant he had to turn down work (which happened once).*

"What I really crave: more time! More time for auditions and to complete work. So often the industry feels like the person who can work the fastest and deliver quickly gets an advantage. The timing of auditions is obviously brutal in film and TV but it happens in theatre too. I had an experience auditioning many rounds for a big show with very quick turn-around in between callbacks, while I was in another show at the time, so the childcare logistics were rough and so expensive! Constantly having to rearrange in a panic. I remember after one audition them saying, 'Can you come back tomorrow and read for a new character?' And I couldn't. There's no way I could make the childcare work. So they said 'Oh, ok,

just read this cold then.' Which meant improvising a Scottish accent on the spot, rather than having a whole extra day to prepare. I hate having to say no to last minute opportunities or having to scramble to rearrange childcare. But so much of the industry functions in a last minute, rushed way. And does it really have to? My husband has missed a few auditions already this year because he literally got the call the night before and we couldn't get babysitters. Ugh.

"Writing for Kids' TV, it also feels like being constantly available and ready to jump into action at any moment will get you more work. And working on the weekend seems to be expected. I wish, looking back, in theatre and with writing jobs, that I asked for more time when deadlines or audition times were too tight or rushed."

c) *"I remember reading something like a year ago that a colleague wrote on social media, that in order to make things happen for yourself in this industry, you have to get out and see everything, be everywhere, etc....And I don't think he's wrong, but also the barriers that caregivers/disabled folks/low-income folks face in being able to do this is real."*

13. SOME COMMON THINGS WE HEARD:

Common big-little wins...

"It has taken a Herculean effort to accomplish childcare."

- Informing stage management of the need to keep your phone on vibrate and be able to take calls from daycare/school in the event of emergencies has not been a problem for many artists
  *Ditto for people caregiving for elderly/sick parents.
  **One administrator of a theatre offered to be added as their child's emergency contact.
- Theatres asking ahead of time if artists require accommodations.
- Asking for money to go towards childcare vs. just asking for more money has had a higher success rate, possibly because it can come out of a different line in their budget?
- One mother said a director actually paid for and provided on-site childcare so she could do the show with an almost one-year-old!
- Paying for flights and accommodations for grandparents was cheaper than paying for babysitters.

*Many people expressed that relying on help from parents and family was how they were able to accept contracts, but also for many people, parents that helped before now no longer have the ability to do so...

- Getting permission to take a long weekend to fly home and be with family
- Working in a city where they didn't know any babysitters and the theatre trying to help with that: *"We really appreciated the effort, even when it wasn't ultimately successful."*
  **Every theatre: keep an active babysitter list, duh!*
- Teaching at a March Break Theatre Camp and getting permission for her own child to attend for free.
- Working in Theatre for Young Audiences so the schedule mirrors a school day.
- More than once when being offered a contract and seeing that there's a child in the script, I've asked the theatre to consider hiring my kid:

  "I understand why so many kids of theatre parents end up in the business! Having at least one kid's expenses being taken care of when out-of-town while also bringing in a pay cheque afforded me the chance to do the show as some of my son's pay cheque helped with childcare. So basically, child labour has helped me afford being a mom and work as an actor."

On leaning on friends and community...

a) *"I had a great support system amongst my friends. We all worked in theatre and pretty much had babies at the same time. So we understood each other as parents and as artists with our wacko schedules. When I did my first show after having my kid, my friends were so helpful! We organized it so they would pick my kid up from daycare, then swing by the theatre where I was working, and drop us home. Even now, we'll pick up each other's kids from school or take them to soccer practice if need be. We need to rely on each other more!*

b) *"It got even more challenging when our friends started to have kids and then the pool of friends to help from shrunk!! Because we both do a lot of teaching in theatre schools, sometimes we'll barter for help...For example, bartering babysitting for audition coaching sessions or voice over or self-tape help. That has worked out well."*

c) *"I think we can be more of a village for each other and just help each other out. As my kids got older and I developed community (through school—definitely not through theatre) and playdates became commonplace, this has become a huge*

source of support and I appreciate that there are fellow moms that I can reach out to straight-up and ask for favours: Can you pick my kid up after school? Can my kid sleep at your house this weekend?, etc. It is not transactional and if there were more of this and we weren't so nervous to just ask and offer favours it would all be so much easier!"

Common frustrations ...

- Mostly I don't ask for anything extra because the theatres have made it clear (or I just know) they don't have any more money.
- Fear of asking for later starts and early outs to do drop-off and pick-up for fear of being perceived as needy.
- I've mostly stopped auditioning or seeking outside work that I'm not in control of.
- My artistic practice has transitioned into making my own work in the limited hours I have when my kids are in school/daycare.
- I've come to terms with making less money because of childcare expenses.
- Theatres not understanding that daycares and schools will charge you A LOT for every minute you're late for pick-up...not to mention your reputation.

"I now basically turn down most/all theatre contracts and opportunities because of how much it would cost us as a family both financially and emotionally. Film has ended up being much easier to manage as an actor as I make more money and am needed for way less days. In the event where I am booked for lots of days, the pay I make more than covers the cost of childcare. It is unfortunate that we have to make these decisions."

On terrible messaging from theatre school that has stuck...

"I've personally never requested childcare support when offered a theatre job. One part of that is that it's almost never been offered to me in the past, and another part of that is that I don't have the mindset that childcare support is something I could even ask for. I think part of that mindset/belief that I can't ask for support was something instilled in theatre school through an antiquated way of thinking of an actor as a labourer/worker first, and person, second. I distinctly recall being told in theatre school that being in the acting industry meant that we would have to miss birthdays, weddings, and funerals. The implicit message was that we had to sacrifice our personal lives and things that are important to us in order to succeed. Today, I understand that some conflicts may be unavoidable and unworkable, but I'm of the mindset that if accommodations could be made to increase/encourage participation for caregivers, they should.

WHAT MANY MANY MANY PEOPLE SAID THEY WANT:

FIVE-DAY WORK WEEKS!

SHORTER REHEARSAL DAYS OVER A LONGER PERIOD OF TIME!

DEDICATED SPACES FOR CHILDREN AT WORK!

MORE MONEY TOWARDS CHILDCARE!

MORE MONEY IN GENERAL!

PART THREE: WHAT THREE REPUTABLE TALENT AGENTS HAD TO SHARE...

**The three different voices are delineated by AGENT ONE, TWO, and THREE in the order that we spoke...*

THINGS THEY HAVE ASKED FOR IN NEGOTIATIONS, WITH VARYING DEGREES OF SUCCESS:

- More money for caregiving costs.
- Early-outs for rehearsals.
- Five-day rehearsal weeks.
- Permissions and clearance for partners/parents/caregivers to be on set, which can be complicated when it involves adding those people to the insurance plans, but is possible.
- A private trailer, dressing room, or private space for pumping and breastfeeding, even in rehearsals.
- A mini fridge to store pumped breast milk.
- An accessible space (e.g. they can't safely and repeatedly climb three flights of stairs up and down to dressing rooms with small children!).
- A pack and play crib or safe space for babies and toddlers or small children.
- Out-of-town accommodations for the artist AND their family.
- Flights for family, travel logistics, etc.
- A contract clause that specifies that the artist is never to be away from their family for more than ____days at a time. (e.g. 12 days) for out-of-town contracts.
- An elongated creative process (e.g. revised deadlines and workshop dates) when a woman had a baby during the process.

PHILOSOPHIES...

<u>AGENT ONE:</u>

"I was so convinced that post-Covid, people were going to recognize that the status quo wasn't working for anybody. I can't tell you how many times I get the response: 'Well that's not how we do it', and my retort is always: "Well, it's 2024, and we're living in a new world, and that's not a legitimate excuse!

“Looking back on a pre-Covid world, it’s a misogynistic, patriarchal business model that does not take into account that people have other responsibilities in their lives that take time and resources. And I say misogynistic, because it was always expected that the woman will sacrifice her time and career to care for her children and the man will be the breadwinner, which is ridiculous and an archaic concept based on so many false premises. It’s remarkable how in 2024, these stereotypical gender roles still exist. Even in an industry that prides itself on being progressive and open-minded when it comes to gender, when it comes to money, that stuff is still so deeply baked in.

“Generally I feel that theatre companies are trying to do their best, but don’t have the time, resources, and abilities to tackle this. Theatres are in a tough situation because they’re all losing money, there is no extra money, but still as a Producer, you have to acknowledge that it’s not just artist salaries that are an expense, it’s, ‘What else can you do to help the artist do their best work?’ By offering support you’re allowing the artist to be their best, and isn’t that what you want? It comes down to money, yes, but also attitude.

“It’s invariably the smaller productions and theatre companies that are more socially conscious, and dig deeper to find the support, because they acknowledge the needs, and there’s more willingness to creatively problem-solve. Isn’t it often the way [that] those with less offer more? And with the larger companies, individual producers are having to answer to the institutions, so it can feel less of a human-to-human interaction.

“And also: live your values! Do I have to quote your own mission and values statements and inclusion and accessibility protocols back to you?”

AGENT THREE:

“Artists are often made to feel as though their needs are an inconvenience. If a producer wants to work with an artist—especially if it’s a creative relationship that will take place over a number of years—we have to work together to figure out a way to make that happen, where the artist’s needs are being met. Everyone has a different level of security and there are lots of things you can do to make someone’s life more comfortable and flexible for them and their family. In showing a willingness to brainstorm together and creatively problem-solve, you create a lot of goodwill from the start and 1000% the work and process is better because the artist feels supported.

“It’s hard to bleed money from a stone. Demanding more money where none exists leads to tension and frustrations. Instead, what else can we do to offer support?

When precedents are set, it has a trickle-down effect."

SOME STORIES...

AGENT TWO:

"Sadly, sometimes I'm more successful in advocating when a higher-up person in the cast or on set has children and a precedent for certain needs being met has already been set. Or if a producer is also a parent. For instance, once I was negotiating with a producer who was a mom of three children and she said to me from the very beginning, 'I am fiercely advocating for this because I want women in the industry to be able to be mothers and not sacrifice their career.' But I've also run up against female producers who are also mothers and don't give a shit. I had a TV producer for a big network say to me: 'Well, why do you think nannies exist?' Well okay, then pay for one!

"An agent I know flagged a male actor's availability for a TV guest spot after the deal was made, because the shoot was right in the middle of his wife's due date and he may have needed to leave if she went into labour. The agent thought it was a responsible, transparent thing to flag, but the casting director was furious that it wasn't mentioned earlier, and without even talking to the producer, they rescinded the deal. Basically it came down to: if he can't commit to possibly missing the birth of his child, the job wasn't going to be his! Things got really ugly because the agent then went to the producer and really the casting director was only interested in trying to save themselves vs. being on the right side of things. So often the people we're negotiating with have their own agenda. Or they just don't want to make waves. There's nothing in it for them and it's easier to say no and not complicate things. And the attitude is often that actors are 'a dime a dozen' (and you're not!) but they think of actors as commodities.

"I've heard stories of actors whose partners were working at big festivals, even when they were understudies, scheduling c-sections on the Monday off so their partners could be guaranteed to be there."

AGENT THREE:

"I represented some artist-moms who had created a show that went on tour and we were successful in setting up an informal on-site daycare. But that was several years ago, when maybe there was less concern about liability. All of the mothers created it based on their needs and everyone was flexible in the rehearsal process (e.g. this baby

needs to nurse earlier than expected so let's jump to a different scene and come back to this one later)."

APPROACHES...

AGENT ONE:

"Sometimes you have to get 'The Big No' before you go on and ask for the rest.

"I always start from the place of what is important to my client? It may not necessarily have to do with caregiving, it may be something else that they're dealing with and trying to reconcile with their daily life. At the end of the day, it really comes down to money, which is less of an issue in film and TV because there's just more money than in theatre. And even if you can't get any extra financial support in film and TV, you're still making a fantastic daily rate, so you can afford your needs and not work at a loss."

AGENT TWO:

"Sometimes people make such a big deal and react so negatively and strongly to an ask, almost as though they're personally offended, and from my perspective, I'm asking for my client to be treated like a human being! These aren't crazy asks and often the people you're negotiating with are way better compensated.

"As established agents, we're not afraid to make asks and we're not gonna burn any bridges at this point. But some younger agents are worried about their jobs and reputations and don't necessarily have the clout behind them to have those fights even if they want to, and also they might not be encouraging their clients, who may also be new, to be asking for what they need for fear of losing the job. We know this is an industry [that] rewards people who are not 'needy'; people who show up and have no issue with anything and can stay forever and just jump as high as they are asked to jump and don't make waves."

AGENT THREE:

"I often know the artist's family and always offer to involve their partner in the negotiation process, to hear from them what's important, especially when there's a baby involved.

"I once wrote into a long-term creative agreement with a theatre that the (male) artist was wanting to start a family, and that if and when they had a baby, needs will emerge

that they are unable to articulate at this time because they and their partner don't yet know what they'll need. Putting that on the table from the start took away the possibility of resentment or lack of accommodations down the road, and made the experience and opportunity more inviting for the artist. Also, I like to remind theatres/producers that things can happen with children, especially in the first year of a baby's life, that will require attention, and may result in timeline shifts or the artist having to leave the project. So I'd build that into the terms (e.g. lack of penalty and fair compensation and crediting in the event that the artist had to exit the project early). My approach has been to be upfront and transparent and consider a myriad of possible scenarios from the get-go, so that in the event of something happening, we can have a plan in place."

OBSERVATIONS, SHIFTS & TRENDS...

AGENT TWO:

"Some theatre companies are attempting to make seismic changes!

"A large-sized theatre company in Toronto has for years been in talks about opening a daycare, because there are so many artists with kids—not just actors, but designers and directors—but I don't think it's ever gonna happen because with insurance and so many other considerations, it's just so expensive. I know one of the funding hurdles is that their big donors want their names on theatres, attached to a production, but they don't have donors willing to fund a daycare because even though it's funding artists, they want to fund the art, so there's this disconnect and they haven't yet been able to find any donors willing to support artists in that way."

AGENT ONE:

"There's a shift away from the 10am–6pm, six-day work week, which is obscene, and I think we realized during Covid, it's not sustainable. More time doesn't necessarily mean more and better work, and there's a case to be made for shorter hours over a longer period of time, especially when the pay is so low and people may have other jobs, and certainly have life responsibilities. One day off a week is not enough for anybody! Artists all too often in the theatre are expected to pay to work and that's just wrong and an out-dated way of working. You want a 48-hour work week? Then pay more! Asking from the get-go what accommodations people need...theatre producers are doing that more, I've noticed. Which means the artists are walking into their jobs feeling supported and valued. And when there's been a hard negotiation and fight in the background, even though it's through us, it colours how the artist feels when walking into that job. It's the

nastiness…Sometimes the answer is just gonna be no, but how that is articulated makes a difference.

"I'm also observing more theatres planning for various (worst-case) scenarios. For instance, if you can't afford understudies or swings, in this post-Covid world, you have to figure out a way for the show to go on in the event of illness, injury, an emergency…It just makes sense and saves theatre money in the long-run because canceling performances creates such a loss. It's fiscally responsible and also humane. And if that can't realistically happen, then we need to accept that actually the show must not go on."

AGENT THREE:

"I'm observing more compassion as a community…but at the end of the day, in the non-profit arts sector, the buck stops with the Board. Which is why all too often a theatre's stated values on their website do not always align with how artists (and staff) are actually being treated. In my opinion, Boards of Directors need to be a part of these conversations, if internal protocols and systemic changes are going to happen. Also, in addition to advocating for support from government funding, so many Foundations are putting their dollars behind supporting mental health and healthcare needs. We need to communicate to these Foundations and funding bodies that there is a need for healthcare and mental health supports in the arts. There are places where theatres can find money for this…as always, they just have to get better at advocating, and in order to advocate they have to recognize the need."

AGENT ONE:

"Western society has not yet recognized that it does take a village, and this mentality that everyone is on their own is not working, has never worked!"

PART FOUR: SOME FINAL THOUGHTS FROM US...

We're a bit of a hot mess and what follows is also a hot mess! But first, thank you to Lisa Marie, Susie, and Margaret at Balancing Act for inviting us—and paying us!—to participate in this project, and for holding space for us. Thank you to the other members of our cohort for sharing over several Zoom meetings, and also to Rebecca from Good Roots Consulting for sharing her expertise with us.

We're incredibly grateful to all of the artist-parents who wrote us back, even if they didn't have time to share, and of course to the 25 people who did share, as well as the three agents. Time is very precious and sharing these stories can be vulnerable and bring up all kinds of stress and emotions, not to mention it takes a great deal of time and energy. We're most appreciative.

Many of the stories are distressing, but not surprising. There are many repeated comments and themes, and so many excellent ideas and examples of strategies that have helped. It's clear, even from this very small informal "focus group", that change is badly needed and absolutely possible at a human AND institutional level. These arts organizations are run by humans, after all. Recognizing the privilege and pay discrepancy between artists, arts administrators, and full-time production staff, as well as Board members (who tend to have the ability to volunteer their time and expertise because they are well compensated in their actual jobs) is a good place to start. (Hot Tip for Arts Administrators: Please *please* refrain from sharing your own childcare hardships with artists as a way of "trauma bonding" when you're making double or triple what that artist makes in a year and are the one signing their contracts!). Gatekeepers and staff come and go, whereas artists hop around; we see who the ones are who are receptive to care and accommodations and the ones who are not.

As for the future, we look forward to all of the excellent research and pilot projects that have been created over these past three years of Balancing Act and Level UP! soon being available on a shared platform, free to the community and sector at large, as a way to learn from each other around caregiving in the arts and all that is possible.

It is our hope that advocacy for funding at the government level (maybe via Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts and the various granting bodies?) and through arts-friendly foundations whose mandates emphasize healthcare (caregiving is a healthcare issue is it not?) might make a difference financially. For instance, an arms-length "Caregiver Fund" managed by Balancing Act that artists, in conjunction with the arts organizations that have hired them, could jointly apply to in order to offset (or dare we say cover?) childcare and the myriad of other caregiving needs—this would be truly amazing!

No surprise, it seems to always come down to money. Artists need more money to continue to live and work in this sector, especially those with families and life obligations. The non-profit arts sector needs more money with which to pay these artists and their staff, maintain their buildings, etc. We all need more money! It's not a question of greed, it's about basic human needs, the needs of people and their families being met, exceeded even.

We're told in theatre school that we must "pay our dues", then we're told stories from our mentors of them "paying to work", and here we find ourselves mid-career, paying to work. The best advice we were given by a mentor early on was to remember that an artist's ladder is horizontal. I don't think they meant that we should measure our expectations or not "reach for the stars", but to understand the reality that "success", however each of us personally measures it (e.g. a year of consistent acting or directing work, a slew of commissions, box office or granting success with our indie productions, etc.), does not guarantee an upward trend. Unless you're working in artistic leadership or arts administration positions, there is very little room to grow a sustainable career in this industry. Let's put it another way: if we were lawyers, all of us mid-career artists would be partners by now!

So what to do? Some not-so-original-but-still-worthy ideas: Advocate for more money from funding sources! Pay artists more money! When you can't pay artists more money, recognize there are other ways to support them. Start by asking us! Needs, like life, are fluid, and every artist will have ever-evolving and unanticipated needs throughout their careers; "best practices" does not mean a cookie-cutter approach to care work.

Personally, we've been very lucky that we've had access to credit and have received support from family in emergency moments over the past 20 years, which is a privilege that many artists do not have. It's why and how we've managed to work in this way in this industry for this long: family and access to credit. That said, we currently don't see a way forward for us in this industry at this time if our goal is—which it is—to emerge from what feels like insurmountable debt and start making a decent living while being able to care for and spend time with our children, as well as help out my parents as their needs will inevitably increase. We are just at the start of the cliché "Sandwich Generation" moment, which is actually very very real and more than a bit daunting. We know this isn't forever and we've been trying our hardest to stave off thoughts like, *"What was the point of the last 20 years?"* and, *"There go our 'careers' up in smoke"*, etc. We hope to one day re-emerge with renewed energy and desire to contribute to this necessary change, but for our family right now, the answer seems to be a temporary yet indefinite backing away.

The kindest thing a donor ever said to us when we thanked them for their donation to one of our productions was, *"No, thank YOU for inviting ME to be part of YOUR success." !!!* It absolutely changed the way we thought of and went about grassroots fundraising. There are

people and foundations out there with money who want to help the non-profit arts sector, artists, and arts organizations thrive. Let's invite them to be part of our sector's success.

In the meantime, we hope in this tiny way we, and all of the artists and agents who have contributed to this document, have been part of Balancing Act's success as they take the next steps towards change.

Thank you for reading this and thank you to everyone who shared their experiences and ideas with us.

~ Julie & Aaron