Chapter 18.

The Possibility of Other, Better Worlds: Single mother organising as acts of *Homefullness*

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Abstract

This chapter proposes that *Homefullness* has a great deal in common with the imaginative and radical ways of thinking, survival and resistance developed by single mothers organising at the margins of society. It describes the experiences of an 'un-careful' present, where children and their mothers are left in destitution in receding welfare states. These accounts are telling of our present times and the forces that need to be challenged if we are to create future cities of *Homefullness.* Starting from the vantage point of those that are excluded, impoverished and not (yet) counted for, this chapter explores what inclusive, equitable and sustainable communities should feel and be like. It also discusses examples set by two single-mother led organisations that developed alternative ways of delivering services and engaging families in poverty – *SPAN* in the United Kingdom and *Operation Life* in the United States. Finally, this chapter proposes that these projects should be considered as examples of 'everyday utopias' that challenge hegemonic ideas of self-reliance, independence and capitalist realism.

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Introduction

Single mothers have across time and space occupied marginalised positions in society that have often led to hardship and poverty but have also prompted imaginative and radical ways of

thinking, survival and resistance (McLellan, 2024; Cohen & Samzelius, 2021; Orleck, 2006). Yet, throughout history the gendered, classed and racialized everyday knowledge and political voice of single mothers has often been silenced and erased. Although much academic and political interest has been devoted to the economic and social situation of single mothers and their children, they have often been treated as objects of study rather than as subjects with epistemic authority capable of theorising their own experiences and making valuable contributions to society. As pointed out by sociologist Patricia Hill Collins, 'the context in which people do intellectual work is just as important as the content of the ideas themselves' (2017, p. 14).

Multi-racial single mother led initiatives are often born out of a combination of rage and love, anger about injustices and care for children and other people close to one's heart. They are also deeply rooted in an understanding of interdependency, responsibility towards others and the value of caring relationships that are extended beyond the immediate next of kin. They are as such, a stark contrast to the ideas of self-reliance, autonomy and personal responsibility that have come to dominate political discourses in most Western countries in recent decades. These are the same ideas that tend to be used by decision-makers who argue that housing is not a right, but an individual responsibility.

In this chapter, I want to counter the objectification of single mothers by proposing that there is a great deal that can be learnt from the imaginative and radical ways of thinking, survival and resistance developed through single mother led organising, as well as from how people in positions of power have crushed some of those initiatives. Communities of resistance may need to be repeatedly built anew in response to new challenges. Yet, the dreams and legacy of previous generations can continue to inspire new generations to come, if they are brought into the open and critically reflected upon. Or, as argued by utopian social theorists – envisaging a better tomorrow, is an iterative, ongoing, collective process. Setbacks are features of such processes, but they are not necessarily end points (Cooper, 2016; Levitas, 2013).

I'm writing this text from my current position as a homelessness and poverty scholar at a Swedish university, but also as someone with a long personal and professional experience of

multi-racial single mother organising and activism in a British and a transnational context through the *Single Parent Action Network (SPAN).* I begin the chapter by describing the experiences of an 'un-careful' present, where children and their mothers are left in destitution in receding welfare states (Samzelius, 2020). These accounts are telling of our present times and the forces that need to be challenged if we are to create future *cities of Homefullness*. Starting from the vantagepoint of those that are excluded, impoverished and not (yet) counted for, we can start thinking of what inclusive, equitable and sustainable communities and cities of *Homefullness* should feel and be like. This is what single mother led initiatives have always done and continue to do. Hereafter, I discuss the examples set by two single-mother led organizations that developed alternative ways of delivering services and engaging families in poverty – *SPAN* in the United Kingdom and *Operation Life* in the United States. Finally, I propose that these projects should be considered as examples of 'everyday utopias' that challenge hegemonic ideas of self-reliance, independence and that there are no alternatives to systems that primarily are organised around financial parameters if people and in this case single mothers and their children are to live in inclusive, caring and sustainable communities.

A single-mother perspective on homelessness

Together with Sue Cohen, one of SPAN's founding members, I have previously argued that experiences from single mother led organisations need to be situated as part of a broader feminist knowledge and resistance project that address the trials faced by various groups within interlocking systems of oppression of race, class, gender, sexuality and citizenship (Cohen & Samzelius, 2021). Experiences of motherhood are shaped within social systems of power and oppression, whether we are directly aware of this or not. When single motherhood is politicised, it can help to shed light on how large-scale political and economic issues affect the lives of individual children, their mothers and their communities.

According to Nancy Fraser (2017), the rise in poverty and homelessness among single-mother households, across the globe, is 'a more or less acute expression of the social-reproductive contradictions of financialized capitalism' (Fraser, 2017,p. 22). What Fraser is pointing at is that

under the current financialized capitalist regime, the balance has shifted in a way that favours the interest of the market and economic growth over the social and emotional needs of human beings. One of the problems arising from this imbalance is that, on a micro-level, families are struggling to find a balance between activities linked to economic production and other areas of life. As housing becomes increasingly commodified and financialized, and when the responsibility is moved from the state to the market, the needs and interests of financiers and investors gain precedence over local social conditions or residential needs and thereby contribute further to the imbalances we are currently witnessing. Fraser argues that this 'crisis of care' is one acute expression of those contradictions, the looming ecological crisis is another, and they are interlinked.

Despite its international image as a woman and child-friendly country, the poverty levels in Sweden among single mothers and their children, particularly those who have a refugee or migrant background, has tripled over the past twenty years (Samzelius, 2020). This group is also over-represented among families seeking support from social services due to acute housing problems and homelessness (Angelin et al., 2022), which runs parallel to an unprecedented accumulation of wealth among the richest part of the Swedish population. For several years, both in my role as an employee at Save the Children (Samzelius, 2017) and later through my PhD research (Samzelius, 2020), I have documented the experiences and perspectives of single mothers that have been deprived of a homeplace where they can focus reproductive activities such as caring for children. These, I argue, are reflections of a care-less present.

The homeless mothers that I met in Sweden who turned to social services for support were either offered temporary accommodation in privately run extortionately, expensive hotels and hostels or were told that finding housing was an individual responsibility. These responses led to hardship and made women and children vulnerable to destitution as well as further abuse in the hands of rough landlords. It is outside of the scope of this chapter to go into details about the workings of the Swedish welfare system, which I have analysed elsewhere (Samzelius, 2020). However, a key message from these women is that the choices that mothers make are shaped and constrained by the social relationships and environments in which they are embedded. Our lives are intertwined and interdependent and it is therefore not possible to separate the suffering of

children from the situation of their mothers or society as a whole. This sentiment was expressed in the following reflection by Yasmin, a mother of three who had come to Sweden as a refugee from East Africa:

> For my children to have a good situation, my situation has to be good too. When we are all in a good situation, we also have a good relationship. But if I don't feel well, my children will suffer. If parents and children are not feeling well this is not good for society either…long-term…it is all part of the same whole…it is related…how we feel and wider society (Samzelius, 2020, p. 19).

Yet, they argued this was not accounted for in their interactions with social services (Samzelius, 2020). Sweden has, in recent decades, as many other welfare states moved towards a more punitive social assistance scheme with a strong emphasis on self-sufficiency and rules around activation measures and sanctions. It is a system focusing on individual deficiencies, often disregarding structural constraints, which becomes particularly problematic in relation to women with caring responsibilities who face homelessness.

In interactions with statutory services, the mothers complained that they were not listened to when they tried to explain their problems (Samzelius, 2020). For example, it is not always possible to move to another city when you juggle three part-time jobs and have a disabled teenager who attends a school for children with special needs. The women explained how scary it was to share corridors with drug-users, how tired they felt and how difficult it was to care for young children when you lived in temporary accommodation with shared toilets, bathrooms and kitchens at the same time as you were expected to attend work-related activities full-time. No regard was given to how this would affect the children as it was seen as the mother's responsibility. To apply for flats that they knew they would never be offered, just for the sake of demonstrating that they were trying was described as demoralising. Some were informed that their children could be taken into care if they failed to solve the housing situation. Gloria, one of the mothers told me how it made her feel:

> It has stressed me out. You feel humiliated. It's like you have no value. It's like you are abused morally, you know. Sometimes it's like you are here, but you don't have the same rights as everybody else. You feel completely dehumanized … All of this just because I was unable to find somewhere to live (Samzelius 2020, p. 96.)

Women like Yasmin and Gloria are experts on the dysfunctional side of the Swedish housing market. They taught me what I have come to describe as a 'parallel' housing-market for those that have been excluded (Samzelius, 2020). These include illegal sublets, slum housing in the countryside, shared houses with one family in each room and hotels and hostels located in industrial estates, in office blocks and old care homes sold off to private property companies by cash-strapped local authorities. The mothers told me about how much people charge for housing and how rough landlords operate. They showed me letters from welfare agencies, brought me with them to meetings, and discussed how hard they worked to find a way out of these poor housing situations and to not to be reliant on welfare. They told me that they could not afford to be paralysed by the idea that there is no alternative, because accepting the status quo is to accept suffering and injustice.

When suffering becomes individualized and internalized, it tends to be surrounded by silences or individualized blame. However, as described by the medical anthropologist Paul Farmer '…underneath this silence lies the pent-up anger born of innumerable small indignities, and of great and irremediable ones' (2003, p. 25). It was this pent-up anger that the mothers in Sweden shared with me, and that has sparked low-income mothers in different parts of the world to organise. The sociologist Iain Wilkinson (2004) has discussed the implications for social scientists of attempting to write about the political and moral significance of understanding and depicting what suffering does to people. This cannot be avoided, he argues; instead, we should embrace it and see it as 'the motive force in the advancement of ethical debate on the character of our times' (Wilkinson, 2004, p. 119). In doing so, women like Yasmin and Gloria need to be recognised as 'credible knowers' (Fricker, 2007) that can help us understand the contradictions of our times. Whilst political philosophers often contemplate moral principles of justice, fairness, or equality from an abstract vantagepoint, sociological and feminist approaches 'forces the question of how these are played out in practice' (Levitas, 2017, p. 7). However, it is also

important to question how they are built into the design of social institutions and how they are played out in the actual process of daily life.

Activist Mothering

A defining feature of the activities carried out by single mother organisers and activists is a bottom-up approach to building support networks, community resources and political action. It starts from an awareness of personal lived experiences of mothering and then moves from there to inform collective struggles and justice projects. Whilst doing research into grassroots community activism in New York and Philadelphia during the 1960- and 1970s, The sociologist Nancy Naples (1998) noticed how the women she had interviewed described a broader definition of actual mothering practices that went beyond nurturing work. What she came to refer to as 'Activist Mothering' included all activities and social and political activism that addressed the needs of children and a wider community. This included a self-conscious struggle against racism, sexism, and poverty in ways that challenged essentialist interpretations of mothering practices as something mainly carried out within the private sphere. The US based *Operation Life* and the British *Single Parent Action Network* that I will discuss more in detail are examples of organisations that also operated from a vantage point of 'Activist Mothering'.

It was in the late 1960s, that a group of African American single mothers in Las Vegas, mobilised in response to their children's need for decent clothing, shoes, education, housing and medical treatments. Despite working more than one job, they could not afford to provide for their children (Orleck, 2006). Twenty years later, across the Atlantic, it was the stigmatisation, discrimination and poor housing available to single mother families that sparked women in inner-city Bristol to self-organise (Cohen et. al., 2017). Both groups soon realised that if they wanted real change, it had to come from themselves. They set up child-care facilities, ensuring that their children were cared for whilst they were able to educate themselves about the legal, political, racist and sexist practices that limited their existence. They argued that they were not failures, instead it was the system that was failing to live up to its own promises of democracy, justice, equality and fairness for all its citizens.

As Ruth Levitas (2017, p.6) has observed, 'The desire and hope that things might be otherwise, and might be better, is the defining characteristic of utopian thought'. For Levitas, 'utopia as a method' involves hopeful and radical speculation as a form of knowledge production and critique. However, as she further points out, social utopias are also widely at work in our everyday lives as they are the reflection of the models that we carry around in our heads of how the world should operate. These aspirations always have an ontological aspect to them as 'they carry an embedded idea of what it means to be human, what is good for us and makes us happy' (Levitas, 2017, p.8). By using 'utopia as a method' we can 'imagine a future society with a different ethic and look at our own practices from that standpoint' (Levitas, 2017, p.12). Without using the academic language of utopian thought, the women who founded SPAN, Operation Life, and other similar organisations were still engaging with it by imagining how services and initiatives that would benefit impoverished single mothers and their children should feel and look like. They channelled these ideas into collective action, creating a movement between imagining and actualisation to show that there are alternative ways of organising society.

SPAN's involvement in European anti-poverty projects identified a need to network individual single parents and single parent led organisations across local, national and European spaces. As such, they developed from a Bristol-based single-mother multi-racial support group into a national network, whilst also remaining rooted in the local. A key aim of SPAN was to fight discrimination and to lobby to improve national and European social policies. Through this work they challenged dominant ideologies of the nuclear family as well as stereotypes of single parent families prevailing in public and political discourses. Another important feature of SPAN was an anti-racist and multi-racial stance, which was informed by experiences of discrimination and racism against members with African and Caribbean backgrounds. Diane Burns (2000, p. 270), who was both a member of SPAN and a PhD researcher, explains its participatory ethos:

> ...at the centre of SPAN's self-help philosophy are self-defined notions of mutual support, which are negotiated through `sharing' experiences and circumstances. Based on notions of shared experiences and/or interests (which do not necessarily assume a homogenous experience), SPAN's move from its locally defined

> relationships to (include) the political and public arenas in national and international spaces. Within this process, systems of participation that privilege the `lived' experiences of single parents, remained however, a central principal to SPAN's work.

Parallel to the advocacy and policy work that SPAN members engaged with, it also developed alternative services tailored around the needs of single parent families from its base in inner-city Bristol (England). In 1998, with the support from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and funding from the European Union, the SPAN Study Centre was set up. Initially it mainly offered training and support-groups designed to build confidence and basic skills, with creche facilities running alongside at its premises in the annex of a local Primary school (John, Payne & Land, 2001). Over the years SPAN offered English classes, childcare development projects, parenting support services, advice and guidance, and mentored projects in SPAN's premises as well as in community rooms on housing estates, and in nursery and primary schools to meet the needs of the local community as well as a growing population of refugee and immigrant single parent families. The organisation collaborated with self-organised refugee women's groups, delivered accredited learning on behalf of Further Education colleges, and contributed to the establishment of collaborative cross-sectoral networks in the city. The learnings from this local work were also shared nationally and internationally through, for example, SPANs membership in the Lone Parent Advisory group at the UK Department of Work and Pensions, the UK cross-departmental Child Poverty Unit, and the European Anti-Poverty Network.

SPAN was inspired by welfare and civil rights movements in the US and elsewhere, linking their efforts to transnational struggles against racism, discrimination and social injustices. Interestingly, there are many parallels between Operation Life and SPAN. For instance, over a period of twenty years, Operation Life developed an alternative social welfare system for mothers and children that were living in poverty, administered by women who were experts in this area because of their own lived experience. They successfully set up childcare, a medical clinic, a library and job-training programs for low-income women in one of Las Vegas' most deprived neighbourhoods. They also founded a community development corporation through

which they constructed and rehabilitated social housing projects for families with children and for senior citizens (Orleck, 2006).

Rather than departing from established systems and frames, these organisations created their own. In the case of SPAN, this was done both in response to the learning developed through its participatory ethos and by seizing opportunities that were identified along the way. Most of the staff were, or had been single mothers, and because of this they worked to fit around their children's school hours. Having children was never a barrier, rather an asset. SPAN staff and members came from different religious, cultural and linguistic backgrounds simply because that reflected the make-up of the community of single parents. SPAN was organic, strategic, eclectic and opportunist all at once. Yet, as in the case of Operation Life, if members had not continued to develop new skills, knowledge, understanding and confidence along the way, SPAN would never have lasted as long as it did or had the impact it had. It is also important to recognise that both organisations had allies in more powerful positions in politics, at universities and in welfare rights organisations that offered advice and support in various ways.

Organisations like SPAN and Operation Life were a challenge to societal norms simply through their existence and success. They both defied stereotypes of lazy, incompetent welfare mothers scrounging on the system. As argued by the Black feminist activist Pauli Murray: 'A system of oppression draws much of its strength from the acquiescence of its victims, who have accepted the dominant image of themselves and are paralyzed by a sense of helplessness' (1987, p. 106). Single mothers that initiate grassroots organisations refuse to be paralyzed and to accept defaming images of themselves. Through paving the way, they bring others with them and 'clearly reject the taken-for-granted assumption that those in positions granting them the authority to describe and analyse reality are entitled to do so' (Collins, 1986, p. 517).

The challenge of capitalist realism

I first encountered SPAN in the early 2000s as a local single parent in need of advice and support. A few years later I was employed by the organisation, and I soon progressed to become

the manager of the SPAN Study Centre and the childcare services. For many years I oversaw fundraising, finances, community relations and service development in this local context, which means that I gained a lot of detailed knowledge of the inner workings of the organisation as well as the major challenges that it faced.

While it was determination and a dream of other, better worlds that kept the members and staff of SPAN and Operation Life active, it was the inability of people in positions of power to imagine a different way of operating and organising services than that enmeshed in a business ontology that finally led to the dismantling of both organisations. The end of both organisations caused a lot of grief, anger and frustration, but looking back, I also think there is a great deal that can be learnt from these experiences. What has been written out of history, needs to be critically reflected upon. If indeed, the enactment of utopian thinking is 'provisional versions of a better future' (Levitas, 2017, p. 8), it could be argued that ideas tested through practice by organisations such as SPAN and Operation Life can raise crucial questions about the role of economic and social policy, political organisation and agency.

Through reading about the demise of Operation Life and reflecting on the events that eventually led SPAN to merge with another community organisation and dismantle its radical foundation, I have come to realise the commonalities between these organisations. It might be enticing to blame some individuals for their demise. However, the real battle lies in understanding the thinking behind how our societies should be ruled and organised, and who is considered 'qualified' to get involved. In a book chapter entitled *When things fall apart,* Sue Cohen and Morag McDermont (2015) unravel some of the forces that both SPAN and Operation Life had to fight. The chapter tells the story of how SPAN got involved in an ambitious urban regeneration project in the early 2000s and how the organisation was pushed out under pressures of 'austerity' measures. Stories like this, they argue, illustrate how urban policy shapes and interacts with the lived reality of organisations, people and social structures.

In 1994, SPAN was given access to a disused annex of a primary school right next to where the motorway M32 cuts through Bristol's impoverished inner-city neighbourhoods to reach the city centre. In return for the use of the premises rent-free, SPAN committed to carrying out

considerable and necessary refurbishments. Over the years, the organisation created a small oasis in the middle of a site plagued by drug-use, crime and prostitution. I recall arriving in the mornings having to push used condoms and needles under flower pots, hiding them from mothers and children that would soon arrive, before calling the Council's Sex and Drugs litter team to come and remove them. I also remember the lovely creche space that SPAN had fundraised for, the welcoming classroom, our big kitchen table and the beautiful garden that was maintained by members who learnt to grow vegetables. The feeling of the space was equality important, as expressed by a mother who used to come to the SPAN Study Centre:

> I'd say it's the one place that I've found that's had such an impact. People were really taken seriously... I can't think of any facilitators or any members of staff who didn't have the same sort of outlook. They were always warm, they were always friendly, inviting, ready to listen, just ready to help in every way.

Close to SPAN's premises was a derelict building on a disused plot of land. It was a pass-through site that felt unsafe to many of the residents in the area. Members of SPAN imagined how it could be transformed into a community space and got the Bristol City Council on-board. An architect firm was brought in and SPAN applied for funding to research the viability. Eventually the proposal was that there would be a mix of social housing and a community space that would house a library and the SPAN Study Centre and childcare facilities on site.

Over several years, SPANs CEO, Sue Cohen and I attended meetings with the architects and Bristol Library Services to view building plans and financial projections. The community space was due to be finished in 2012, but in the meantime the Property Services of the Bristol City Council served SPAN notice on its space in the annex of the Primary school as the site was to be re-developed. No consultation was made with the organisation, the hundreds of families or the wider community and no alternative premises were offered. This resulted in a legal battle where SPAN argued that there had not been any assessment of the impact of the proposed eviction on service users. Eventually, Bristol City Council gave SPAN the use of the site for another two years. The time, the energy and the resources spent on solving this issue was exhausting.

In 2009, the same year as SPAN was served notice, the UK Conservative Party leader David Cameron declared 'the age of austerity' and the end of 'excessive government spending'. When the Conservative Government came into power a year later, austerity politics were implemented at a fast pace, with cuts to spending that directly benefited citizens and communities. Philosopher, Mark Fisher (2009) has referred to austerity politics as *capitalist realism*, which he describes as a 'pervasive atmosphere...a kind of invisible barrier constraining thought and action that is based on the naturalisation of a series of political and ideological determinations' (pp. 16-18). Although Fisher did not equate capitalist realism with neoliberal or financialised capitalism, he pointed out that the widespread belief that there is no alternative to capitalism realism has reinforced the power of neoliberal thinking.

In the 1980s, Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher became infamous for proclaiming that 'there is no alternative' (to her politics of privatisation and marketisation). This was also what we were told when the new Head of Library Services informed us that we would have to pay market rates if we were to move into the new community building that we had been part of building. From here on Bristol City Council's business ontology had to inform the purpose and objectives of community spaces. However, for a community organisation like SPAN this was not an alternative as it was not affordable. It did not matter that SPAN had initiated the project in the first place as we did not own the new building. SPAN then moved to premises that were rented from another community organisation that also experienced financial challenges and eventually the organisations merged. It is interesting to note that a business ontology also seeped into the way further education and childcare funding was allocated by government agencies while big private companies like Sodexo and G4S entered the arena of welfare to work programmes. Ultimately this affected the thinking of the SPAN Management Board, who after Sue Cohen's retirement and with support from external 'HR experts' from private businesses, appointed a white male CEO who spoke the language of business, but who had no regard for the community that the organisation served, or an understanding of single parent issues and grassroots politics. Two years later SPAN ceased to exist as an independent organisation.

Two decades earlier, Operation Life met a similar fate in the United States after the Reagan and Bush administrations decided that they were not 'qualified enough' to run the programs that they

had initiated. To continue to operate they would have to appoint people with ‘professional credentials’. The final blow came when the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services awarded contracts for services started by Operation Life to a more conservative group who eventually took over their programs. According to Rennee Diamond (a local social justice and women’s rights activist who had supported Operation Life), the takeover of funding from radical, African American -led grassroots groups was a manifestation of a larger Bush and Reagan policy which transferred resources to more conservative groups. Diamond noted how the responses of local officials were provoked by the very idea that poor, single African American mothers could administer multi-million welfare programs (Orleck, 1997a).

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the CEO of Operation Life, Ruby Duncan, tirelessly argued that cutting welfare programmes did nothing to motivate single mothers to get out of poverty and become self-sufficient (Orleck, 1997b). However, the kind of programs run by Operation Life gave women a purpose, respect and value. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, when the American discourse of ‘welfare queens’ and ‘benefit scroungers’ reached the shores of the UK, SPAN fought the same battle arguing that low-paid jobs were not the solution that would put an end to cycles of poverty (McLellan, 2024). Both organisations, together with thousands of other mother-led grassroots projects around the world, argued that no one was more expert on the problems facing mothers and children that lived in poverty than the mothers themselves. For mothers are aware of the needs of their children and understand the intrinsic details of the welfare system and the job market that holds them back from getting out of poverty. They also know the importance of supportive relationships, solidarity, purpose and respect.

The need for alternative ways

The ideas that were put into practice by SPAN and Operation Life could be described as prefigurative practices, or a sort of testing ground for alternative ideas for the future. However, it could also be argued that they do not just ‘test’ what is possible, for people change themselves in the process, and new possibilities, both for persons and for the future, are opened (Unger, 2007). Despite being forced to close, the legacies of these organisations continue to live on

through the people who once benefitted from their work, through those of us who were involved in making it happen and through scholars who have conducted interviews and helped to archive documents, photos and other materials that tell our histories (Burns, 2000; Orleck, 2006; Orleck 1997a; Cohen & Samzelius, 2021; Bark et al., 2023; McLellan, 2024).

Lara Monticelli and Mikkel Krause Frantzen (2024) argue that 'the only way to de-naturalise' the idea that there is no alternative 'is to unveil the fact that opposing alternative ontologies can exist. And these can be as real, if not more real, than the pervasive atmosphere of capitalist realism' (p. x). SPAN and Operation Life are only two examples of a web of small grassroots initiatives across the world that have grown from the injustices and discrimination that single mothers and their children have endured historically and in our current times across national borders, religious fault lines and cultural divides. These initiatives have developed from dreams of more caring futures and in resistance to practices and norms that contribute to the social exclusion and economic marginalisation of single mothers and their children. They know, instinctively, that there must be alternatives to the care-less present. They also know what would make a difference in their lives and in that of their children and wider communities.

For cities of *Homefullness* to thrive, business ontologies need to be replaced with relational social ontologies and an understanding of all beings as connected and interdependent upon others for their own wellbeing (Barnes, 2006). It is only by understanding people as relational and connected that we can rethink our understanding of responsibility and the sites where social change towards care-full justice might be taking place (Williams, 2017). Within this process, the experiences and knowledge of single mothers that live in poverty should have an important place. Because as we used to say at SPAN, 'what works for marginalised single mothers, works for other families too'. There will always be people in positions of power that try to erase the legacy of organisations like Operation Life and SPAN, but by doing so they also show their lack of commitment to democracy, justice, equality and fairness for all citizens. By writing and talking about this legacy, we continue to show that there are alternatives as well as hope and possibilities of other, better worlds.

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