

Childcare drive for film & TV gains traction with first nursery at Warner Bros. Studios ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The movement for an effective childcare infrastructure for workers in the U.K. film and TV industry is taking a major leap forward with the opening of the first dedicated, on-site childcare facility at a U.K. studio.

Variety can reveal that Warner Bros. Studios Leavesden, home to the forthcoming “Wonder Woman 1984,” will open a nursery this summer, providing 40-50 places to both Warner Bros. staff and productions shooting at the studio. Crucially, the nursery will hold flexible hours in order to meet the demand of extended production schedules.

The message is simple, according to co-founder and “Peaky Blinders” actor Charlotte Riley: you can’t talk about equality without talking about childcare.

The initiative is driven by the “Press” actor and business partner Mark Radcliffe, who set up creative sector-focused childcare firm WonderWorks, alongside Emily Stillman, VP of Warner Bros. Studios Leavesden.

Riley created WonderWorks after returning to work after the birth of her first child and observing that while her childcare needs were addressed as a cast member, the vast majority of crew were unsupported.

“It was blindingly obvious that people were struggling with this. There were so many people who’d just left (the industry) because there was no way of making family life and film life work,” Riley tells Variety.

“Although I was seeing diversity with more young women (in the workforce), what’s happening is that people are having to sacrifice having a family in order to maintain a job they’ve worked hard to get in a male-dominated department.”

Productions set to shoot at Warner Bros. Studios Leavesden are being encouraged to reserve spaces at the nursery ahead of shooting for crew members, which can then be subsidized. Overall, there is a two-tier system, with coverage for standard nursery hours and extended hours for production staff. Payment is based on market day rates and flexes up as days get longer.

Stillman highlights that what differentiates WonderWorks’ pitch is its aim of helping workers in production.

“When you think about trying to manage a family, how can a childcare facility cope with split days, night shoots, schedule changes or last-minute changes? The project that (Riley and Radcliffe) put together...is a purpose-built facility for the film industry. For us, that made a huge difference,” says Stillman.

The nursery will be located at Warner Bros. Leavesden Park, adjacent to the Hertfordshire-set studio in southeast England, and will cater to infants and children up to the age of five.

Riley notes that the U.K. industry has so far been devoid of specialized childcare services for the creative sector because workers are made to feel ashamed if they’re “not prepared to make sacrifices.”

“But U.K. production is booming like never before,” says the actor. “And yet we are losing swathes of people because there are very, very few people who can manage parenthood and film.”

In the U.K., where the film and TV industry is built upon an extensive freelance workforce, the accessibility and cost of childcare presents palpable barriers that disproportionately affect women.

According to a 2018 study by U.K. film and TV childcare advocacy group Raising Films that surveyed 640 workers across the industry, 79% of respondents said their career had felt a negative impact due to parenting and caring duties.

At Warner Bros. Studios Leavesden, there is a firm belief that when productions buy up spaces in advance of a shoot, they will be “actively helping people get back into the industry,” says Riley, who plans to roll out WonderWorks as a mobile nursery this summer, catering to film and TV sets across the country via a decked-out double-decker bus.

“You can support all the opportunities for women you want but if you don’t support women when they’re bearing fruit creatively and personally, there is no point providing them with opportunities because you’re not supporting them through their child-rearing years as well.”

The initiative comes just weeks after the European Film Market at the Berlinale hosted its first creche for filmmakers and delegates — an initiative spearheaded by EFM director Matthijs Wouter Knol, and also supported by the fest’s new executive director Mariette Rissenbeek.

Operated by volunteer group Parenting at Film Festivals — a group founded by four film professionals based out of France, Spain and Germany — the creche cost €50 (\$56) for 10 days, running from 10AM-8PM. The group, which launched the initiative at last year’s Cannes Film Festival, funded the childcare, while the festival provided the infrastructure and venue.

Co-founder and former Melbourne Film Festival artistic director Michelle Carey tells Variety, “This is not just for professionals — it’s for filmmakers who travel. I worked at the Melbourne Film Festival for 10 years, and (when we invited) female filmmakers, so many of them who’d just had a baby weren’t able to travel, whereas when we invited the men who’ve had babies, they were always able to come.”

The group recently expanded the service to Spain’s San Sebastian Film Festival, and plans are in place to bring back the Cannes creche in May.

“It’s really heartening to see this becoming more visible and talked about,” says Carey. “We talked to industry veterans who tell us what they had to go through when they were younger and how they’d have loved something like this. For us, it’s about keeping people in the industry so we don’t lose them — particularly women.”

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