



The World Transformed

'My Mum is on Strike' Political Stay and Play Events

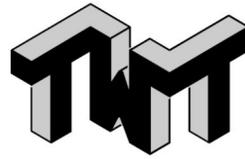
Overview:

The 'My Mum is on Strike' events were the outcome of an evening of cava, curry and childcare in a front room in Leyton one night about six weeks before International Women's Day, we wanted to be involved in the Women's Strike, but getting to a demonstration in the city was difficult as we had children to look after. We decided to organise an event where children could be collectively cared for (mostly by volunteers who either identify as men or who do not usually have childcare responsibilities) while their Mums, carers and parents could sit down, drink a hot cup of tea, and have a chance to chat about what it means to parent, to care in 2019, and what striking from that care might look like if we could scale it up across society.

We didn't want the kids to feel like they were being dumped in a creche so that their mums and carers could do 'real' politics, we wanted to make playing with children central to the politics of the event. It needed to have loads of energy and exciting imaginative activities so that kids really wanted to be there, and a nearby space for carer's and mums to talk about politics and have their struggles heard.

We wanted people to understand that the labour of caring for others is considered 'women's work' and it is still largely undertaken by women. We wanted to do something different by getting people who identify as men (or do not identify as women) to step in and do this work instead. We also wanted to highlight that caring labour is vital to our communities and the lives of our kids. Our events were wildly successful with over 500 parents striking in London, alone.

Along with some of the best activities of the stay and play genre (feminist stencils and scented play dough!), we used a consciousness raising format, borrowed from the [women's liberation movement](#) where everyone gets to speak and no one interrupts. The idea is that by hearing others speak of their experiences, you realise you're not alone. There is space however for important differences between people too (for example, differences of race, class, sexuality) and for people to air these differences rather than



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shut them down. We wrote down our key ideas, in Hackney these ideas were written on laundry as part of a collective art piece 'airing the dirty laundry'. Then everyone took their free lunch box (cooked lovingly by our male and nonbinary chefs for the day) and went home, leaving the volunteers) to clean up.

How to run a 'My Mum is on Strike' political stay and play event

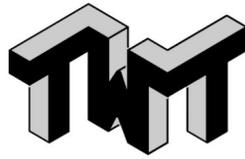
To start with, we opened the door and the volunteers made a cup of tea or coffee for each of the arriving carers. Once everyone was settled in and the kids were playing, we made an announcement to everyone thanking them for coming and tried to explain why we thought a space like this was powerful in terms of reflecting about the importance of unpaid women's labour in the home and why striking from it was key to making ourselves feel less invisible.

We then played for another hour, while also running a consciousness raising activity, which is where small groups all wrote down their answers to four questions and then went around the circle and shared them (some venues did this by getting people to write on sticky notes and putting them up around the room, in Hackney they wrote their answers on pieces of laundry for an art display. The questions were:

1. What is your favourite part of being a mum/carer?
2. What is your least favourite part about being a mum/carer?
3. What would the world be like without us?
4. What kind of world are we striking for?

What materials will you need?

We had activities set up with kids in mind such as painting and card-making and a play dough table. We prepped by going to pound land to buy supplies (we spent £35.00- more than enough), we made scented play dough (by putting essential oils in the play dough) and cut stencils of fists, bread and roses, rainbows and the word 'strike' so that children could make cards for their parents. We had containers filled with shredded paper with plastic animals hidden inside such as dinosaurs and farm animals. We had bubbles (in such a small and busy space we probably wouldn't get them again because



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they split and became a serious slip hazard! Bubbles might be better in a venue with outdoor space or one with lots of room) and balloons.

We also provided colouring in activities that Sisters Uncut have made of [famous black feminists](#) and trans and nonbinary activists in the UK. We provided vegan and non-vegetarian lunches of curry, rice and naan which parents and kids could take away that our male and nonbinary comrades had cooked and boxed up.

You need lots of visuals! Parents will need to give attention to their young kids sporadically, so it can be hard to have a group discussion. Posters about striking and about inspirational women, big sheets of paper with questions like "what are we striking for?" etc. handouts or flyers for future events and a contact list will make it much easier to facilitate conversations about striking, parenting and childcare and give participants ideas and actions to take away with them.

Duration: How long will it take?

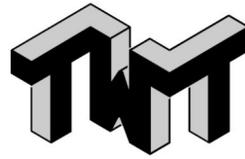
We ran the session in Walthamstow, Deptford and Tooting for two hours, 10am-12pm. It ran on a bit longer as people were having a great time, so it was more like 1pm before we left. In Hackney they did a lunch run so it was 12-2pm. In Haringey they ran it twice, 10-2pm and then again 2-4pm for the after-school rush. You will likely be knackered afterwards.

Room Configuration: What should the room look like?

We ran the activity in William Morris Community Centre Hall in Walthamstow, in a parent run nursery on the Vanguard Estate in Deptford, at the Round Chapel Hall in Hackney, at the Kurdish Community Centre in Haringey- it really varied depending on what people organising the events had access to. We had a play area with many tables of activities, a kitchen area and a circle of chairs for the carers.

Content Notes

The enormous absence of adequate, well funded childcare in the UK is astonishing, and the women that came along knew it. Some were at breaking point, others wanted to



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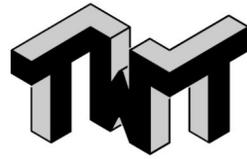
know if there was a waiting list they didn't know about for extra hours or extra funding, but there isn't. There's just us. Only half of local authorities in the UK and Wales have enough childcare for working [parents](#), forcing many women to remain in the home and locking them out of the workplace. Adequate child care relies on us standing up to big businesses making a profit out of care. 84% of early years provision in the UK is now delivered by profit-hungry, private firms. [Political](#) debate has focussed on how many free hours the government is funding but we also need to ask where those funds are going and what kind of organisations that funding is going to. Helen Penn describes how "the care of our children has increasingly become a commodity to be bought and sold" rather than an essential social good or public service. These were the conversations we needed to be having.

Parents will most often not want to be completely separated from their kids. Some people will be okay with some man they have never met taking their child to play in another room, but in our recent experience most don't want that, even if it means they get to strike less! In our experience putting the parents at the front of the room where they can be seen and see their kids playing works best. Volunteers need to try to do what they can for the children, but things like going to the toilet will require their parents unless they tell you otherwise.

What you are trying to achieve with this workshop?

For the kids: We wanted to create a fun, feminist atmosphere where kids could see their mum or carer across the room and could access them if they wanted to, but that they could wander around the room freely trying out different activities with eager volunteers inviting them to try different things.

For the parents and carers: Women told us they thought they had to give up politics when they had kids because it all felt so inaccessible- they were so grateful and delighted to be in a space with other feminists and we spent a lot of time just chatting about our struggles and our lives as carers. We tried to have a chance to reflect together about what it meant to be a carer, and share experiences of this role and what it means to go on strike as a carer or parent.



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For the volunteers: We wanted the volunteers (usually men who are not presently carers themselves) to enjoy hanging out with children, making cups of tea and also to encourage them to try to cover the gap in labour which occurs when mums and carers go on strike. They were expected to clean up, wipe faces, cook lunch, empty dirty potties etc.

You need to have safety tested the room, make sure a toddler cannot pull any heavy furniture on themselves, that the kettle cannot be pulled down, that heavy books will not fall out of shelves etc, usually the venue will have done this for you but always best to check. If any liquid spills, make sure nobody slips, tidy it up quickly etc. If in doubt about anything just ask the parents. Be careful of things like bubble liquid, boiling water. If parents are bringing buggies in it's a great idea to ask them to pack them down as they arrive unless there is another room where they can be stored- buggies take up loads of room!

Extra reading

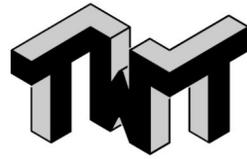
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