

The powerful fluidity of the Children's Program at CR10, the way the program and organizers were able to expand and contract wasn't coincidental. But was definitely built out of shared work over time, be that groups or pairs of people who have been working together in our homeplaces or in different movement spaces or other arrangements. As well as the immense amount of labor (almost a year) that went into crafting the days. And what was created was magic, for all of us. Which is the power of these spaces, we weren't creating a space only 'for' young people but a space where all of us, young people, parents, non-youth, volunteers, guardians were given the space to transform together. Even for a short amount of time, *this* is the true power of conference spaces, to live and breathe magic, dreaming and acting and transformation together. So we all go home to the work and struggle we are a part of a little more filled up and with the knowledge (in our bodies) that dream and play and magic and creativity are a necessary part of our strategy and practice in building the other world we know we need.

—Kate Shapiro

Kate Shapiro lives and loves in the South. Currently living and working in Western North Carolina with the Center for Participatory Change she is happiest when she is supporting youth organizing, farming, cooking and playing games... She is a member of Song and Project South and sits on the Vision and Strategies Council for Kindred, southern healing justice collective

Welcome to Issue #4 of *Don't Leave Your Friends Behind!*

It's my turn to lay out the issue. I've been on and off the Community and Resistance tour this month, talking about resistance and organizing in women's prisons (which is the subject of my first book *Resistance Behind Bars: The Struggles of Incarcerated Women*). Between my first leg of the tour (which ended in Western Massachusetts) and the second leg (which began in Milwaukee, WI, and went all the way down to Atlanta, GA, before ending up in Durham, NC), I've been talking with China about the submissions for this issue. We've been reading and editing the submissions, following up with the amazing people who have promised to send us something and beginning to plan this issue's layout.

Between chats, I sent China a tour story, which illustrates one of the ways that, even when we're not actively talking about supporting children and caregivers in our movements, we can still impart that message:

The Community and Resistance event at Mount Holyoke College was fairly small--maybe 15 to 20 people. One of the people who shared an office with the Prison Birth Project (PBP) and would try to put me in contact with them. (He said that they had small children and so wouldn't be able to come out to evening events. He left a message for one of them, saying, "Here's an update on those of us with adult children who can now go out at night")

I don't have a cell phone, but he gave me Lisa (a co-founder of PBP)'s phone #. The next day, I called her from my friend's phone and left a message. Lisa called me back while also trying to pay attention to her

daughter, who had just come home from preschool. I told her that I would love to meet up with her and that, if she wanted to come to the event, kids were fine and I could make my usual announcement that kid noises were fine.

She said she would come, but that she probably wouldn't stay for the whole event since her daughter was so small (she's maybe 3 or 4, I think. I forgot to ask)

We started the event at 6:15. The auditorium, which seats 200-300 people, was fairly packed with only a few empty seats in the front.

I went first. I started with my usual, "Who here has heard of the Attica Rebellion? Who's heard of the August Rebellion?" and then gave brief synopses of both. As I finished describing the August Rebellion, the Prison Birth Project folks rolled in, complete with 2 small girls and one even smaller baby. So I paused and said, "I'm going to give them a chance to settle in. And I want to remind the crowd that kid noises are fine and welcome and are a sign that our movement is growing."*

The crowd--made up mostly of college students--applauded. It was kind of amazing.

Once the PBP folks settled down in the front corner, I continued. When I was finished, I stepped down and the

* I learned this amazing phrase from Jason Lydon of the Community Church in Boston. He said that the pastor at the church he had attended growing up used to say, when kids made noise, "That's the sound of our congregation growing." Now, when a kid is making noise and adults are giving the kid (and parents/caretakers) the evil eye, Jason smiles and says: "That is the sound of our movement growing."

informal fusion or meeting of the minds. There was a powerful fluidity in the group over the weekend as we all worked to balance out our individual needs and responsibilities to ourselves, our wellness and other folks/events at the conference....and that it was almost as though the program took on a life of its own, with individuals able to flow in and out without stress or guilt as they needed to.

Some of the questions that I have as we move forward building — is what does it mean to come together for short amounts of time, often as strangers (like the participants of the children's program) into this overwhelming and overstimulating environment, and then return to our homes? How do we build continuity and momentum as we continue to collaborate on these magical politicized, often transient, young people centered spaces? This is the work!

And while I did not attend very many workshops it was powerful to primarily understand or interact with the conference through the Children's Program. In some ways I think I might prefer it. It helped me stay somewhat grounded. And while it is not that I don't love grown folks (I do!), conferences, in my experience, are often very fractured and buzzy with everyone shuttling around to different two hour sessions.....Many SONG folks speak about the fact that thinking and engaging in skill transfer for only one or two hours together doesn't always provide an opportunity to go deep in addressing challenges or political strategies, skills or thinking. So I often leave not feeling filled up. What often does fill me up is the conversations way too late into the night with new friends, informal mentors and other random brilliant folks.

huge vault. One of the dreams of a magic carpet escapes the vault and Akila quickly scoops it up and ESCAPES. She then meets to rest of the characters and they share stories—Jadu’s family was deported in ICE raids, Luna’s mother was taken away for being ‘crazy’ and she was put into foster care and Esperanza and her friends are policed and criminalized for being trans and gender non-conforming. After we met each new character in the play we would all stop and do an activity –some were full group and some were more age specific –and then would come back together for the next scene of the play.

What was also an exciting departure from what we created with the Children’s Social Forum was that, while a particular politic infused the entire Children’s Social Forum, much of the ‘political education’ happened in specific, measured blocks of time (more like school or camp), with the CR10 children’s program different ideas were woven throughout the play performance as well as all the activities— and it had an amazing tone! AND I think folks got it. Everyone loved the prison monster and the dots were connected. The second part of the program was devoted to strengthening our powers — healing the land and each other and eventually we all dismantled the prison monster together!

During CR10 I was pretty sick, feverish and also overwhelmed at all of the loves who were all in the same place at the same time. I wasn’t present for the whole program as I was helping to hold down some of the logistical pieces and since I was sick and not wanting to infect any little one. ALSO there were about 10 or 11 folks from Regeneracion childcare and the San Francisco Childcare Collective supplied many of the volunteers and there was another young lovely person from a newly started DC childcare collective so it was a lovely,

little girls began running up to me and giving me all sorts of cards and pipe cleaner creations that they had brought with them. So I sat on the floor while they ran back and forth in front of the stage.

Brother Jesse Muhammad, who is the father of a 4-year-old daughter, mounted the podium next, stating, "I'm happy to see the young leaders of the future and the even younger leaders of the future (indicating the kids running and crawling around in the front) who are here." Then he spoke about organizing around the Jena 6 case.

I have returned from tour exhausted but inspired by the many stories of community-building and resistance I’ve heard. I’m enthusiastic about spending the winter transforming *Don’t Leave Your Friends Behind* from a series of talks, workshops, meetings and zines into a handbook.

If you have a story or experience to share, please send it in! (See the call for submissions at the back of this zine)

Vikki
October 2010

DON’T LEAVE YOUR FRIENDS BEHIND is a collaboration between Vikki Law & China Martens.

Grassroots resistance runs deep in New Orleans, but it isn't always immediately visible to outsiders. It is often based deeply in community, involving elders passing on knowledge to a new generation or people who have known each other all their lives coming together to take action. "People who want to come in solidarity should be respectful with when and how they enter a community," said Kool Black. "There was a lot of organizing in St. Thomas; we developed a lot of leaders. The people who were nine to twelve years old when we started, in seven years, led that program, and were the staff. That was the intention, to pass it on to that *next generation of leaders.*"

--Jordan Flaherty, *Floodlines*

What we ended up creating was a play. The play was sort of the frame for the program and in this play we all went on a magical adventure with each other where we met a number of different young people:

Akila: A Black American whose grandmother was a Black Panther. Akila's power is that of knowledge—knowing the histories of oppression and resistance.

Luna: A Navajo girl living on the Reservation whose mom was taken by the PIC monster because they thought she was crazy. Luna's power is that she can create anything from the earth.

Jadu: Is mixed Black, Chinese and Indian from Trinidad, living in Mississippi. Jadu's power is that he is a dreamer who has powerful visions.

Esperanza: A Latina transwoman who hangs on The Pier of NYC with a community of other queer and genderqueer folks of color. Esperanza's power, along with her community, is that they are shape-shifters.

Eli: A white genderqueer Jewish person. Eli is an ally whose special power is empathy and feeling, and as one who knows that it is important to bring people together.

Each of the characters we met over the day and a half of the play all have a specific power as well as a specific relationship with the Prison Monster, who represents the prison industrial complex. Akila gets put into juvenile detention after a night of nightmares haunted by the prison monster.

While in Juvie she sees that the prison monster is collecting everyone's dreams and locking them into a

Experiencing CR10 Through the Children's Program

My relationship with the gathering Critical Resistance 10: Strategy and Struggle to Abolish the Prison Industrial Conference began last year when I was invited to work with the folks from Regeneracion Childcare in NY to build an abolitionist children's program. Having met and worked with some of the Regen folks through the Children's Social Forum process at the 2007 US Social Forum, we immediately began splashing around with expansive and textured plans for the Children's Program. We agreed from the beginning that we wanted it to be magic — to create a space where we were all engaging together through story, song, imagination while also recognizing and holding all of the different places and experiences we were. It is not that we wanted to suspend reality but rather create realities within our realities with the goal that everyone participating in the Children's Program would understand or relate to the prison-industrial complex in different ways that were grounded in legacy, resistance, creativity and hope.

I was thrilled to participate — to begin to push farther these conversations around movement building and abolition through play and political education and body with young people, to push forward the thinking and knowledge we developed when building the Children's Social Forum at the USSF (but to have a year instead of 3 months, to have 15 brilliant minds and bodies instead of one or two, to have a budget! What!). As well I was politically intrigued to learn more about the work of Critical Resistance and hoped to strengthen and string together what often feel like disparate pieces of my life and work and politics-organizing, youth work and childcare!

The View From Where I Sit By Kristin King

Dear Comrades:

You all rock. Thank you for being supportive and inclusive of my kids. Our group pays for childcare, and if there isn't any available, you'll all take turns watching them while the rest of us get down to business. At socials, you play with them.

I still feel like something is missing. It isn't so much that I want you to do more as an ally to support me in my parenting, but that I wish you could learn more from my kids and from my experience of caregiving. Carrying, bearing, nursing, nurturing, and disciplining two children has changed me irrevocably, and my perspective is so different from yours that I think sometimes we are living in two separate worlds.

Take my body, for instance. It looks like yours. But it's been doing stay-at-home mother work for seven years, and it hates sitting in chairs for two-hour meetings. It's used to sitting on the floor and moving around the room. If I do that, I look different and weird. But really, nobody should be sitting in a chair all day long. After forty years of that, you're gonna need back surgery. You'd be better off getting up and changing some kids' diaper, then coming back to the

conversation refreshed and renewed. And better at dealing with shit.

Now take your political ideology. I share it. That's why I'm here, week after week, in this two-hour sitting-in-chairs meetings. At the same time, I think it's ridiculous. You have this abstract notion of how you want to change the world and what you want people to learn, and a fervent desire to translate that abstract notion into practical action. That's backwards. You have to start with practicality and build your abstract notions from there. I can travel from the abstract to the practical just fine, but it makes my head hurt.

What do I mean when I say we have to move from the practical to the abstract? I mean that I wake up to a messy house because my spouse had to work overtime, and I rush around to find shoes for my kids and feed them and get them out the door, and then I take them on various appointments and errands and I get back exhausted, with a messy house, not knowing what to cook for dinner, and knowing that I'll have to get the kids to bed by myself because my spouse has to work overtime and I think, "Yes, it's about time for revolution." Speaking of the revolution, I've been there. I've tasted it. I wish you could too. Back here in Purgatory where I do politics with you, we still subscribe to the myths of the market-based economy and give community lip service only. We try to



MSGs: translocal affinity group made out of a couple of a New-Yorker Sebastian + a Castillian Maribel and a 4-year-old Gako and a baby girl Samari. Active in social movements on both sides of the Atlantic, especially in activist research efforts coming from Precarias a la Deriva in Madrid and currently in Counter Cartographies Collective in NC. Working temporarily at higher education institutions to make a living.

assignments. With my baby on my lap, I rested cross-legged on my porch in the fading heat of a summer evening and gave Drew permission to text me anytime he wanted to discuss the assigned poetry.

Between summer session and the start of the new school year, I call Noel. He's been accepted into a program closer to his home, and I'm sorry he won't be back. I'll miss you, I tell him. Make good choices. I want you to be successful. Call me if you need anything. We will always be here to support you, even if you're not our student. Take care of yourself; be good to yourself.

The school year began on September 8. I called Drew, 6:45, and he was already up and dressed for school. Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Drew came every day. He asked me to text him every morning and I agreed. Thursday and Friday he texted me back right away: *I'm up*. Monday, no response to my texts until 9:30 a.m. It's a good thing I have unlimited texting, because I blew up his phone with texts until he finally answered. *I'm pissed that I didn't come to school*, he texts. *Good*, I tell him. *Come to school. Get an education. You're a rock star, Drew. You're a rock star*.

Andrea S. Givens is a blogger and non-fiction writer, with work published in *My Baby Rides the Short Bus* (PM Press, 2009) and on innovative web sites including momlogic.com, trusera.com, and seattlepi.com. She has been married for 16 years to the love of her life, Charles Givens, who gives the family unwavering support, strength, and commitment. She is a determined mother to Maya, Zion, and Elijah Givens. She lives and works in the rainy Pacific Northwest.

live up to the ideology of individualism, pretending we can "do it all" and cope on our own. We play the game of Alpha Male in our meetings, everyone trying to get in his own viewpoint.

But there's another place where the rules are different, where there are other ways of being and feeling and thinking. It's called "co-op preschool." For six years, my children attended co-op preschool, and I worked in the school as an assistant teacher. Nobody would think it in the least political, much less transformational or revolutionary. But consider: it is hard to play Alpha Male while sitting on the floor in a circle singing your ABCs. You can feel proud that you know the alphabet, and that's about it.

Co-op preschool is where I learned what community looks like. It means people having shared responsibility and doing their part not because they're getting paid but because they're accountable to each other. It means looking after other peoples' children as if they were your own. It means getting together and cooking dinners for somebody who's pregnant or has cancer. It means having faith that a social institution will meet everyone's needs, and working to make that happen. It means that you can show up in tears after a difficult morning, and expect that nobody will shame you for it. It means doing the work that you are most passionate about, that is closest to

your heart, with people you'd trust your kids' lives to. How come our politics isn't like that? If we stop everything in the middle of some political meeting, and go sit down on the floor with some kids - anybody's kids will do, really - and sing the alphabet, would that do it? Would that bring the revolution?

Solidarity,
Kristin King

Kristin King is either working for social transformation or picking gum out of the living room carpet - she's not sure which. She received a Pushcart Prize for fiction in 1998 and most recently published "Fall of a Superhero in Doctor Who: the Waters of Mars" on Strange Horizons (<http://www.strangehorizons.com/>).

today. He doesn't want to be around other kids. I assured her that we'd do everything we could to be sure Drew was comfortable and able to work. I know if Drew is in the conference room I won't get any work done today. He just has too many excuses and too many avoidance behaviors. I want to help him but he won't help himself.

June 16, 2010

I called this morning; I thought grandma was going to be mad, because yesterday we didn't have Drew working in the conference room. He came off the bus whiny and demanding and we just don't work that way. Once he was able to get it together, I spent about 15-20 minutes talking to him about his responsibilities and listening to his litany of woes. He went to class and did an awesome job. I was happy to share that with her and she was pleased, too. She said he's been in a good mood and "wanted to knock on wood." I said I'd do it for her, and she told me Drew's up and moving around. I'm glad. I hope he makes it to school today.

June 17, 2010

Grandma called. Drew got up by himself. So she's happy he's coming to school. I told her today's the last day before break, but that I'd be calling a couple of times throughout the break to see how he's doing, and then of course I'll call the morning school starts again. Drew needs to have regular attendance.

Drew didn't make it at all to summer session. To be fair, it wasn't his fault. I called him a few times and e-mailed him homework, checked back and explained the writing and literature

June 9, 2010

Drew's not coming to school today. Last night he took a knife and threatened to cut his own throat. Grandma called 911 and they spent several hours in the hospital. Drew signed a piece of paper saying he wouldn't attempt suicide again. Psychiatric professionals go the contract route when they believe it wasn't a serious attempt. Anyway, they are tired from being up so late. I'll call later and see how they're all doing.

June 10, 2010

Drew came to school today. We spent some time trying to figure out what he needs to get to school every day. He didn't have any ideas and wasn't willing to engage, so we just sat quietly.

June 11, 2010

Called Drew. He's whiny again, but I was able to tell him that he did a really good job yesterday and let's make it another great one today. It was hard to get him to respond, and then when I did hear him he told grandma that if she didn't stop shaking him he was going to piss on her face. So I said, Drew, that doesn't work. Remember if we don't like something that somebody says or does, we are going to respond in a way that says how we feel without being disrespectful to the ones who care for us. He's still whiny, but hopefully he'll make it to school today. I told him when he comes I will be sure have lunch with him.

June 15, 2010

Grandma just called. She wanted to be sure Drew could work in the conference room

Organizing within an Anarcha Feminist Childrearing Collective

by CRAP! Collective
(Child Rearing Against Patriarchy)

"We demand a feminist upbringing for the next generation. We want to actively challenge the tirade of sexist racist capitalist classist homophobic transphobic ageist and ableist toys, media and literature produced for children; To empower and inspire the role of parenting caring and educating; And to combat patriarchy in all its forms within our children's lives. We would like to create networks to support and discuss feminist childrearing issues and push childrearing issues in feminist activist circles".

[CRAP! Collective original statement 2008]

CRAP! (Child Rearing Against Patriarchy) Collective arose out of a discussion group entitled 'feminist childrearing', organised by 3 anarcha-feminist mothers, at a squatted feminist gathering in East London, England, 2008. Our original statement spelled out our aims for the collective. A feminist childrearing revolution? Shouldn't take long, we thought!

As well as compiling zines, leading workshops and writing articles for our blog and other publications, we have also made essential links and worked together with like-minded groups and collectives, parents, carers and allies. These include pro-feminist men, people without children, activist and anarchist campaign groups, and feminist and childrearing allies internationally. We have also organised childcare and kidspace at radical events, family blocs on demonstrations and actions, and been active within radical childcare collectives.

There are massive divergences between the spheres occupied and lived by those with and without caring responsibilities. Even within radical spaces or revolutionary groups, so often little attempt is made to

include and encourage parents/carers and their children to attend. Within no time, non-parent/carer allies had mislabeled CRAP! Collective as the group of mothers who could provide childcare last-minute for their event. We often accepted, as we wanted each event to be as child-friendly as possible. But, after total burnout, we concluded that this was neither radical nor revolutionary. We want to push the boundaries surrounding attitudes towards childcare, mothers and kids in our radical communities- not do the babysitting!

Over the last few years, CRAP! Collective has organized, and participated in, many varied and essential actions and events. It has been an attempt at fusing our personal and political realities and visions. We have learnt a lot, and usually the hard way. Non-parents/carers are crucial to the success of parent-led organising, so we've added suggestions to the lists below to help the inclusion of non-parents. It is important we share these experiences so that we don't continually reinvent the wheel when it comes to organising in a pro-kid way.

When organising a family bloc for a demo or a family-friendly action:

- Prepare Early: don't leave your placard painting until 3 hours before the demo starts. Sounds obvious, but it can be surprising what you can forget in all the excitement! Early preparation is essential to avoid stressing yourself and your kids out on the morning of the event. Give yourself plenty of time to get to meeting points, and allow for nappy changes/nose bleeds/tantrums, and all the weird and wonderful things that go with bringing children anywhere. Fun and creative non-parent allies are needed to help make props before the event, and liven up a flagging kidsbloc on the day.
- Allocate Roles: ensure that both an experienced first aider/street medic and a trusted legal observer will accompany the kidsbloc at all times.

said, but I won't have time for breakfast. I reminded him he can eat breakfast at school, and said, I'll see you in a little bit. He said okay, he was coming. When he checked into his classroom, I brought him a cream-colored Starbucks mug full of steaming Tazo Chai, and thanked him for coming to school.

June 7, 2010

Drew's behavior is a complete nightmare. He's complaining that he's been having nightmares, and when I tell him that's okay, just get up and come to school, he starts whining and kicking the walls. His grandma is so frustrated she yells that if he can't get it together she's going to put him in a home. She's sick of his shit. I don't blame her, but I know she's bluffing and I bet Drew does, too. It's time to have a meeting and figure out how we're going to get Drew to school. This is ridiculous.

June 8, 2010

Grandma answered the phone right away. He's up, she said. He didn't want to talk to you or even hear your voice, so he got up. Perfect. I can live with that.

Later this afternoon I talked to grandma and assured her Drew isn't the only student with a trauma history. His complaint that he's had a hard life and nobody understands is complete bullshit - he's never given us a chance to show him that we only work with kids who have had miserable lives. We carry them until they have the tools they need to walk on their own. We can't do that over the phone, though. Drew has to take the first step by coming to school.

part, and he has to do his part. He doesn't respond. I told him to just say "I'm up" and I'll leave him alone. Eventually I hear him tell her to get the fuck out of his room. I tell him that's not the most loving thing I've ever heard, but it's nice to hear his voice. I tell him I'll see him in a little bit, and grandma takes me off speakerphone. I tell her she can call me back if Drew isn't moving around in a few minutes. I feel sorry for her. Drew can be a real shit.

7:17

Grandma called. Drew's refusing to come to school. He's punching walls and telling grandma to get the fuck out. I try tough love this time, telling him over the speakerphone that we all have responsibilities, and it is unacceptable for him to lie in bed and whine. He's not getting an education, and he's not addressing his issues. All I hear is whining. I want to go to his house, pull his ass out of bed and tell him, "Butch up, Sally. Get your ass to school." He manipulates everyone around him - tells grandma that if she doesn't get the fuck out, he will throw a fit. He's always throwing a fit. It must be exhausting.

I got a call from Sandi K. She said her son Will wasn't going to come to school because he has a sore throat and she didn't know what to do since the bus was on its way. I asked to talk to Will, and I told him I'm sorry he has a sore throat, but that I will give him some tea, I will bring it to his classroom personally, but he needs to come to school. He said he couldn't get ready in time, but I know he has 20 minutes before the bus comes. I said oh Lord, I'm a woman and I can get ready in 20 minutes. You're a dude. You can do that. He

If your legal observer will be filming, always make a collective agreement with them before the event about whether the footage will be kept or destroyed afterwards (we have had a documentary film-maker pose as an impartial legal observer, and now have no control over how his images will be used). A mainbloc-kidsbloc representative is needed to continually feedback crucial information whilst on the demo so nobody's left in the dark. We all should be aware of our rights, the general plan of the day, and not feel isolated. Ideally these important roles should be filled by a child-friendly but childless volunteer, so please offer your services.

- Dynamics: think about the placement of the kidsbloc in relation to the rest of the demo. Will you lead, remain at the tail-end, or disperse yourselves throughout? If it is likely to kick off at certain points, think about how you will deal with this collectively as a bloc. Should you involve children in this particular demo or arrange a separate child-friendly one? State your views/worries clearly, and emphasise that you will not allow children to be used as media-bait. Main bloc organisers- please talk openly about these options with a trusted representative of the kidsbloc in planning meetings.
- Essential Supplies: Bring enticing snacks, energizing drinks, and always have bubble mixture to hand! As well as being fun, masks and face paints also work well to disguise you and your kids from roving paparazzi/police cameras. Creative resources such as pavement chalks can be used en-route as a kid-friendly action.

When organising kidspaces at convergences, protest camps or events:

- Safe Spaces: the London G20 convergence centre got violently raided by the cops (the

police entered with guns drawn and forced everyone to lie on the floor). We sensibly had decided to have the kidspace in another building. Always formulate a collective Safer Spaces Policy and fully discuss media/comrade photography, and inform the rest of the event about your decisions (verbally and on easily visible posters). The main event organisers need to share important information with the kidspace crew prior to the event, adhere to the kidspace's policies, and offer help with written risk assessments/first aid kits, so that we can all make safe and informed decisions.

- Emergency Contacts: have a folder specifically for important information and ensure you write down parent/carer and emergency contact details, allergies, and other important information just in case. However, it is essential to immediately destroy this folder afterwards. We left these details in a squatted kidspace overnight, only to return the next day to find the building (and therefore the kidspace information folder) had been reclaimed by the cops. We will never know if the police read the folder's information, or threw it away immediately.
- Start a Toy Bank: toys that provide open-ended/imaginative play are the most successful, e.g. dressing up, play-dough. Ask for people to donate old toys/materials, and arrange a suitable storage place so that you can build up a good selection for your collective, and other groups, to use at later dates. Non-parents/carers are needed to help in the collecting/storage/transportation/upkeep of the toy bank.
- Be Realistic: recognize your limitations and don't take too much upon yourselves. The most important thing is to provide a vital service to the kids and parents/carers, not that you offer a first

7:20 a.m.

Grandma calls. Drew is refusing to get out of bed, and she's not going to fight him. I think that's what Drew is hoping for, that he can be a complete shit and grandma will leave him alone rather than suffer his abuse. I find his manipulation unacceptable and I know she does, too, but she doesn't know what else to do. It is astounding that we fully support Drew as he navigates his gender-identity issues, but he won't make an effort to meet us halfway. Drew doesn't make it to school.

Today I take special care of Noel, who is having a rough day. I bring him into the office to have breakfast with me. I carry the conversation; his contributions are monosyllabic grunts and the occasional shrug. I'm worried about him, but I don't push. He'll talk when he's ready. I know he struggles at home: He wants to do what is right, but in his world family is everything, and his brothers and cousins are all gang involved. He feels obligated to run the streets with them, and the gang mentality is starting to encroach on his soft heart. He is becoming a bully. I encourage him to take a break if he is starting to feel frustrated in the classroom. When I escort him to class, he squeezes his breakfast orange until it is nothing but pulp.

June 2, 2010

Drew is a real pain in the ass. I called again, and grandma put him on speakerphone. I encouraged him to get up, get dressed, come to school. I told him it's half day, he can make it. Silence. I cajoled him to get up. More silence. I told him I'm doing my part, grandma is doing her

Six-thirty a.m. My left hand wraps around a grande drip coffee, four raw sugars, well-stirred. My right hand clicks the space bar, waiting for my Mac to come to life. I'm a half-hour early for work, but this is the time I normally arrive. I usually use this time to call students and maybe plant or harvest my Farmville crops, catch up on the news.

This is my favorite time of morning. The coffee, my third cup and therefore no longer needed to wake me up, adds to the solitary pleasure of the predawn. Its black richness glides down my throat and warms my belly.

I have only one student to call today. Drew has demonstrated avoidance behaviors in his last school by rarely showing up. I'm hoping to prevent Drew's truancy tendencies, so I promised his grandma I would give Drew wake-up calls every morning. It's not extraordinary - I have called many students in the past. It is one way I can support students and families. If we can get the kids to school, we can teach them what they need to know to be successful in school and in life. Showing up for school is the first step.

Tuesday, June 1, 2010 6:45 a.m.

I called Drew this morning. Grandma answered and put me on speakerphone. I didn't hear a peep from Drew, even though I used my sweetest voice and told him, "Get up honey. The bus will be here shortly. We really want you at school today." He won't respond. He tells his grandma he doesn't want to be rude so early in the morning. Hm. I wonder what makes the morning any different from the rest of the day, where rudeness rules?

class children's workshop extravaganza! Non-parent/carer allies- please do offer your workshops and time to the kidspace, but we rely on you to turn up and stick to what you've promised. However, in reality, kidspace schedules sometimes go amiss, so please be flexible if you are asked to lead the workshop at another time.

- Kidspace Vs. Crèche: make it clear whether you are offering childcare (parents/carers can leave their kids with you) or a kidspace (where parents/carers can hang out and play with their kids). You only should offer to mind other people's kids if you know them well, have discussed what to do should certain scenarios occur, and are qualified/experienced enough to do so. However, you will always end up with some kids being sneakily dumped upon you for the day! So be clear that children are always their parents/carers responsibility, and have posters up saying so. Ensure also that individual workshops are publicised on programs as being 'parent/carer and child friendly' or 'not suitable for children' for those people who can't leave their kids in the crèche.
- Daily Meetings: take turns in representing the kidspace at every single site meeting, getting concrete offers of help there and then for that day. Put up a 'To Do' list in the main area, the kidspace, and even the toilets! Make sure you encourage non-parents (of all genders) to sign up and involve themselves in the kidspace. It is also important to have a regular kidspace meeting after the main site meeting, feeding back vital information from the rest of the event to your crew, sharing feedback/ideas and catching up on how everyone's doing/feeling. Good facilitation is needed for a quick and productive meeting, so non-parents are needed

to facilitate (it's hard to focus on the topic in question when you're halfway through changing a runaway nappy!).

- People Care: kidspace crew organisers are usually those with children themselves. Imagine how exhausted you would be doing this job! Non-parents: introduce yourselves, regularly visit the kidspace crew and offer help, to make tea, to get lunch or cover toilet/rest breaks. See what needs doing, and do it! Lunch should always be offered first to the kidspace crew and children, and then opened up to the rest of the event. Take care of your kidspace crew, and your event will have a rockin' kidspace!
- Raise Some Hell: refuse to be subjugated into the dingy basement and demand a suitable kidspace area and facilities with easy buggy-access. Child and family provisions should not be an afterthought, but an integral part of every event. Ask non-parents to provide a kids version of the adult workshops, so that the younger generation feel involved and respected for their participation. For example, at the Camp for Climate Action 2009, the 'What is Climate Change?' workshop was adapted for children, and they got to perform at the camp closing gathering.

Childcare, childrearing and child-friendly provisions should not be just defaulted as a mother's own issue. We see this as counter-revolutionary and a symptom of the sexism prevalent within radical movements. It is essential that people of all genders without children involve themselves in these areas. Communities, collectives, political groupings, movements even, need to be thinking about and organising decent childcare, and creating inclusionary spaces, where families are welcome and happy.

Sometimes the first step for our students is just getting to school. Truancy, avoidance, issues at home, students' refusal to get on the bus, brown-bottle flu - there are any number of reasons why a student doesn't show up. While each reason has a measure of significance, if we can get the kiddo to school we can help them work through whatever difficulty they are facing. I am hard with students when they make choices that have the potential to make life more complicated for them in the future. Life is tough, and these kids have been dealt circumstances that are harder than most. We can support the students in the ways that are most meaningful, and we do. We have purchased shoes for kids whose feet ripped through the toes seemingly overnight. We've sent food boxes and grocery store gift cards when families just needed a full belly. We do our best to stand in the gap, to offer material support and connect them with resources we know will wrap around these families who do the best they can. All of that can, and does, happen, when the student comes to school.

Drew, our most truant student, enrolled in school with typical emotional and behavioral issues, and a significant concern that his classmates will discover he's physically a girl. He does his best to avoid coming to school at all. Staff supports his decision, even though his family doesn't; we call him by his preferred name, use male pronouns, and escort him to the boy's bathroom. But for him it's not enough. He is the king of avoidance, so for him, and for other kiddos who have trouble making it to school, I make wake-up calls, and now, wake-up texts.

Call to Destiny

By Andrea S. Givens

Just before dawn emerges, I turn into the parking lot at work. I pull the ear buds out of my ears and wrap them around my iPod. I shove it between old bills, receipts, and raw sugar packets on the passenger seat and vow to make my car look less manic. Over my left wrist I hang my purse and a white plastic grocery bag containing nectarines, purple grapes, cherry tomatoes, radishes, a red bell pepper, raw almonds, and sliced Havarti cheese - food I will eat throughout the day to maintain my physical, mental, and emotional energy. I grab my coffee and my keys, survey my surroundings, and make a mad dash into the building, grocery bag slapping my side, coffee sloshing. Once inside, I pull the door shut, disarm the security system, and breathe.

This isn't the safest of neighborhoods, and we don't work with the safest of kids. I work at a school in the Pacific Northwest that serves middle- and high-school-aged students. These kids are severely emotionally/behaviorally disturbed. Some are mentally ill. All of them demonstrate behaviors that don't work for them in a regular school. They come to this school, the most restrictive environment available, to learn replacement behaviors, coping strategies, and academics - skills their home schools were unequipped to teach.

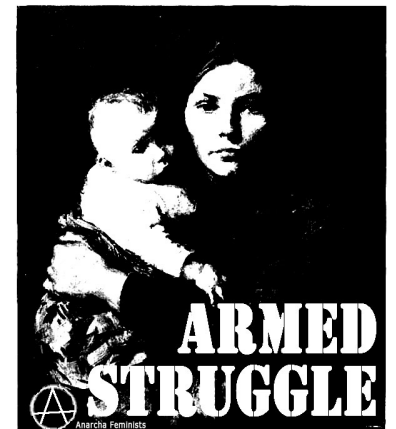
We are constantly coming up with great ideas, but have such precious little spare time. We have made some important gains, but even just surviving in this capitalist nightmare is difficult (never mind trying to self-organise around childcare). Both the negative and positive experiences we have had with non-parents whilst organising within the Collective have reinforced our views that there is a real need to challenge such discriminatory behavior within our own circles as well as in wider society. Our original aims are therefore still our priority, and we will carry on fighting for recognition of these issues. We will settle for nothing less than total revolution and there will only be revolution if those with children are part of it.

www.feministchildrearing.blogspot.com

CRAP! Collective are a group of anarchafeminist parents based in the uk. We seek to revolutionise current attitudes to children and parents/carers, by promoting inclusive and supportive organising, and raising the visibility of families in all their many forms within our communities.

Graphic by Eva

I am Billy's mum. We mainly spend our time going to the park, looking at the animals at the city farm and eating with other mums and babies. I like to call these trips 'Mum Solidarity Actions'.



We're here... we're queer... and that's not all...

Again, there is danger, the mother of morality - great danger - but this time displaced onto the individual, onto the nearest and dearest, onto the street, onto one's own child, one's own heart, one's own innermost secret recesses of wish and will

- Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886)

Heya, my name is Rei. I live in Australia with my little queer poly tribe, and we do our best to provide radical parenting and education for our kids Medea (7) and Theo (8). The condensed version is that we try to parent and educate them in a way which is sex- and body-positive and allows them as much supported autonomy as possible, while encouraging them to challenge hetero/gender normativity and giving them the tools to critically evaluate all the -isms and norms and rules they encounter... we are making it up as we go along and there have been, and will be, much trial and error - but that is ultimately what we aim for.

Building radical communities

Communities do not preexist, they must be built and for us to build radical communities that go beyond having a single thing in common, we need to respect and involve parents/caregivers/children as we would any other group of people in our midst. With projects such as “Don't Leave Your Friends Behind” and the great work some people are already doing in this area, I believe this is where we are heading. I so look forward to sharing the process and experience of radical parenting with a radical community!

Lara Daley has a 5 month old baby, Ruby, and has worked with various activist networks and organisations in Sydney, Australia. Lara is interested in Rad parenting, cities/grassroots urban projects, and Pacific Solidarity, in particular maintaining customary land systems. She currently lives in the Fiji Islands.

hasn't gone to plan. Unsurprisingly, race and class also deeply effect the level of difficulty experienced by new parent/s. Currently little attention is paid to ensure that parents/caregivers/children feel welcome in our spaces/actions and when talking about issues of safer spaces these groups are rarely, if ever, are considered. It cannot be left up to parents/caregivers alone to initiate the conversations, support and structures necessary in including them in building our radical communities. It also cannot be assumed what actions and structures would provide support, as when one has never had the responsibility of raising a child what is thought to be child/parent/caregiver friendly may actually miss the mark. This is an ongoing discussion that needs to happen with folks with kids as well as amongst those of us who don't when they are noticeably absent.

Aside from creating spaces and structures that are safe for children/parents/caregivers we need to be mindful that the aim cannot simply be to maintain parents/caregivers involvement as it was when they were childfree. Whilst this is on the one hand desirable, it is equally desirable to be able to expand the way that folks can participate in radical spaces/actions, respecting and valuing the different capacities, needs and responsibilities of people engaged in the lives of little people. As mentioned above this would have the add-on effect of broadening and grounding the kind of political work that we do.

There are many intersections within my tribe... I'm a bi-racial genderqueer sex worker and student, one of my partners is a high femme pastissiere and the other is a beautiful butch painter and musician. One of the kids' dads is a bisexual circus teacher, and his boyfriend is a queer social worker and performer. Our extended network of chosen kin is just as multifaceted. I tell you all this not because we are poster children for diversity but because we *aren't*. Families that transgress what is commonly accepted as normativity are everywhere. But they are just out of sight, marginalised, ignored. Neo-liberal supposedly non-homophobic attempts at acceptance occasionally surface ... I read in the paper yesterday that '*evidence is mounting (that) children from same sex parents are academically as capable as children of heterosexual couples*'. There is not enough room in this article to fully explore everything that is wrong with this headline... suffice to say that it illustrates how far we have to go.

Because that article is as close as my family comes to being acknowledged in mainstream media and, really, they aren't even talking about us. Maybe in the future when the term

'Gender Diverse Co-parents' comes in vogue we will have the absurd right to be judged based on our children's grades along with gay and lesbian parents.

I cite the above example because it highlights the pressure on queer parents to provide evidence that their lives and choices are valid and not damaging. Not only our children's grades, but their identities, physical appearance, demeanour, knowledge base and life experiences would be evaluated harshly by the majority were the spotlight turned on us. No matter that they are healthy, happy and remarkably self-aware, no matter that they reap huge rewards from being a part of an extended network of adults who love and support them. Many people still believe gay and lesbian parenting to be inherently harmful and deviant. What then of the family and system of parental ethics I have described? Can't you just hear the cry *Children at risk!* In deference to this constant discourse of 'risk' and children, we evolve slogans of the 'Same but Different' ilk. *We're just like you!* The same sex marriage campaigners insist. As though queer relationships are acceptable only as long as they are homogenised versions of the straight social paradigm. Oh, and the kid's grades stay

Seeing past the scene

Children are important in so many lives and being unable to be flexible to the needs and concerns of folks with kids is a hindering factor in radicals ability to relate to and engage a diversity of people. If we can't talk to people and respect differing realities, we will only continue to be a radical fringe, that whilst pushes the limits remains a fringe all the same. I know some great people out there who want to be part of a movement not a scene and being able to involve people with kids has to be part of that vision. A great example of seeing past the radical scene is that of the Black Panthers and their dedication to the reality of community through their free breakfast program and education initiatives. This kind of practical support to their community meant that their politics and action was both relevant to and supported by community.

The absence of people with kids from our midst, is evidence of the tendency radicals can have to isolate themselves. A scene is a poor substitute for a radical community that can support people through life changing events and include others that may not share the same predominantly white middle-class well educated life experiences.

Supporting parents/caregivers & little folk

Anyone who has gone through a difficult time in their lives will know how hard it is to ask for support when you need it most. Having a baby is definitely one of these times, particularly if you have gone through a birth or anything else that

Supporting co-parenting as an alternative in construction

It is great to hear people talking about co-parenting and even more exciting that people are out there practicing it in ways suited to their own context and situations. However, some talk of co-parenting risks being somewhat of a theoretical orthodoxy that people without kids adopt as a more radical (hence acceptable) way to raise a child and maintain your radical politics (and “cred”). Like open relationships, these kind of alternative relationships take hard work, a lot of responsibility, honest communication, trust and wider networks of support. Co-parenting, like being in an open relationship, shouldn't be seen as a badge of honour that makes someone more radical than their monogamous or single/dual-parent contemporaries. Co-parenting is not always possible and proclaiming that it is always the best option assumes that we live in some kind of social vacuum free of inhibiting external factors. Co-parenting is not just a simple choice of whether you co-parent or not, but an exercise in building community and alternative relationships in a world that doesn't support them.

We should focus on sharing experiences and stories of the many different styles of parenting, including co-parenting, in order to learn from each other and support all kinds of parents and caregivers.

up. Where does that leave us, and the many others like us?

Where does it leave our kids? Our seven year old identifies as an ‘it’ and our eight year old is pink mohawked, and the campest creature on two legs to boot. One of our kids masturbates joyfully and often, is happy to talk about it and tells us when they have run out of the special oil they use as a lubricant so we can put it the shopping list! One of them currently has a boyfriend *and* a girlfriend. When the national anthem is sung at school functions, one of them sits down as a conscientious objector (the other one loves to sing anything, anywhere, and that's ok too). In the holidays they go to Mardis Gras and Pride March. We all still bathe together, and in summer we sleep naked. They have both got down on hands and knees and watched me put in a tampon when I was bleeding, because they were curious and concerned about what was happening for my body. When either of them ask questions about sex, sexuality, bodies, relationships (and anything else) we answer them. Honestly. Even when that takes time and is confronting or difficult to break down so that they can understand. We don't have tv but

they are allowed to read anything in the house. If they want to read something with content that might be new or potentially problematic they have to have an adult on hand to answer questions but, other than that, we're anti-censorship. These are some of the practical results of our parental ethics and engagement with the kids. They are random examples meant to illustrate some of the ways we choose to do things differently. That these choices should be assessed as problematic, as putting our kids at risk, is indicative of current dominant politics of sexual fear, hysteria and censorship. In such a climate the way we live and parent is radical. But it doesn't feel like that to us. Not to our kids either - not yet anyway. It's just normal. But it is abnormal according to the status quo... and, in light of our queerness, even more unacceptable.

We *do* do things differently and our happy, healthy kids are fluent and comfortable with ideas and behaviours that many other children their age only experience in the context of shame, ambiguity and prejudice. If we were a mum/dad/kids unit, we would be trusted with far more autonomy in the raising of our children, and if we transgressed no one would

The idea that having children and practicing radical politics are mutually exclusive is an elitist and damaging one. It is based on the belief that radicalism only takes the forms demonstrated by a childfree lifestyle.

We need to get past the idea that single-issue politics, reactive campaigns and summit hopping are the be all and end all of our political lives. The way people engage in this kind of politics can tend toward an individualised hero-activist mentality, which is primarily about emphasising the political work "I do" rather than the work "my community" does. Failing to see our work in more collective terms is counterproductive to building and acting as radical communities that share life and political struggle. By emphasising individual action this tendency perpetuates limited forms of participation for people responsible for kids.

If we could see our political work as truly integral to our whole lives, then some of us having children (either by choice or situation – being pro-choice isn't always choosing abortion) would be part and parcel of a lifetime of shared political work, whether our community organise as a collective, organisation, network or other.

Embracing parents and kids may contribute greatly to broadening and grounding the kind of political work we do, which would assist us in building our own inclusive radical communities as well as strengthening our ties with others.

stereotyping of folks with kids only makes things harder.

If other groups of people in the midst of our communities were spoken of in such a way it would not be tolerated. Rarely would any childfree person speak up for parents/caregivers and parents/caregivers are rarely there to challenge this for themselves.

The attitudes that often accompany the use of the term “breeder”, hold parents responsible for their inability to participate in radical spaces and for the changes in lifestyle necessary when faced with minimal support, both in radical spaces and broader society. Somehow the radical status quo has managed to mirror broader society's individualisation of parental responsibility and thus are isolating parents enforcing a nuclear family model, the same model that many criticise as hetero-normative, consumerist and disengaged from struggle. Through individualising parenting and parental responsibility, critical analysis of the structures that need changing, gender, race and class and how they impact parents/caregivers/kids are overlooked. It seems that capitalism and parenting are only discussed when deriding “breeders” for reproducing workers to turn the cogs of the system.

Kicking the idea that there is something essentially un-radical or un-revolutionary about having kids to the curb.

suggest that it was because we were heterosexual, or use our unconventionality as evidence that straight people shouldn't have children. But we aren't, and we don't, and the wonderful queerness of our tribe is evidence against its own validity in the eyes of many.

To other families in the margins- respect and solidarity.

To allies and friends - speaking for myself, one thing I need from you is validation. The world at large does not tell me I am a great parent, does not tell me that it knows I try my best. It does not encourage me to continue to try and challenge gender/hetero normative discourses in the way that I parent. It does not support me in giving my kids information and autonomy. It does not tell me that I can be all the things that I am and be a parent too.

I'm sure all parents doubt and worry, but not all parents have their fundamental right to *be* parents challenged and questioned and examined and afforded criteria. This lack of validation erodes confidence and breeds isolation. When you encounter parents and kids in your communities, take whatever time

you have to listen and give positive feedback, thank them for doing what they do. If we don't parent and educate in a radical way then long term change is virtually impossible.

Recognising this, and according respect and support to the families who are making change happen could have a huge impact on the radical community's ability to regenerate and sustain itself. And you might just make someone's day.

rei is a genderqueer parent, performer and pervert who hails from Oz where they live with their little tribe of beloveds. They hope that their contribution to this collection stirs the hopes and hearts of other radical parents and allies... should that be the case, get in touch via reialphonso@gmail.com. power to our littlest people. xx

Since becoming a parent I have also come to realise my own inadequacies from my childfree days in supporting parents, even when I thought that I was being an ally to parents and caregivers upon reflection I now would do things differently.

There is plenty that can be done on both a practical and attitudinal level to prevent the continuation of an uncaring and isolating tendency within our midst which excludes parents/caregivers and kids. We need to start thinking radically differently about parents/caregivers and kids and keep watch over ill-informed assumptions about them that are both hurtful and debilitating in order to build radical communities that both share lives and struggle.

Eliminating discriminatory language, blame and judgment from our radical repertoire

There are discriminatory attitudes and behaviours in radical circles that manifest in language, blame and judgment, that undermine the ability of radical communities to support and include families. Using terms such as "breeder" to describe someone's choice (or lack thereof) to raise a child creates a hostile and alienating environment for folks with kids. Personally, I have found it very difficult to share my ideas on radical parenting and the process of becoming a parent even with close friends who had used this term frequently in my presence during my childfree days. Pregnancy and early parenthood are challenging times and are times when we can be at our most vulnerable. Negative language and

**Small hands can make big changes:
building radical communities
that support our whole lives and struggle**

by Lara (usually in Australia currently living in the Pacific Islands)

Being involved in various activist/radical circles and networks I had been exposed to enough non-child-friendly spaces, derogatory talk of “breeders” and anti-kid sentiment, to feel anxious about people in these groups finding out I was pregnant. Sadly, I believed that I couldn't assume, nor trust, that people with whom I felt an affinity with on other counts would support me in my decision to have a child. I anticipated a general lack of support with these new life and personal political challenges and a proliferation of judgment that would assist in ensuring that I would (in spite of my desires) live up to the notion that people who have kids are hetero-normative and stop being active, hence no longer can be revolutionaries. The fact that I felt unsafe in sharing what was going on in my life is as good an indicator as any for me, that there is work that needs doing.

Fortunately, there have been people from these communities who to my surprise have shown great excitement and in principle support for both myself and my daughter's Dad. However, having moved cities and then countries, I have been unable to experience how this may or may not have translated into practical support.

On Fear & Commitments
by Mustafa

I remember at age 15 all up to around 30, I was intent on never having children. This is a time where a young man is most vulnerable and afraid of commitment; I had not found a consistent partner nor had I cared to look for one and perceived “Security is achieved by isolation.”

My main purpose in life was to escape the construct of culture shock, familial remediation and class identity. My comfort depended on the incarceration of my emotions; love no-one, not even yourself.

Real early in my existence I had the chance to travel a lot, my father being a Ph.D candidate of Journalism at the University of Exeter in the 80's; we spent a lot of time in England. I grew up there and identified with a “western” concept of tragedy, comedy, family, security and luxury.

Long before England we ran on asphalt through most of Europe and every Arabic speaking country

(West Asia, North Africa). My father settled in England since the Iraqi government had paid his way and gave him the chance to achieve a Ph.D. to further his career. He was already Chief of Staff of a major Iraqi news agency.

In Exeter I found myself. I became self-aware; life was fair on occasion though there was more external influence than internal scruples. I was called "nigger", based on my brownish tint. Other than being very offensive I was not aware of the meaning of the word, nor did, I assume the kids themselves.

I got into a few fights, nothing ever being too dramatic. I had crushes and I was crushed on. The teachers, the headmaster loved me; I was English. I had no idea who I was.

In 1987, Father Ph.D. moved us back to Iraq, I was in panic, and I cried I would miss my friends. Iraq is this desolate desert, I was sure it would be hot, humid, the people stupid, an uneducated mix of thugs.

Step 5- memorials and icecream

When a year, two and more passes I will still need you. Come over when the date rolls around and tell me I'm doing amazing. Howl at the moon, light candles or just make dinner. Bring over a movie and icecream and hold my hand when I am reminded of my baby and start to cry. Remind me of all the good in my life and never let me forget.

mama mouse lives in a colorful cave with her best friend and their ghost baby paikea and their amazing miracle babe hunter. to contact her email bryanandmikki@gmail.com

Editors' note: we are looking for more ideas on how to support parents who have lost a child. Feel free to share tips from your life.

Step 2- food, health, laughter

I needed you to make me dinner and make sure I was ok and taking care of myself. I needed you to tell me i'm strong and tell me stories of way back when we were young and full of adventure. I needed to smile and I needed soup.

Step 3- rituals and cleansing

I needed you to help me honor her. I needed you to support me. I needed you to help me build a fire, scream into the wind, beg the gods for answers. I needed you to hold my hand as I built an alter. I needed you to tell me you'll always be there for me

Step 4- into the night

As time passed it got harder to go out. I had fears of people asking me what happened and if I'm ok. I really needed you to be there. I needed you to encourage me to dress up. I needed you to be my friend and my gang. I needed you to tell me you have my back.

I was un-aware of the clash of civilizations but it had imbued itself real early into my psyche and I, like most of the working class prejudices, became a statistic. We spent two years in Baghdad, the height and nigh deconstruction of the Iran/Iraq war – living under beds, invasion sirens blaring, surface to air missile dunes a few hundred yards from our house – I missed Exeter, where it was normal. My parents during those two years went through serious hell, bitter hatred, anger, resentment and eventually leading up to a divorce. My older brother of two years and I went back and forth to extended families since our parents could not stand to be in the same house together. In 1989, the Iraqi news agency sent my father to New York City, and my parents decided to reconcile, saving face for their young children; I was 12. My mother became pregnant again and my younger brother, Ali, was born in August of that year in the States.

Here is where I had my first real experience with children.

Ali was small at the hospital, quiet yet resolute. My mother looked wasted and spent but I never took into account what she went through three times in

her life. Now that I think about it she probably received better medical care in Baghdad in 1976 and 1974 than she did in New York City in 1989.

I changed diapers, warmed bottles, nurtured and played with the child. As he grew older I was his prototype and I just wanted to ignore him. The family spent birthdays together, they were not very dramatic I remember, yet I do not remember a birthday spent with my older brother or I, that was. I can remember Ali's birthdays, only because I have pictures of them; it would be the same every year.

We did not really observe holidays. I can still remember my parents being bitter with each other, I can imagine they did not wish to observe holidays together with children they did not really want.

In my adolescence I became detached from myself, from my obligation, responsibility; finding alcohol and cigarettes as suitable habits. But what sort of obligations would a 12 year old have at this point?

Suggestions on supporting your friend who lost their newborn infant

mama mouse

When I lost my daughter I felt so alone. I was young, far from all my close friends and completely unprepared for such a loss. Here's the steps I wish I had the courage to ask my friends to take then . Read them and take it in. Your friends may need you one day.

Dear friends, here's 5 easy steps I wanted you to take to help me heal. Let's learn and grow together.

Step one- sit, listen, cry

I wanted you to not be afraid of me. I wanted you to hug me for a long time And to listen and cry with me. I needed you to say ' I'm so fucking sorry'. I needed to know you cared.

Note: This is the description for our mothers among us program: “mothers among us” was a term that we used to describe how there are women who we interact with who are mothers but often times not identified that way while incarcerated. It’s just one of the ways that the system hides your autonomy and identities.

This Program offers groups focused on empowerment for incarcerated mothers as well as mothers in the community dealing with the effects of the oppression on their lives. Within a social justice framework, we explore issues of motherhood, identity and parenting while navigating the system, reunifying with their children. In addition to groups program has components consisting of direct advocacy and referrals.

This program addresses two significant and intertwined issues: the prevalence of postpartum depression and the increasing number of women at the intersection of the criminal justice system and motherhood.

Marianne Bullock is a mama to the wildest 3 year old, a doula and student who lives in Western Mass. She is Lead Doula with The Prison Birth Project providing full spectrum doula care for women in her community. She has been a practicing doula for over 7 years and is currently pursuing a degree in Social Justice & Environmental Studies at a local community college. She has lead workshops on "addressing sexual assault in activist communities" "empowering birth" and "prisons as agents of reproductive oppression".

Throughout my late adolescence and early to mid twenties, Ali was 8 through 12. He came to exhibit the same tendencies I held at this age, though his role model was me. I felt Ali could have had a different life had I not been involved or even involved differently in his rearing. **I remember being so withdrawn from him when all he needed was a male connection to the world, understandably Father was lacking in expertise where a Ph.D. could not oblige. This experience has to be lived and breathed, not taught. Here I think is where I made a terrible mistake. Forcing my little brother to become independent during his own adolescence was counterproductive, as it has estranged the both of us. What he needed was a support structure, bouncing ideas and liquid thought, malleable not building from experience and a non-hierarchical observation.

I failed him.**

I was then drawn into activism very late in my years, I was around 25. I honestly have no excuse for my quiescence, but fitting to a borderline personality disorder. I thought having children would impede the action of “permanent

revolution”, let alone being too old to raise children now. I also felt a concern for their safety: how could I bring a child to life forcing them to become statistics and victims?

I fast-forward to age 33, partnered 4 months with a woman, the very definition of political experience and fortitude. An Anarchist meets a reformed Socialist (i/e borderline Anarchist). Her experiences with family are much different than mine but those are her stories to tell. She is pregnant at age 34, in a relationship with a man never wanting children and never wanting to commit to her and afraid of being placed in a corner with no exits. Her strength in me and our existence made it an easy choice for me to believe in our decision.

My assurances to my child and my family now are much different than I expected them to be. My regrets are her and my relationship together was not long lasting before getting pregnant. My regrets are our child will never see Baghdad the way I saw it. My regrets are never giving Iraq the chance it deserved to be remembered. A standard of resistance against colonial rule; my paternal

What The Prison Birth Project Needs:

- Financial Contributions!
- Committee Members (even people from afar can join the research committee and help incarcerated women get the wide range of issues they need researched!)
- Grant Writers and fierce fundraisers!
- People who want to put on fundraisers in their communities to help support the work we are doing!
- Journal Makers!
- Books on Pregnancy, childbirth, addiction and recovery.
- Newborn baby clothes in good condition.
- Food Gift Cards
- Childcare!

Contact us at
collective@theprisonbirthproject.org
www.theprisonbirthproject.org

The Prison Birth Project

www.theprisonbirthproject.org

The Prison Birth Project is an organization focused on reproductive justice, working to provide support, education and advocacy to women and girls at the intersection of the criminal justice system and motherhood

10 ways to support Incarcerated Mamas Postpartum

1. Write them letters! Show them the light at the end of the tunnel!
2. Send them pictures of their babies, cards and pretty pictures.
3. Give them a journal.
4. Lend an ear, talk directly about the loss of the child physically right now, and don't try to relate unless you have BEEN THERE!
5. Go to our court dates, show the judge that there is people who care , and people watching the decisions he/she is making.
6. Put money in commissary/phone fund.
7. Support movements that move to not put pregnant women behind bars. Find organizations locally that will offer support to mothers in this situation.
8. Offer the family support, offer to babysit, find carseats, clothes, bottles or other things that they may not have for the child.
9. Look up local information on parental rights and send that information, help to advocate for visitation and retention of custody if that is an issue.
10. Support comprehensive legislation around issues of pregnancy and postpartum for inmates - anti-shackling (anti-restraint is broader and even better to support) laws for pregnant and postpartum women , as well as the abolition of medical isolation for women after delivery.

grandfather I came to learn was Governor of Fallujah back when Britain imposed itself on Iraq, he prepared speeches and organized the community to resist the occupation and kicked the British out. Fallujah under the current "western" occupation was the first to resist and hit back the hardest. It was under Fallujah the charred bodies of Blackwater, street level capitalists, were hung from bridges.

But I digress: concerning my son, my family and our future together -- I have no regrets!

I expect there to be extreme difficulties, major highs and lows though I can safely say that I cannot perceive an exit strategy.

We raise our child with an attachment parenting approach.

We both have learned from our childhoods what to change in current lifestyles and we aim to not regurgitate a self perpetuating cycle.

Laith is a happy baby.

My fears are ever changing. When I held them both and helped them into our home from the hospital I was afraid I would drop him, he was so tiny. That fear surrendered to confidence. I'm afraid I would make the same mistakes I had done with Ali. I'm afraid I may yell at Laith and he will never forgive me. (see above with asterisks **). What I am trying to change in my current status as a confident Man, is my non-typical patriarchal heritage; an existence of less individualistic selfishness to my son, my Anarcho-Pagan Wife/Partner and myself. I don't want to be withdrawn, dissociated. Most of all I will not stand to be apolitical.

My biggest fear though, is how to raise a child in the States. It will be an ardent task under current wars of aggression against Islam/Arabs labeled terrorism, under xenophobia, under the "terror babies" watch, under heavy racism, under fear of cultural appropriation and preservation of native culture, language where all he will hear is how his classmate's father/mother/brother/sister/aunt/uncle died at the hands of the insurgency which Laith will call the Resistance. I think an affluent community wherever we plant ourselves in the coming years,

transportation for children to facility
3. Use of restraints while pregnant during delivery and postpartum.
4. Use of medical isolation while postpartum.
5. Lack of sound breastfeeding policy and support for new mothers who wish to breastfeed their babies.

As I write this I am on-call for a woman who is exactly 40 weeks pregnant. This will be her third baby and may be the only child she retains custody of. My job as a Doula has been to support her in navigating the decisions that she has to make for the health of herself and her child. The organization I work for advocates for mothers to retain their custodial rights and give birth in the most empowering way possible, even while behind the wall.

For the past two years, most of the births that I have supported mamas through have been for women who will be leaving their babies about 48 hours after they deliver. Despite this, in almost all cases, the delivery room has been like any other: filled with love, joy, fear, pain, release and beauty. It is after the baby is born, during the days when a mother's hormones shift and start to dip, that a mom goes back to jail. I go with her to offer her what little support I can.

Lots of mothers are put in medical isolation after they deliver and are unable to gain support from the friends and community inside that they have made for themselves. I've thought a lot about how to support a mother in their transition back to jail (and away from their new baby) and have sat down, one on one, with many of them to figure out exactly what they need (other than to be with their babies). Here is the list that we came up with:

Mothers Among Us: The Prison Birth Project

The Prison Birth Project is an organization focused on reproductive justice. We work to provide education, support and advocacy to women and girls at the intersection of the criminal justice system and motherhood. Our goal is to provide the tools to help them make empowering choices and to provide continuous care throughout the spectrum of pregnancy, birth and postpartum. We offer this in the form of childbirth education classes, one on one meeting time, our Mothers Among Us program and open resource compilation with local organizations and knowledgeable references. We seek to provide a transformational space for women to support each other and work through issues of oppression that affect their families and the social landscape of mothering.

Lots of us hold values in our hearts that support the abolition of the prison and criminal system and support movements of decarceration and alternatives to jail sentences. This system wasn't built for women and current policies in no way support family creation. Lots of people ask me how I can hold those views and still work within an institution that does not support mothers/families. The answer for me is simple, you don't leave your friends behind.

Over the past two years together, we have identified five areas within prison policy that most affect incarcerated women. You can support them through their own prisoner-led movements and by supporting outside movements to change these policies:

1. Lack of access to healthy, nutritious food.
2. Lack of visitation with children and family/lack of

filled with integration of multi-cultural exhibits and a lack of a historical "tokenization", to be part of the support structure in opposition of demanding the elite the consequences of the oppressed. If we were to remain in Austin for the duration of his education, that support structure to which he will belong will look like a "salad, rather than a melting pot. Where all individuals are unique; not cast to a liquid formation" self-perpetuating "normal salient theory", delegitimizing "ethnic" identities. What would normal look like anyhow?

I believe it is important to be immersed in discussion on heritage, culture, "rights and responsibilities" of all people. Here in Texas the Board of Education has identified potential exclusions from our history books trying to re-write the "impact of the Progressive Era." This is what Laith will be learning, his classmates will have no history to associate Progressive Arabs and the influence of Islam and Persia on the European Enlightenment.

A valid fear only triples as he finds his parents are bi-sexual and communist-anarchists.

This is a tall order, a question which must be answered with refinement and we have no regrets.

For more about this, see

<http://news.firedoglake.com/2010/05/18/radical-re-imagining-of-history-by-the-texas-school-board-of-education/>

My name is Mustafa. I currently live in Austin, Texas with my beautiful family. I was born in Baghdad in 1976 travelling all across Europe and West Asia before the age of 5. Though I spent little time in Iraq, the arid air in Texas reminds me of it. At the age of 5 through 10 I lived in Exeter, England, spent 2 more years in Baghdad then moved to NYC in 1989 where I remained for 18 years. I briefly lived in Oceanside, California in 2002 and moved to Austin in 2007. I wish to tender my resignation to the United States. I am an existential, a cultural Muslim, an anti-theist, a social anarchist, a father, loved partner, and a poet.

expected, on Mother's day the park was full of celebrating families. The YWU Mamas made their way through the park stopping to give flowers to mama's and women, along with a handout on birthing options in New Mexico. Women seemed to appreciate the flowers and were interested in the information we were sharing.

Among our YWU mamas in the park was one of New Mexico's few midwives of color, who catches babies at home, and some homebirth mamas who had birthed babies at home. Some women YWU connected with that day found the idea of homebirth a new one, but thought it was a cool option.

After passing out 200 bunches of flowers, YWU Mamas found each other and children, gave thanks for the day and made our ways back home.

connect to our campaigns...

check our websites:

mamasofcolorrising.wordpress.com

youngwomenunited.org

or contact:

Texas: mamasofcolorrising@gmail.com

New Mexico: mcadena@youngwomenunited.org , (575) 644-5830

Mamas of Color Rising and Young Women Women United are both local affiliates of INCITE! INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence is a national activist organization of radical feminists of color advancing a movement to end violence against women of color and their communities through direct action, critical dialogue, and grassroots organizing.



Mama's Action in Austin: The Austin Mamas gathered in a parking lot of a grocery store which they thought would be supportive of their work, being that the majority of their customers are families/women of color. However, the store managers failed to demonstrate interest in their work. The Mamas, being the revolutionary group that they are, proceeded to gather in the parking lot and continued with their work, aware that their presence was not wanted.

As the members of MOCR approached women of color in the parking lot, they offered women a flower to acknowledge the work that they do/did as a mother. Some were surprised, perplexed, responsive, and the majority were thankful. Some even offered donations for the flower, it was clarified by a Mama that no donation was needed and that the flower was simply a symbol of acknowledgement and appreciation from one woman of color to another.

After passing out nearly 300 carnations to women, the store security approached a MOCR member and notified her that they were not allowed to be passing out flowers. At that point, the Mamas had already connected and shared their message with nearly 300 mothers.

Mama's Action in Albuquerque: The Albuquerque Mama's gathered in a community park where many families of color hang out. As

Tips on how to support your friend during pregnancy

by Jessica Hoffmann

Here's a list of some things I've come up with in hanging out with my sister during her pregnancy (she's 38 weeks now -- due anytime!).

- ✓ clean the litter box. there's a parasite in cat feces that can be harmful to pregnant women, so offer to take this chore off your pregnant loved one's to-do list.
- ✓ learn about pregnancy and childbirth. your pregnant loved one is going through something big, and like with anything in life, it feels good when people you're in close relationships with care enough to educate themselves about what you're going through.
- ✓ understand that at different points in pregnancy, your loved one may be more tired than usual, or emotional in a different way from usual -- don't pathologize it, making

assumptions about what they can or can't do, but be sensitive to the fact that they are going through real physical and emotional changes.

- ✓ listen. as with anything, listen to people you love. pregnancy isn't the same for everyone, so while it's great to educate yourself about it from books and movies and things, it's also important to listen to how it feels and is for your loved one in particular.
- ✓ if you're asked to be a birth partner, educate yourself about childbirth, follow the pregnant/birthing person's lead, and be sure to take care of yourself so that you have the strength and balance to be a good support in an important and sometimes challenging moment.
- ✓ be curious but not intrusive. show curiosity and interest in your loved one's pregnancy, but don't assume it's okay to touch their belly, offer parenting advice, or anything else without

center, and home birth services.

In the U.S., maternal and infant mortality rates are alarmingly high, particularly within communities of color. Research shows that holistic pre-natal care (including nutrition and health education) from early pregnancy on, as well as continuous labor support during birth, contribute to healthier outcomes for both mothers and babies. These options, inherent to the midwifery model of care, are not available to poor women (uninsured or on Medicaid) in Texas or many other states throughout the country. While Medicaid will cover will cover midwife attended births in New Mexico, information and access to the full range of birthing options is greatly shaped by a woman's race and class.

Mother's Day 2010, Mamas of Color Rising and Young Women United collaborated on a joint day of action and awareness.

Most poor and working class mothers of color don't have access to information on all of our potential birthing options. For Mother's Day, we took our Birth Justice message to the streets in our local communities to honor mamas of color with flowers, as a form of creative outreach on birthing rights and birthing options.

MOCR wanted to raise awareness in their Austin communities about the midwifery model care, currently inaccessible for most women of color in Texas. MOCR decided they would hand out flowers to women of color with a card attached listing reasons that Medicaid in Texas *SHOULD* cover midwifery care.

YWU moved to share information about Medicaid coverage of all birth options in New Mexico, where it is a woman's right to a homebirth, birth center birth, or hospital birth.

from Mamas of Color Rising (Austin, TX) and Young Women United (Albuquerque, NM):

We are Mamas of Color, together creating a vision of how we want birthing, parenting and caretaking to be in a more just and loving world.

Our vision and practice of parenting is not just about biological mothers or the isolating model of nuclear-family units but includes aunties, sistas, grandmas, tias, and other close community members who share in the often undervalued and invisible work of caretaking and parenting.

We believe the discrepancy in U.S. maternal and infant health outcomes, along lines of race and class, is an issue of reproductive and social justice. Now is a strategic moment to impact the way birth in this country happens. It is essential that women of color organize around birth justice to amplify our voices and implement revolutionary visions of birth.

A message Mamas of Color Rising and Young Women United,

Mother's Day, May 2010

We believe women have the right to choose if, when, and how they become mothers.

On this Mother's Day we want more than flowers and cards, we want all mothers (including poor mothers, undocumented mothers, young mothers, queer mothers and single mothers) to have the power and the access to choose their birthing option. We believe that all women have the right to choose a birth option that is healthiest for themselves and their families. In turn, we believe all women have a right to accurate information about birthing options and equal access to hospital, birth

- checking in or being invited. as with anything, consent matters.
- ✓ ask what your pregnant loved one could use help with and help where/how you can. maybe they need help lifting big things, or picking things up off the floor once their belly gets very big ... or maybe they could use moral support at doctor's visits or in dealing with their excitement/nerves/etc about being a parent ... don't assume what they need, as everyone is different, but listen, ask, and offer the kind/s of help you can give.
- ✓ talk about childbirth preferences and choices with your loved one if they want to talk about this, and recognize that it's both a political and a personal topic, and be sensitive to talking in a way that's helpful/illuminating/supportive but not judgmental. these are big, loaded choices.

i'll send more if i think of more.
meanwhile, this is what has come up
for me and my sister.

Jessica Hoffmann is a
coeditor/copublisher of make/shift
magazine and proud auntie of Ruby
Joy Hoffmann (born 9/4/10).

*Editors' note: more suggestions to
add to the list are welcome!*

