

WHO CARES?

A voice for parents at home

2008 Issue 1 (Spring)

www.fulltimemothers.org

PO Box 43690, London SE22 9WN

No reward for caring

In a speech last October to the Conservative Party Conference David Willets said, *'Gordon Brown has designed a system that penalises one-earner couples because he wants to drive as many mothers as possible back to work. It is for them to decide, not for Gordon Brown to tell them what to do. Gordon Brown wants work-friendly families. We want family-friendly work. We need to make families stronger.'*

The fact is that politicians fail to attribute equal value to the parent-carer at home as they do to parents who maintain two jobs, and whose children can spend ever-longer hours in structured daycare or maybe even 'home alone', unsupervised on computers. What action should really be taken to ensure a good childhood for our children? Most of us would like to see opportunities for our children to experience freedom and play and time to unwind in familiar home surroundings. Is this possible when both parents are under pressure to work?

'It is for them to decide, not for Gordon Brown to tell them what to do'

The problem is that current government policy only recognises mothers who return to work and financial help with childcare costs is provided only to parents who are both in paid employment. Not only does the government prefer both parents in paid work, it subsidises this choice. This ringing endorsement from Westminster has completely undermined the value of the caring role.

Where's the 'choice'?

If politicians truly believe it is 'for them (parents) to decide' then, in order to have a level playing field, the money currently subsidising third party childcare should go at least equally to the carer at home. This is often the most costly choice of all with families having to make ends meet on just one income. Moreover, mothers who care for children at home forfeit

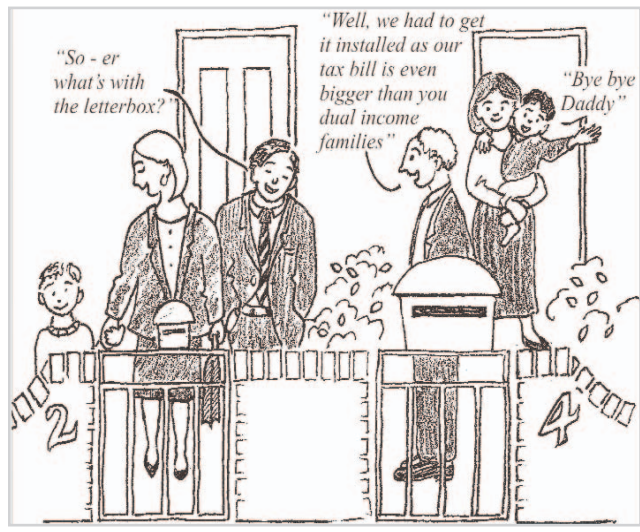
household income, despite having several dependants to house, clothe and feed.

CARE report

In January Social Policy charity CARE published important new research⁽¹⁾ comparing UK family taxation policies with other countries. The UK tax system is unusual in that it takes virtually no account of a taxpayer's family responsibilities. For the one-earner couple on an average wage the tax burden in the UK has increased considerably over the last 40 years; this type of family paid 40% more tax than in the average OECD⁽²⁾ country and 25% more than in the average EU country.

In a foreword to the report, Professor Robert Rowthorn of Kings College, Cambridge says: "At one time, marriage and family obligations were extensively acknowledged in the British tax system." He says,

"These have been almost entirely abolished by politicians who regard themselves as the standard bearers of

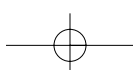


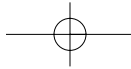
their future career prospects, lifetime earnings, pension and financial security as a result.

'A system that penalises one-earner couples'

Under the present system dual income families can take advantage of two personal tax allowances and often a lower rate of income tax i.e. two parents earning £25k each pay considerably less household tax than a single earner on £50k. This imbalance in the tax system must be addressed. Indeed a single earner family can end up paying more tax than the childless couple next door on the same

Contents	
From the Chair.....	2
Members stories:	
Sharing a love of life.....	3
40 years of family life	5
New poster for FTM	6
What the papers say	7
Book reviews.....	9
Creed of the idle parent	10
Point of view: a grandmother writes ..	11
Your committee.....	11
Your letters	12





modernity and women's emancipation."

"Those who question the wisdom or fairness of what has happened are dismissed as reactionaries seeking to turn the clock back to a mythical golden age. To accept their proposals, it is claimed, would put Britain out on a limb and cut off from the common practice of other economically developed countries."

He continues, "Nothing could be further from the truth ...modern Britain is now the exception."

"In most other countries, the tax system takes into account the number of adults who must share in the family income, and the tax burden on one-earner couples is reduced accordingly."

The authors of the report, Draper and Beighton, have also been among the first to point out that children in poverty fall into two groups: as well as

children of lone parents on benefits there is persistent poverty in two-parent working families. Whilst the government has rightly tried to help

At one time, marriage and family obligations were extensively acknowledged in the British tax system ... These have been almost entirely abolished

single parents, it has largely ignored the challenges faced by two parent families in trying to make ends meet.

'We need to make families stronger'
And what about 'making families stronger'? The problem, says committee member Mary Bienfait, is that children tend to be cared for in institutional settings from a very early age. Many spend long days indoors, managed as a group, learning behaviour they copy from other children rather than benefiting from wisdom passed down the generations. Even if they are outside in a playground, they are still in a structured environment, away from

their families. As a country we are bringing up our children 'separate' from ourselves. Children have their own world, which is distinct from ours. Contrast the experience of a young child at home, out shopping with mum, chatting with neighbours and passers-by from all generations, learning how to fit in with the world around them and about the simple pleasures (and risks) of daily life, under the wing of a consistent, loving parent? The dominance of nurseries and group care of young children must cease if these issues are to be addressed.

Marie Peacock

with thanks to Mary Bienfait

- (1) Taxation of married families: How the UK compares internationally www.care.org.uk/internationaltaxcomparison
- (2) Organisation for Economic Development and Co-operation.

For a copy of the FTM submission to the Conservative Party's Review of Early Years Provision (January 08) please write to PO Box 43690, SE22 9WN or go to www.fulltimemothers.org. The submission highlights the fiscal discrimination faced by couples with one parent at home. It calls for real choice and fair treatment for all mothers and set out the additional support that full time mothers need during the caring years.

From the chair



Family policy under this government has come to resemble the proverbial Gordian knot: best left alone or cut through without mercy.

These solutions being unacceptable, there is no shortage of experts willing to nevertheless have a go, but only succeeding in adding to the muddle.

I am reminded here of a couple of conferences that I have attended recently. The reasons why the yarn got so tangled have long been forgotten. Various experts who spoke at the Adult to Adult Relationships Conference organised by Relate, earnestly warned us not to look at the tried and tested, such as ways in which marriage could be supported and encouraged. Though, admittedly, good early childhood attachments were said to lie at the heart of good future adult relationships, we were urged not to jump to the conclusion that this meant the mother/child relationship as "research in Switzerland had shown that babies as young as 8 weeks recognised others too". The consensus was that public funding was required to pilot ever more people in ever more types of relationships through life's hazardous waters.

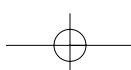
There was further pleading for public funds by one of the speakers at the WatCh? conference a week later. A brand new Parenting Academy costing £10 million a year has been set up. A suggestion that this money could finance more Child Benefit was given short shrift; in the Director's view courses for parents (should they wish to attend) would yield far greater benefits.

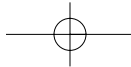
And thus it was that an ugly thought began to form in my mind. This government, like an unwise parent, has given up on the prevention of problems. Aware that the situation is unacceptable and in an effort to retain its electorate's love it is falling prey to snake oil merchants and purveyors of human repair services eager to help it part with its money.

Will they unravel the knot? I'm afraid not. It's time to look at modern yarns to weave in old patterns.

Anna Pines

Support our campaign.... write to your MP at House of Commons SW 1A 0AA.
If you don't know his/her name find it at your local library or on www.parliament.uk





Members' Stories

Sharing a love of life

As I grew up in the 1970s in West London, having children seemed to me to be a strange business. Why, I wondered, did women who had worked so hard to get qualifications and a good job then throw it all away to change nappies? Looking after children was messy, unpaid, low status and given how fragile babies are, really rather frightening.

Girls' Aspirations

So it was probably hardly surprising that when I was studying at Newnham in Cambridge in the mid 80s, I knew plenty of women who aspired to be engineers, accountants, lawyers and scientists, but none who dreamt of being a full-time mother, or at least who was prepared to admit to it.

A change of heart

Why did women do it? This was a question I continued to ask myself throughout my early working life and the early years of our marriage. And how is it that I am now a full-time mother of two children? Well, over the years I did meet a couple of older women who had looked after their own children, whom I admired and also, who crucially expressed confidence that I would be able to do the same and to do it well. But the turning point came one Spring morning. I had been turning the whole matter over in my mind quite intensely the previous week and reached an impasse. I set it aside; the whole thing seemed pointless to me; you might as well get on with your occupation, I thought, and forget it.

My question answered

It was a bright, sunny morning. As I cycled along I admired the colours of the trees and the flowers and the play of sunlight in the leaves. I thought "This is beautiful!". A blackbird landed on the path beside me and looked at me sideways; his black eyes

shone, his bright orange beak contrasted with his glossy feathers. He was so perfect, so amazing. Suddenly I was filled with a great thankfulness, a wonder and a powerful desire to share all of this beauty. I realised at that moment that I had an answer to my question.

Sharing every new day

Before our first child was born, I was still planning to return to the job which I loved as Learning Support Assistant and Languages teacher in Special education. Once I held our



daughter in my arms, however, I knew that this sharing of the wonder of life with our child could not be confined to odd moments at weekends. I realised that I needed the time with her to explore the world and to help her to discover it. Fortunately my husband felt the same and put no pressure on me to return to paid employment. When I apologised (!) for the money we would have to pay back in maternity pay, he said it was one of the best deals we had ever had. His confidence gave me the confidence I needed.

Why Love Matters

I wanted to know how best to help our little girl grow and learn, but I wanted to be a genuine help to her. Having worked in mainstream teaching, I had

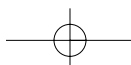
seen many sad examples of how bad it can be for a child when they are pushed along at an adult pace, to follow an adult agenda. We were both determined not to hot-house our daughter. I read voraciously, baby feeding on one arm and book in the other hand. "The Continuum concept" by Jean Liedloff, "Why love matters" by Sue Gerhardt and "3 in a bed" by Deborah Jackson all have had a profound influence on me. I got a book that suggested games to play with your toddler. Not however, until our daughter was 3 1/2 did I find what I had been searching for so hard and then only by chance.

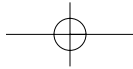
Life changing ideas

Our daughter had started to ask us to teach her to read. "That's a bit soon!", we thought. I was browsing in a charity shop one day and saw a book entitled "Montessori Read and Write" by Lynne Lawrence, so I bought it out of curiosity. I didn't really notice that it mentioned Montessori in the title nor did I realise how life-changing that purchase would be for me and for our children. I tried out some of the ideas with our daughter and it was like giving bread to a hungry person.

Oasis in the desert

For someone who has taught in mainstream schools and worked hard there to provide children with what they need, (in spite of the overwork, the stultifying systematisation, often a lack of resources and support) finding Montessori was like finding an oasis in the desert. Here it all was so beautifully set out and so comprehensively backed up by research; the development of the child, his capacities at each stage, his needs in terms of adult support, the right environment and the right materials. The observations Montessori had made were born out by my own experience with children





in the mainstream classroom, at toddler groups and at home.

Picking up dropped stitches

I had noticed as a teacher of Modern Languages that at 13 or 14 some children will never seem capable of getting past a particular attainment target level regardless of how much support they are given and I had wondered about this. I now realise Montessori would have called this “dropped stitches”; children who miss out at the relevant sensitive period, say for language development, will always have their attainment limited in this regard. But there are other “sensitive periods” or windows of opportunity for learning other skills such as a sense of order, social relationships, for recognising fine detail and for using the full range of senses and all of them completed by the time a child is 6 years old. These skills will not be automatically developed, but only brought out if the child has had the right stimulus and support and at the right stage. And also, crucially, if he or she has had the freedom to explore concepts for as long as they feel they need to. It is parents who are best placed to offer this freedom and support.

Parents - the experts

One factor that has saddened me since I started as a volunteer helping to run our local toddler group, is that so many parents lack confidence in their own abilities. Government is constantly giving out the message that it is “experts” who know best and that truly loving parents will consign their children to the care of a nursery, teacher or other “professional” as

early as possible so that real development can begin. This is a false premise, as is borne out by the many problems that children are now exhibiting. Montessori called such children “orphans with living parents”.

Parents - the first educators

Nature has fitted parents to be the first and best educators of our own children. It is a role no-one else can play, however well-qualified they claim to be. We as parents can make all the difference to our children

... many parents lack confidence in their own abilities ...



first the education of the senses, then the education of the intellect (Maria Montessori)

not just now but throughout their lives if we give parenting the time it deserves and if we have the insight and support to do our vital job well and in partnership with our children.

Changing the world

Since 1907, Maria Montessori’s discoveries have been replicated across the world and on all continents. She understood, by observation, the development of the brain in the child’s first year, long before scans were able to demonstrate this. How children will want to learn to write and then to read, often in that order

and will often begin to do so around the age of 4, with the right support. She knew this before there were “National Literacy Strategies”. But most crucially of all, she understood the vital role of the child in making the world a better place, that if you want to stop people fighting each other and start getting them to treat the planet

with respect, you need to prioritise the needs of the next generation.

There are now more than 22,000 Montessori schools around the world, more than 750 in the UK. Montessori is the single largest method of education in the world with over 22,000 schools in more than 100 countries, many of them offering education for children up to the age of 18. But it all starts with parents and the family.

Our amazing children

So why have children and why take time looking after them yourself? Because children are amazing and so is the world around us. Because parents are vital to their development. Because together parents and children can make the world a better and happier place.

Karen Rodgers

Some good books:

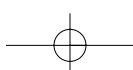
- “Montessori Insights for parents of young children” by Aline D. Wolf published by Parent Child Press*
- “Teaching Montessori in the home” by Elizabeth G. Hainstock*
- “Basic Montessori learning activities for under 5’s” by David Gettman*
- Further general information on Montessori available at www.montessori-uk.org*

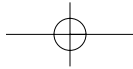
Because children are amazing and so is the world around us

You cannot teach a man anything; you can only help him find it within himself.
Galileo Galilei (1564-1642)
Italian physicist and astronomer

FTMs are a diverse bunch: some of us use local state schools, others home-educate and some switch to the private system. We'd be interested in learning about your experiences.

An educated man is one who can entertain a new idea, entertain another person and entertain himself.
Sydney Wood





Members' stories

40 years of family life

A mother and father write about how they have managed family life, supporting each other through the busy parenting and grand-parenting years

A mum's perspective

I was a teacher before our first child was born in the early 60s. Then my husband and I decided it would be in the best interests of our children for me to be at home and two years later our second child was born. Full-time motherhood was exactly that, as we had no relatives nearby to help us with our children.

Helping others

I applied to run a local playgroup, but withdrew the application when one son developed asthma. Later I was glad to be available when my closest friend had terminal cancer and needed help with her three young children for a long and difficult year. After she died we had two more children. The nine year gap between our first two and our second two children brought it home to me how quickly our world had changed.

Learning through play

Once our third child started school friends expected me to return to work, but I still chose to be a full-time mum. We could manage on my husband's salary. But by then life at home was lonely, other mums I knew had returned to work. Our youngest daughter was born in 1977. As soon as she started nursery class I led a pre-school playgroup for three years. It was rewarding to see 3 to 5 year-olds benefit from learning through play. I registered the group in 1981 when no child below the age of 2½ years could be admitted to any pre-school without an accompanying adult. How different from today!

By the time our two youngest children entered secondary school, life was completely different from when

their brothers made the same transition. Many children gathered in our home during school holidays and after school, because their own parents were all out working.

Challenge of the teens

On Boxing Day 1992 our third child told me she was pregnant. For the following months she studied for GCSE at home with me. Her baby arrived, and then her excellent exam

seemed naively unaware that their own children could be misled by the easy availability of alcohol, drugs, sex, cigarettes, emails, texts and bullying, or become subject to anorexia, bulimia or self-harm.

Keeping a watchful eye

Our daughter is only 16 years older than her daughter. She and her husband keep a watchful eye on the internet, emails and texts, carefully



Family

results. A year later she married the father of her child and embarked on further education.

I was glad to be available to help her. But her pregnancy made me realise that even a full-time mum cannot watch over teenagers visiting their friends in other homes where parents are out at work.

When our grand daughter went to secondary school in 2003 her young mother was shocked that pressures on teenagers had increased and escalated since she left school. Also she was concerned that other mothers had no real concept of the changes. They

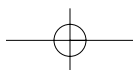
controlling and wisely monitoring the amount of freedom they allow their daughter. When she is out they keep in touch by mobile phone or text.

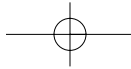
Forty years on the school run

And me? I continue to be a full-time mother and grandma and do a little writing. Both our daughters have to work to earn money to support their way of life.... and I have been doing the school run for 40 years.

Being there for the family

For me not going out to work has been worthwhile. Although, since my husband retired five years ago I do





sometimes miss the salary I might have earned! During that time I spent twenty happy years voluntarily producing and editing a magazine from home and I have really valued 'being there' for our children and later being available to our grandchildren.

D.T

Father's Viewpoint

We married in 1963 when it was normal for mothers to stay at home to look after their children. I qualified in Medicine that year and our first child was born the following Spring. My work initially was very demanding. I was on call for emergencies alternate nights and alternate weekends. When I was on call I had to live in hospital at night. So having my wife at home was essential as I was in no position to offer much support and we had no local relatives to help us.

Precious holidays

During those early years of our marriage I had only very limited time to give to our children. Two weeks away on holiday in the summer was always a very precious time for us.

As the years passed my time away

from hospital increased, and opportunities for helping in and around the home increased.

Hands-on dad

I have always been involved in housework, washing up, and in more recent years have cooked from time to time. I became quite adept at changing nappies. I took on this role at night when required. Why not? After all I was already used to being woken up at all hours when called out at night!

Time to listen

My wife and I have always enjoyed doing things together, and I think that this has led to a deepening of our relationship over the years. Not all life goes smoothly. There will always be problems in relationships. As a family we have had our ups and downs. Having my wife at home and not under the pressures of a full-time job has helped when problems have arisen. She has always had the time to listen.

The grandchildren

For many years we have been able to help with bringing up our two local grandchildren. This has been a real

lifeline for our daughter, and since my retirement I have been able to share in this.

Settling for less

It is my belief that society today is being driven along by the desire to acquire ever increasing wealth and possessions. Sadly this does not necessarily result in happiness.

During the early years of our marriage when our children were growing up we were not particularly well off, and any spare cash we had was mainly spent on our children and their needs. The 1970s were difficult times for large numbers of families in England, and we were happy to settle for what we had, and always aimed to live within our means. Credit cards were fortunately not the fall back that they are today.

Wouldn't change a thing

Over the years we have had the time to fulfil our commitments to each other. Whether this would have been as easy if my wife had been in full-time employment I don't know. But I wouldn't have preferred life to be any different.

R.J.N.T.

New Poster for Full Time Mothers

When no one else will do and your child wants mum for some momentary comfort, you don't need any other rewards. I pondered on this when I was thinking of a poster design for FTM.

So many mothers miss out on these intimate occasions. From a child's point of view, the benefits of that security and affection are more than words can say or science can prove. Above all I wanted to remind mothers that we should be proud, hence the

JOIN US IF YOU'RE PROUD TO BE A MOTHER



poster title "Join us if you're proud to be a mother".

The poster could be of use in variety of settings; GP surgeries, toddler groups, schools, community centres, village noticeboards etc. Really it's up to individual mums to display the poster in their local communities as they see fit, adding their own personal local contact details if they feel comfortable with this.

The website address is included too, as well as the PO Box address in London. I hope this new poster captures the imagination of all mothers who feel strongly about the importance of motherhood and that they will be inspired to join the FTM campaign.

I'd be happy to send anyone an electronic version and the posters should soon be downloadable from the website too.

Madeleine Sparkes
(madeleine@globalarena.co.uk)

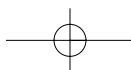
**Family and Youth Concern
AGM and Conference
Saturday 14 June 2008,
Royal Air Force Club, 128
Piccadilly, London W1
10.30am to 5.00pm.**

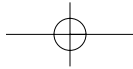
Guest speakers

Irina Tyk (headmistress of Holland House School in Edgware, and author of Culture in the Classroom and The Butterfly Book: A reading and writing course) will be speaking on 'Education and the culture'.

Ray Lewis (a former prison governor, and founder and executive director of the Eastside Young Leaders Academy) will speak on 'Rites of passage in a modern age'.

All are welcome and admission is free. For further information or to reserve a seat, please contact Norman Wells on 020 8894 2525 (email: fyc@ukfamily.org.uk)





What the papers say

Impact of poverty and unstable family life

Delegates at the Association of Teachers and Lecturers annual conference said chaotic home lives and poverty made children unable to learn. Some delegates called for a Royal Commission to investigate childhood.

A Wiltshire teacher, Phil Whalley, said it was clear from research that family stability - or the lack of it - was an important determinant of a child's education outcomes. "This means we already have a significant problem in Britain because we already have worrying levels of social dysfunction and family breakdown and the situation is getting worse."

Poverty is likely to lead to family breakdown which in turn creates more poverty.

But also those who under-achieve in childhood are more likely to have dysfunctional lives and be unable to support their own children. "In short, as a society we are in danger of creating an expanding, perpetuating and toxic circle," he said.

18th March BBC News

Pension Problems

After indicating six months ago that it was prepared to allow women with families to make one-off payments to cover up to nine years' worth of missing contributions before retirement the government performed a U-turn on pensions policy.

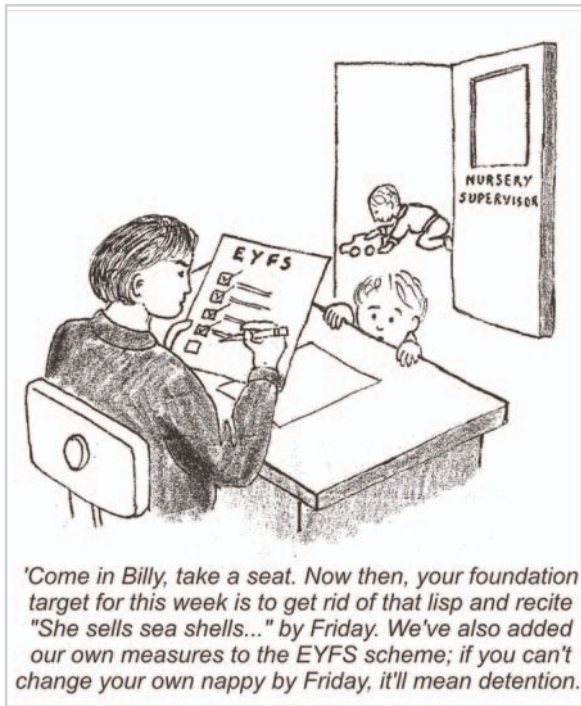
Only three out of 10 of Britain's 12 million women over the age of 45 are entitled to a full state pension. This proportion is however, expected to rise after a recent decision to decrease the number of years of NI payments needed to claim a full pension from 44 to 30. But campaigners complain this is insufficient to help the millions of pensioners and women who stayed at home with their children who will retire before 2025.

*Rosa Prince, the Telegraph
20th December 2007*

Mums Surveyed on the Net

A survey by the popular website Mumsnet has revealed that mums' primary concerns are over the amount of time spent with their children. Of those taking the survey 37 per cent used a private nursery for their children, and 35 per cent used no childcare. But when asked, 40.2 per cent said they would use no childcare if money were no object.

*Laura Donnelly, the Telegraph
18th November 2007*



'Come in Billy, take a seat. Now then, your foundation target for this week is to get rid of that lisp and recite "She sells sea shells..." by Friday. We've also added our own measures to the EYFS scheme; if you can't change your own nappy by Friday, it'll mean detention.'

Pouring water into a bucket with no bottom...

In *The Times*, columnist Eleanor Mills compared the Sure Start and early years National Curriculum method of helping children out of poverty with an American model. She criticised Gordon Brown for imagining that recreating the type of stimulus that a middle class child might expect at home in nurseries would benefit the under privileged. Without proper loving care at home, she implied, early academics are wasted, 'like pouring water into a bucket with no bottom.'

Because neuroscience shows that emotional experiences in infancy have a measurable effect on how we develop as human beings, science

shows that good parenting isn't just nice for small children; it actually leads to proper development of the baby's prefrontal cortex, which in turn enables the child to develop self-control and empathy and to feel connected to others. In the American model from Colorado set up 30 years ago, vulnerable mothers are given mentors from pregnancy who visit them at least once a week to encourage and support them in bonding with their developing child, with remarkable results.

*Eleanor Mills, The Times
2nd December 2007*

Families in Meltdown

A senior family court judge has attacked the government over what he says is an "epidemic" of family failure.

Mr Justice Coleridge, a Family Division judge for England and Wales spoke in Brighton at the annual conference of Resolution, which represents 5,000 family lawyers. He refers to the "wholesale collapse" of family life, which he considers is pushing children into drugs and crime. Family life, he says, is "in meltdown" and the government is doing too little to address the problem. "What is certain is that

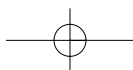
almost all of society's social ills can be traced directly to the collapse of the family life."

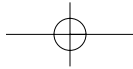
David Laws, the Liberal Democrat Children, Schools and Families spokesman, said the judge highlights trends dating back at least 20 years. "This government is not the source of the family breakdown problem but policies such as the operation of tax credits have made it more difficult for some families to bring up children in stable, two-parent households."

5th April BBC News; the Telegraph

Early Years Warning

A group of leading figures promoting the well being of children wrote to the Times warning of the dangers of the new national curriculum for under 5s.





The group, including the leading child psychologists Richard House, Dorothy Rowe and Penelope Leach, and Sue Palmer, author of *Toxic Childhood*, simultaneously launched a campaign called Open Eye to promote the message that babies and young children learn most naturally and effectively through free play, movement and imitation, rather than formal teaching.

One of the complaints of the group was that the legislation is to be introduced by stealth. Unlike the national curriculum for schools, which does not apply to independent schools, the framework will apply to all pre-school settings - state, private and voluntary.

Alexandra Frean, The Times
30th November 2007

<http://openeyecampaign.wordpress.com/open-letter>

Labour pushes mothers back to work, say Tories

Theresa May, the shadow minister for women, who launched the "Women in the World Today" report, said a Conservative government would give mothers more choice. "Women shouldn't be thought of as a single monolithic bloc but as 30 million individuals who should be given a real choice over their own lives," she said.

The report suggests each full-time parent saves the state £29,000 a year in services, but points out that the tax system makes no allowance for families where a parent chooses to stay at home to care for a child.

By failing to crack down on discrimination in the workplace, ministers have allowed a situation where mothers who take time out of their careers to care for children experience reduced future earnings.

The report says: "Labour's approach has been to try to get parents back to full-time work, and in doing so, parents who want to care for their children often feel discriminated against and penalised for making the choice that suits them."

Just one in 10 women of working

age is staying at home full-time, according to official figures.

The Tories launched their study as an independent report from London University's Institute of Education found that working class parents and single mothers effectively face "coercion" to get back into work

James Kirkup and Sarah Womack
Daily Telegraph, 15th February 2008
James Chapman, Daily Mail
15th February 2008

Social Insecurity

Labour MP Frank Field wrote in the *Telegraph* (3rd January 2008) on his thoughts for improvement of child welfare: "Here's a starter for five. We know that the nurturing of children during their first two years of life is crucial to their long-term wellbeing (and ours!). But mortgages based on two salaries force most mothers back to work all too soon.



Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit now average payments over a child's life approaching £100,000. Why not offer to mothers or fathers the right to draw a quarter of this sum to look after their child full time? £25,000 tax free over the first two years of a child's life would massively increase the freedom of families to choose to care for their own very young children.

Payment for the rest of the child's

life would be decreased commensurately, but the right of parents to command when they draw a large part of state expenditure on children would begin to give public expenditure a totally different feel and meaning."

Equality Aims?

Housework and child care are condemning millions of career women to much longer working days than men, according to a study by Cambridge University. Women who go out to work still do the bulk of household chores.

The lifestyle divide must change if women are to have equal opportunities in the workplace, the report said. "The working lifestyles of most people in Europe still seem to be determined by gender," said Dr Brendan Burchell, a senior lecturer in sociology. He added: "A lot of women feel they don't have choices. They have children with a partner and reduce their hours in the early stages of a child's life and when they want to re-establish themselves in their careers and in terms of their earning power, they are so far behind their husbands. There should be more equal career breaks between men and women when children are born - for instance, by encouraging men to take their parental leave entitlements."

Sarah Womack, the Telegraph
6th December 2007

The Silent Epidemic

At least 20 per cent of new mothers receive treatment for post natal depression - three times higher than was previously estimated, a survey revealed last year.

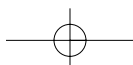
Campaigners say a dire shortage of midwives is putting mothers and babies at risk - with post-natal support "almost non-existent".

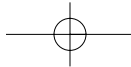
With women spending less time in hospital after birth and feeling more isolated at home in the early days with a new baby, post natal depression is affecting many women.

Telegraph 11th January 2008
Mel Tibbs, Jayne Bridgeman, Marie Peacock

Have you paid your subs?

Membership fees help us to publish and distribute this newsletter and also to provide our website, both of which are not only of immense importance to our members but are the 'ammunition' in our campaign. If you have not paid this year please send your cheque for £10 to the address on the front page or better still, set up a standing order mandate for your bank to pay annually.





Book Reviews

WHAT EVERY PARENT SHOULD KNOW BEFORE THEIR CHILD GOES TO SECONDARY SCHOOL

Jane Bidder

White Ladder Press (www.whiteladderpress.com)
August 2007, 180pp + index £9.99 pbk

Special offer to FTM members: Order via phone on 01803 813343 and White Ladder will send you this title for £7.50 - postage and packing is free.

Few of us have the certainty of knowing that our educational journey with our children will remain on target as the years pass. So many of us move geographically for one reason or another and there may be financial changes or health issues to consider as life moves on. What is certain is that the educational needs and desires of each individual child become ever more complicated as they grow older.

When asked 'How far ahead should you lay the groundwork for secondary school?' Jane Bidder's response was 'Probably from the time your child starts nursery'. My heart sank! Surely not? But this book offers sound practical advice and reassurance, from choosing the right type of school (and changing that decision if necessary) to those daily dramas of lost homework and tiredness. I came away feeling that Jane Bidder would be someone well worth knowing when it comes to our turn at the secondary school system.

Lyn Greenwood



BLUE SKY JULY

Nia Wyn
2007, poetry Wales Press
www.seren-books.com
ISBN 978-1-85411-454-9

Nia announces to her father why her son looks "like someone communing with the angels". "It's the brain", she explained. Yet the true story she recounts is not in essence about brain injury; its ambit is much wider. Her account skilfully chronicles the great divide in our society, not between parents with 'normal' children and those with 'special needs', but rather between those who embrace the child they are given and those who turn the other way. The choice we make will not only determine our relationship with our child but also with our spouse, with the wider world, as well as determining the very nature of who we are as individuals.

Nia's journey will strike deep chords with all of those in our society who have dared to open their hearts to a child. She chronicles the struggle between the expectations of our materialistic society and the call to love. There are so many parents like Nia, who refuse to

have their family life determined by limiting materialist expectations and who take up the fight for the respect, support and freedom that their child needs. Only when these needs are met can they grow and achieve what they are capable of. And it is a tough and often bitter fight.

Those who choose to open their hearts to their child will recognise also only too well, how your heart becomes "a warrior's shield", the "monsoon (of emotions) inside". How you never forget someone who has been kind to your child and really listened to them and to you. How colours seem brighter and sights and sounds more intense. How you feel a fellowship with all those other "dreaming mothers". That motherhood redefines all of your expectations. How it becomes a personal journey in search of yourself; a spiritual, emotional and practical pilgrimage with the destination being 'love'.

Modern society is rather like the mythical ancient Greek Innkeeper Procrustes, whose aim was to make each of his guests fit the standard-sized bed. The role of loving parents in our society is as protectors and champions of our individual child's right to be the size and shape he was born to be. Blue Sky July is a moving personal account of one mother's loving battle for her child. It is also a compelling and inspiring rallying call to all others who rise to this challenge.

FIRST FOODS FAST

Lara Boyd

Luath Press Ltd £4.99 - 78 pages
ISBN - 1 905222 46 7

Lara Boyd is a full-time mother of three sons who conducts workshops for parents of weaning babies on behalf of the NHS. Unlike some of the many books in this genre, this one (like its price) is modesty itself, does not call for hard to find ingredients and does not portray a glamorous mum in a gleaming, spacious kitchen.

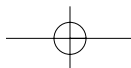
Here is clearly someone who believes that mealtimes should be a family experience for babies and toddlers too and that the kind of home cooked food (with the addition of some salt and pepper for the adults) for them can easily be part of a larger meal for the adults.

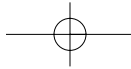
Baby can sit in the high chair and all can enjoy dishes like chicken & leek savoury pudding, creamed potato with cheese, tarragon chicken, stewed fruit, to name but a few.

I am going to pass on this book to a friend who has just had a first baby. I hope that it will be the first step on the road to a long and happy relationship with healthy food and happy mealtimes.



Anna Lines





Creed of the idle parent

Guest article from author Tom Hodgkinson

Our current government is obsessed by the idea of “hard-working families”. Its vision for society is a place where both parents cheerfully put in eight or more hours at the factory or office while the kids are looked after by commercial childcare providers. In some cases, the families who have fallen for this rather bleak and joyless way of living send their children to costly nurseries at the age of just three months. Each weekday is a nightmare of logistics as parents rush to drop their child off, get in to work, pick their child up, get home, make tea, do the laundry and cleaning, pay the bills and try and squash in a bit of pleasure somewhere in the rush.

Plus the child will tend to feel abandoned, and this may lead to psychological problems later.

As an idle parent, I have decided that it's far better for both parents to do as little work as possible for the first few years of the child's life and to spend as much time as possible at home. I don't necessarily advocate that the stay-at-home parent has to carry out “activities” with their child all day, as I believe that children are best left alone, in order to develop their own self-reliance, self-direction and self-management.

But I do believe that the passive presence of Mum, Dad, granny or even nanny if finances allow, during the early years, is far superior to the hard-work-nursery route. I personally would rather earn

l e s s money

and be at home more than be rich but absent. And my partner, after trying to work when our first child was small, decided that she wanted to stay at home and be around a lot more for the others, at least until the youngest had started at school. And when the eldest was two, I rearranged my work life so I could work at home.

The problem, though, with full-time parenting, is that women can feel lonely, tired and unfulfilled at home. To me, there is no sadder sight than a lone Mum pushing the kid on the swing in a grey playground, and most

... it's far better for both parents ... to spend as much time as possible at home ...

Mums will admit later that they found this element of motherhood deadly boring. Much as I hate orthodox jobs, they can provide intellectual stimulation and adult company.

Another problem is that being a full-time mother is a completely impossible job to “do well”. No mother in this position feels she is “doing a good job”, and therefore can feel like a failure.



For this reason I think it's wise for the full-time mother to do two things: one, in everyday life, introduce strategies that avoid the boredom and loneliness, and two, to develop a

... women can feel lonely, tired and unfulfilled...

carefree mental attitude that avoids the self-laceration common to many mothers.

In essence, she needs to get on with her own life and the kids should slot into it. Somehow she needs to combine her presence in the home with something of a “life”. Here are some thoughts that might help:

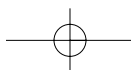
(1) **Creativity.** Making things at home can be slotted in around children or indeed done with the children. Not just cooking, but some kind of craft activity. Knitting, gardening, jam-making, websites, bread-making; there are a host of home-based pursuits that are enjoyable and useful, and many of which can be carried out while the children play.

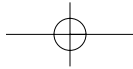
(2) **The man to be at home as much as he can.** It's all very well for the man to approve of full-time mothering and then spend fifty hours a week out of the home. He needs to look at his work and figure out ways of working at home more, working part-time or changing job. I recently met a Somalian taxi-driver who had given up working for the AA because it took too much time away from family life. Driving a cab, he said, was less remunerative, but allowed him far more flexibility.

(3) **Company.** You need to invite friends and their kids around as much as possible. Create your own playgroups - do not rely on government schemes. Burdens are lifted by being shared.

(4) **Organise swaps.** Get one or two other kids round to play, and give their mothers a break for three or four hours. And vice versa. This means you can have a nap or catch up with jobs or read a book. Mums, I think, tend to neglect pleasure in their everyday lives, and this can lead to resentment.

(5) **Trips away.** Take two or three days off every couple of months or so on your own to see friends or family - without kids. Dads actually enjoy being in charge and looking after the kids in their own way, rather than being simply Mum's helpmeet, and





Mum needs to sleep and talk and read and have lie-ins.

(6) **Part-time job.** You might like to think about doing one or two days' work each week, or just a few hours. Offer to help a friend with their business.

(7) **Cottage Industry.** You can run a small business from home for just a few hours a week. You can put more or fewer hours in at different points in your life.

(8) **Stay at home.** When I say stay at home, I mean stay at home. Cut down on shopping trips. Get stuff delivered. Avoid going out: it's an expensive hassle.

(9) **Reject magazines; embrace books.** All those celebrity magazines just make us feel bad. Throw them away, and instead have something like Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes' poetry anthology *The Rattlebag* on hand in the kitchen. When you have a few moments, read a poem. Read to yourself or read out loud to the kids: then you're combining your own pleasure with a bit of home-educating!

(10) **Stop caring.** This is the mental trick I was talking about. Mothers put absurd pressure on themselves to do everything perfectly, and this perfectionism must be abandoned. Instead, we all need to embrace the joys and woes of family life, all the mess and arguments and mistakes.

There is no correct path, only your path. EMBRACE IT.

Tom Hodgkinson

Tom Hodgkinson is the editor of bi-annual magazine 'The Idler' and author of many articles and the books 'How To Be Idle' and 'How To Be Free'.

Point of View

Has the stay-at-home mother become such an outdated figure she no longer exists in the minds of modern scientists?

A grandmother writes:

As the debate on global warming continues to generate more hot air than cold reason a curious anomaly is becoming apparent i.e. an almost total absence of discussion on the subject in women's magazines. Since most of the country's nurturers and carers are female one might expect greater concern for the welfare of the planet than the odd reference to the debate on disposable nappies versus terry towelling.

Carbon Emissions

Women now form half the workforce and may be responsible for more carbon emissions than men. It is the female of the species who invariably does the school run or who drives to the nursery to drop baby off before dropping herself off at work. These multi-part trips are far more polluting than a man's single journey (possibly shared) to the office. But where are the protests from lady journalists and media personalities who declare themselves to be champions of the cause? Could they be in denial as they rush here, there and everywhere fussing over Posh's skeletal frame or Amy W's drug problem? Or perhaps even they can't spin enough to make a case.



"As soon as you're born they make you feel small, By giving you no time instead of it all"

Lennon

The Nappy Debate

As for the nappy debate, the spin-sters have had their way with the project and Boy! Does their slip show! Despite many studies proving the superior planet friendly qualities of reusable terry, a recent report stated reusables were on balance equally lethal to the earth because drying them used as much energy as manufacturing disposables in the first place. Never mind that they take hundreds of years to rot in landfill sites.

How much energy does it take?

Did none of the scientists involved in this study even consider the zero energy used in hanging nappies out on a line to dry? Or has the stay-at-home mother become such an outdated figure she no longer exists in the minds of modern scientists?

An even better solution, according to authoritative reports, is to use a nappy-washing service. Bulk handling is both cost effective and energy efficient.

To paraphrase Lennon: *When you're born you may be small but your carbon footprint should make you walk tall.*

Joan Woolard

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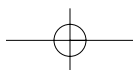
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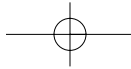
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Your Letters

Letters which appear on this page are the views of the individual and do not necessarily reflect the views or aims of FTM

Career on hold

I've put my career as a academic on hold so that I can raise our five small children because I know that it is best for them to be raised by their mother, not some ultimately dis-interested third party. I can't bear all the ranting and raving we hear these days about 'affordable child care', for beneath it is this smug assumption that it's completely possible to work full time and have successful, well-balanced, emotionally stable, happy children.

It's all a lie. Creating successful relationships with your children takes time; but working outside the home takes time; therefore, at some point, the two will be incompatible. I grew up in the 70's and 80's, and absorbed the feminist view that women could 'have it all'. What a shock I had when our first child arrived. I felt totally betrayed by feminism. It's based on a false set of principles which elevates money, independence and power above relationships and interdependence.

*H Hamilton-Bleakley,
FTM Member*

First appeared on Times on-line debate

Need is immediate

Reading the latest Who Cares? I became more and more concerned. I write to MPs and try to involve friends and no one seems to realise what is happening. Being widowed at 41 years with young children I have supported you financially as far as I could.

Luckily at present my own daughter is only 'working' one day a week but will have to go back 'for her pension'. I believe children NEED full time care for as long as possible. After school they need mum (or dad) to unload their worries or tell of their achievements. It is too late when parents have 'time'. Their need is immediate. Teenagers would be less likely to 'go off the rails' if there was

a parent at home when they got back from school.

Why can't we get through to those who will throw money at all solutions, except helping parents to fulfil their parenting responsibilities?
Yours sincerely

Mrs S Shippey

Same ideals

I came across a leaflet for FTM when babysitting for a friend of mine and was immediately intrigued. I had by this point decided that I wouldn't return to work but would much



rather be at home raising my child myself and I have been pleased to find an organisation that seemed to have the same ideals and thoughts that I had. The website seems to be easy to use and full of useful information and like minded people.

Being a mother is very important to me and its good to know there are other women who feel the same. I have done some volunteering for the local branch of the NCT and it would be interesting to see if there could be any cross over between the two organisations?

Kind regards

Claerwyn Hamilton Wilkes

FTM response to letter in Winter 07 newsletter from Margaret Hanton

Are full-time mothers just considered 'economically inactive' these days? Is that all they say about the work of mothers in official statistics?

Juliet Chalk replies:

For Government and statistical purposes, we are judged to be economically inactive. This is clearly unfair when, as Cameron has pointed out, if a woman goes out to a paid job and pays someone else to look after her children, the state records two jobs and rakes in two sets of income tax.

As a committee we are are working with other groups to press for EU recognition of unpaid carers' work in GDP. UK recognition would then be much more likely to follow. I personally feel GDP inclusion would be a big step towards achieving public recognition for the work of carers, and thus raising their status significantly. The lack of status for caring is one of the biggest reasons why mothers (and fathers) choose not to stay at home with their children. (The cost of housing is another.)

There is of course a whole other area of debate which is relevant here: namely how lots of parental absence is correlated with all sorts of poor outcomes for children, which in turn cost the state a great deal to remedy (if they can be remedied at all).

Obviously full-time parents don't always turn their children into well-adjusted adults, but lots of parental time certainly helps. Arguably in the long term full-time parents are saving the state money - far from being 'unproductive'. If you feel strongly on these issues please do contact your local MP and MEP or write to the papers.

Juliet Chalk

*Please send letters & contributions to P O Box 43690, London SE22 9WN or to the newsletter via our website
The Editor reserves the right to edit letters & articles for space and clarity*

