



Newsletter 2018

Supporting the children of actors from birth to graduation



“It was really helpful to talk to you, thank you for listening to me. The extra crisis money is such a huge help, I wasn't asking for that, I just felt I could say how things are, knowing that you would understand.”

Message from the Chairs

Dear Members, Friends and Supporters



It's been a record-breaking year for ACT! We have helped more families and distributed more in grants than ever before, almost doubling our expenditure. You will read about some of what we have been up to in this newsletter, and we hope it will inspire you to support, or continue to support this amazing charity.

We strive to be an inclusive, modern and dynamic resource for actors with children, who have to wrestle with the additional worries and responsibilities of parenthood on top of the already stressful and unpredictable business of maintaining a career in our industry.



As our new Head of Family Support, Lydia Hodges, observes in her piece, our families tend to be incredibly resilient and resourceful, but the industry can do better in supporting parents and carers generally. Thanks to organisations like

PIPA and Equity, improvements are happening, and parents are being more outspoken about the challenges they face, demanding job-sharing and more flexibility around auditions, rehearsals and work schedules. ACT is proud to help enable new actor-parents to return to work by expanding our provision of childcare grants, reducing the number who drop out of the profession. Although a newcomer to our world, Lydia herself has already made a huge impact on our families, getting out and about and meeting many of them in person. It has been moving to hear how our families' situations have touched her and to witness her intuitive understanding of and respect for our community of actors. We are very grateful too for Lydia's wealth of experience, in particular her work with the National Autistic Society and Carers' Network: she is familiar with many of the challenges that face our parents.

We are hugely indebted too to our Executive Director, Robert Ashby, who has guided us expertly through the arduous process of becoming a C.I.O. and has played a major role in getting our message out there through Agents' and Casting Directors' organisations and social media as well as brilliantly managing the day to day running of ACT.

Robert and Lydia keep Trustees up to date with regular "Friday Feedback" from the families, some quotes from which are included in this newsletter. It's clear that the families find them approachable, friendly and incredibly helpful. The fact that so many families attended our first ever Family Day is testament to that.

Several of our longest-serving Trustees are retiring this year and we would like to pay tribute to their extraordinary commitment to ACT. Indeed as Alister Cameron explains in his piece, many of them have been involved with the charity for many years. They have all been a joy to work with and we will miss them at our monthly meetings. We know they will all continue to support and promote ACT for years to come and we offer them our heartfelt thanks.

With our very best wishes
Peter Forbes and Julia Watson



“Thank you so much for your amazing response! I actually cried. It is a huge comfort to know that there are people who genuinely care at a time when the system is so harsh on so many. People are amazingly kind, and this gives us so much hope.”

“Thank you both for your wonderful support. I can't express how much it means to us to have you both to chat to and ask advice and help from. ACT are just awesome.”



ACT's Trustees are Helen Black MBE, Alister Cameron, Anna Carteret, Catherine Comerford, Peter Forbes, Paul Higgins, Nicola Horton, Lloyd Hutchinson, Ann Queensberry, Joy Richardson, Paul Shelley, Julia Watson, Caroline Harker and Lucy Robinson. ACT's Honorary Advisers are Isla Blair and Doreen Mantle.

“I'm crying, because you just don't expect people to be so nice, to have any empathy. There are still nice people in the world!”



Welcome to Lydia!

Lydia Hodges joined ACT in January as the new Head of Family Support. Lydia has a wealth of experience in working with families in need, including expertise in support for adults and children with autism, and the whole spectrum of issues affecting carers.

Joining ACT has been an interesting and hugely rewarding experience for me. Without a theatrical background myself, I was shocked to learn how undervalued actors sometimes are. For example, not to hear whether you've got the job after an interview would be unheard of in any other profession.

I have been so impressed by the resilience and strength of spirit that our actor-parents show when faced with periods of unemployment, low pay, rejection, or having to deal with the dreaded benefits system (when

will someone make it work for the self-employed?). When you add the responsibilities of children into the mix, life can easily become unbearably stressful. Some larger theatres and companies are doing great things and leading the way, but there's still a long way to go. In the meantime, it's been a pleasure to take some of that stress away from families with ACT's grants and support.

Actor-parents are just like any other parent in most ways: they may have children with disabilities, fall ill themselves, struggle with housing, schools, affordable childcare, or just simply in wanting the best for their children and not always being able to provide it. I've been asked about all these issues and many more when I visit families in their homes.

We've helped out with everything from specialist wheelchairs down to £20 school trips. It doesn't take huge amounts to make a difference. Being able to provide the consistency and security of regular grants for children's activities makes the difference between a child missing out and feeling different from their classmates, and a child who can pursue a talent or have a more creative, expressive life.

One of the things that has struck me as different about parents who are actors is their positive way of dealing with difficult situations, particularly actor-parents whose child has a disability. I have seen such love and acceptance of their child's differences, a desire to work with what that child is good at, to try creative approaches and to celebrate them for who they are.

Making childcare possible



Actor-parents please contact:
lydia@actorschildren.org

ACT is a major sponsor of PIPA, Parents in Performing Arts, because we are angry that so many actors have to leave the profession when they become parents. Alongside our support for PIPA's campaign to make the industry more family-friendly, ACT has started a groundbreaking project part-funding actors' childcare costs to enable them to attend castings and take acting jobs.

The largest charities are mostly devoted to performers who are unable to work, but ACT believes this ignores the vast number of actors trying to survive uncertainty and low pay, let alone with the additional cost of being parents.

"I remember doing a panto in 1998 and being paid £600," said one father. "Wages have never compared to that since. It's scary how the cost of living has just raced away from earnings."

A day's nursery place is often more expensive than the pay for a day's acting, especially in London.

ACT's childcare grants are tailored to each family but might include a six month period of regular contributions to nursery costs – perhaps £450 per month – then continuing payments specifically geared to the extra childcare costs incurred by acting jobs.

“ You’ve given me the freedom to attend more auditions further afield. As a result, I have landed a large role in Glasgow! And now I also have the confidence to take the job, so thank you. ”

“ ACT has really facilitated a revolution in support for parent actors... It really is life-changing for so many and ACT must rightly take credit for that. ”

“ You’ve enabled me to attend castings to get my first engagement since having my daughter and having to put my career on hold. ”

It has been great to work with so many wonderful people, even when it’s the tricky or daunting tasks such as filling out benefit applications or going to challenging meetings with their child’s school. I hope that my advice and support in those times has been a source of strength and encouragement. But above all else, ACT’s presence means parents are not on their own. Often I’ve not known the answer to a problem straightaway, but the parents are I have worked it out together, side by side, as a team.

I know that it can be hard to ask for help, so I hope that many more parents continue to contact ACT in the coming year and give us the chance to make a difference.



Reflections of a retiring Trustee: Alister Cameron

It was 25 years ago that I first joined TACT – as it was then – The Actors’ Charitable Trust combining the welfare of actors’ children with caring for older actors at Denville Hall. Council meetings were held at the Leicester Square offices of Capital Radio and presided over by Richard Attenborough. Lord and Lady A would arrive in their green Rolls Royce and drive right into Leicester Square – the pedestrianised bit. That always impressed me. Much has changed during my time but our vision at the Trust has always remained the same; providing vital support and financial help to the parent members of our profession.

TACT became ACT – the Actors’ Children’s Trust – and parted company with Denville Hall and we committee members became trustees. More responsibility but also more commitment and greater fulfilment. Committee members came and went and new friendships were formed and it’s wonderful to see the enthusiasm of our most recent recruits.

However the rules are that trustees must stand down after a certain time and that time has come for me. I shall miss the camaraderie and the feeling that we’re doing some good. I’ve always felt it a great privilege to be in a position to help the children of my fellow actors.

Also bowing out this year is Catherine Comerford. She is currently our deputy chair and has always been a wise and perceptive voice and I know she will be greatly missed. As will Julia Watson, one of our joint chairs with Peter Forbes. Despite having busy lives as actors they have both worked so hard and contributed so much for ACT at a time when we have been busier than ever.

Anna Carteret and Paul Shelley are also leaving us, both stalwarts of the committee’s debates. It was I who co-opted Paul onto the committee fifteen years ago and I’m so glad I did. He and I have often been likened to Statler and Waldorf – the two old guys from The Muppet Show – but I like to think we have contributed more than just carping from the sidelines. We will all remain members of ACT and we will be able to rejoin as trustees in a year’s time – if they’ll have us!

Personally I’d like to thank Robert and Lydia and everyone from ACT for making my time so enjoyable: I shall miss you!

ACT’s day on the farm

ACT’s first day for families took place on a city farm on the only cold and rainy day in August. But 16 parents and 17 children braved the weather and had the most wonderful day. “We chose a farm so that people would get to know each other through activities: feeding the animals, collecting eggs, mucking out pens,” said ACT’s Lydia Hodges. “The awful weather gave us even more in common!”

The children especially enjoyed being able to meet and handle large rabbits



and wriggly guinea pigs, while a chicken called Bridget perched on their shoulders.

Caseload-willing, ACT will hold similar events in areas where we are in touch with clusters of actor-parents. Lydia

regularly visits families at home but ironically finds that the most isolated parents are those in London and the South East. “People assume that there is greater need for networking in the nations and regions, and ACT had originally planned to employ coordinators around the UK,” said Robert Ashby. “However, for example, families in Northern Ireland are mostly in touch with each other, helped by Equity organisers in a more cohesive, small acting community.” Lydia has recently visited seven families in Scotland and will continue to assess families’ needs throughout the UK and how best ACT can meet them.

Social media



ACT's Twitter feed is managed by actor Sarah Winter. With more than 700 followers it has become a vital tool to reach families.

Follow ACT @ActorsChildren

Sarah devotes hours to finding and creating tweets useful to actors who are parents, including networking events, free activities in school holidays, parents' campaigning voices, and of course ACT's support. Sarah developed innovative and rigorous guidelines for ACT's social media. "We have to tread so carefully between confidentiality and usefulness," she notes. "It can be daunting having the charity's reputation in one's hands, but interaction with our followers proves it is totally worthwhile." It can be hard work: for example, before retweeting a podcast Sarah has to listen to every minute of it in case there is something lurking that doesn't suit ACT.

Like many other socially responsible charities, ACT has closed its previous Facebook page. We are investigating a new Instagram account, and would welcome photos or ideas for photos that ACT could use. Again, not identifying children, but somehow conveying the lives of actor-parents.

Promo films

"Amazing publicity!" was one comment on ACT's new publicity films, shared on Twitter this year. Coordinated by Trustee actor Paul Higgins, the short films were professionally produced by actor Jim Creighton. Both Paul and Jim had also run the London Marathon for ACT.



Huge increase in grants

ACT had another tremendous financial year in 2017-18. Most importantly, grants increased by 86% -- almost double the previous year -- totalling £741,744. The cost of raising funds and managing the investments fell to £37,247. The charity's "bottom line" value rose during the year to £6,766,552.

The full accounts are available free by email or post.

Since 1st April, ACT has continued to reach more families and sustain a high level of financial support for actors' children. ACT has also increased its advocacy, casework and support for actor-parents.

The Trustees firmly believe in balancing the needs of children today, with those in years and decades to come. Most people give money to charity expecting it to be spent on the particular cause now or in the near future. Some grant-making charities build up colossal reserves, but the Trustees believe that ACT's greater reach and spend is much more in keeping with charity good practice.

At the end of the year ACT closed its charitable trust, and on 1st April re-opened as a CIO, charitable incorporated organisation. Previously, as a trust, the charity had no legal identity of its own, it existed solely as a group of individual Trustees. But, now, as a CIO, ACT exists legally and the Trustees at last have limited liability. This makes trusteeship more feasible for actor-parents.

We are deeply grateful to the late John Moore of Brighton who divided most of his estate between ACT and a hospice, each receiving £169,000. Mr Moore had links with ACT when we ran the actors' orphanage, in Noël Coward's years as President. Legacies are vital to ACT's continued success.

Giving back to ACT

Members and families often ask us how they can "give back" to ACT. We don't seek to publicise particular families or make the children appear in adverts: every family deserves our respect and confidentiality. But here are a few ideas for how YOU can support ACT:

Follow and interact with ACT on Twitter @ActorsChildren.

Ask your agent to include a mention of ACT's grants in an email to their clients, including childcare support to make jobs possible for actor-parents.

Whenever you have a theatre job, tell other actors about ACT's grants, and leave ACT publicity in the green room, dressing rooms or even on lavatory doors.

Leave an ACT publicity card in the waiting area at castings.

Ask your drama school's alumni network to include mention of ACT grants in their e-mail to members.

Leave ACT information at group meetings and rehearsal venues.

If you are working with unhelpful, last-minute schedules will the rest of the company join you in asking for family-friendly arrangements, benefiting everyone?

A growing number of wonderful ACT members choose to give monthly donations to the charity: thank you.

Please consider including ACT in your Will.

"I've just opened your letter with cheque enclosed and I can't quite tell you how happy and relieved and... emotional it made me. The help we receive from ACT has been the silver lining of all silver linings. The months are still proving a struggle and ACT's help has been such a weight lifted. Angels do exist!"