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Celebrating thirty-five years of
changing the way we live and work



The Story

Thirty-five years ago, in 1979, the Job Share Project – created by a group of women in Sheffield who'd decided to do something about the challenges they faced in combining paid work with caring for their children – gained its first paid worker. Three years later, it became New Ways to Work, widening its objective to promote flexible working for all. Almost simultaneously, in 1980, another group of London-based women formed the Working Mothers Association, which soon had groups throughout the UK.

In 1994, recognising the importance of fathers, the Working Mothers Association became Parents At Work. The following year its 'Waving *not* drowning' network of parents of disabled children launched the first ever campaign to help such parents work as well as care. Slowly but surely, the two organisations built the socio-economic case for work-life balance. In 2004, they merged to form Working Families.

During the early 2000s, these ground-breaking campaigns began to bear fruit, first with an £11m government fund to help employers adopt work-life balance policies, and then new statutory rights to paid paternity leave and to request flexible working. The world of work was changing.

In 2014, Working Families will celebrate the extension of the Right to Request Flexible Working to all employees, as well as the creation of a new, more flexible system of Shared Parental Leave. But the story, and the challenge, is not over.

In many respects, it's hardly begun.



Time

▶ OUR PROGRESS

OUR GOAL ▶

Despite great progress since 1979, negative assumptions about flexible working persist. Reduced hours working is all too often seen as lack of commitment, and senior roles and flexible working wrongly held to be incompatible.

Flexible working needs to be built into 'business as usual'. We need to work towards 'flexible by default' in job design and recruitment, and enhanced leave rights for carers, and for grandparents. And we need a new statutory right to 'adjustment leave', to enable families to weather life crises such as bereavement, the serious illness or onset of disability of a child, or other major change in caring responsibilities without giving up work.

Equality At Home

▶ OUR PROGRESS

OUR GOAL ▶

While many more men are involved in both childcare and eldercare, take-up of paternity leave over the past decade has been pitifully low. And, while the rate at which it is paid remains so low, take-up of the new Shared Parental Leave by fathers is also likely to be low. Which means progress towards equality at home will be slow.

The evidence from other countries is that fathers take full advantage of paternity leave only when it is well paid, and is a stand-alone right. We need to work towards longer, more flexible and better-paid periods of dedicated leave for fathers.

The Challenge

Since 1979, flexible working has gone from fringe idea to mainstream business practice. Over 90 per cent of workplaces offer at least one flexible working option. Millions of working parents and carers are achieving the work-life fit they need.

But for all too many families, work simply isn't working. Time-poor or cash-poor – or both – they struggle to achieve more than a barely tolerable work-life compromise. For them, the world of work has not changed anywhere near enough.

And for employers, how we organise work today brings costs in low productivity, lost skills and experience, and a reduced talent pool.

Our challenge is to ensure that, by our 50th birthday, work works for everyone.

- **We want work that works for women** – today, maternity discrimination is on the rise, and the 'mummy track' holds back careers.
- **We want work that works for men** – today, take-up of paternity leave is pitifully low and managers all-too-often expect men to be exclusively work-focused, making it hard for them to be fathers.
- **We want work that works for children** – low pay and long hours steal time from children, and family relationships.
- **We want work that works for employers** – realising the skills and talents of every employee.
- **We want work that works for all.**

Childcare

▶ OUR PROGRESS

OUR GOAL ▶

Whilst the number of childcare places has increased hugely since 1979, our childcare 'system' is still not fit for purpose, with demand for good quality, affordable childcare far outstripping local supply. And the childcare crunch is particularly acute for single parents, those working atypical hours, and parents of disabled children.

We need to work towards a universal childcare system, one that protects and enhances the well-being of our children, and delivers good quality, affordable childcare to parents when they need it.

Money

▶ OUR PROGRESS

OUR GOAL ▶

To achieve a good work-life balance, working parents need a flexible job that pays well enough to support a family. They need the twin currencies of time and money.

We need to see more employers adopting the Living Wage, and the National Minimum Wage needs to be both substantially increased and better enforced. And we need to work towards statutory maternity and paternity leave being paid at wage-replacement levels. For with better and more equal pay will come better and more equal parenting and eldercare.

The Mission

Thirty-five years after the spark that generated Working Families, we are still on a mission to create:

- **Shared care and shared careers.** By 2029, both fathers and mothers will routinely work reduced hours, with more time at home and less childcare, and career paths will recognise the child-rearing decades.
- **Disability no barrier.** By 2029, it will be unexceptional for the parent of a disabled child to combine paid work with caring.
- **Great performance from great people.** By 2029, corporate culture will value happiness and well-being, and recognise the 'whole life' of every employee.

Get Involved Today

- **Make a personal commitment.** Become a Changemaker by making an annual donation.
- **Take up employer engagement.** Become a member and gain access to our Benchmark and Research.
- **Make a personal introduction.** Introduce a future Changemaker or employer.
- **Make a donation.** Donate online now at [workingfamilies.org.uk/donate](https://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/donate)

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