Art Librarian Parents and Caregivers Special Interest Group

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ALPACA History and Leadership:
The ARLIS/NA Art Librarian Parents and Caregivers SIG was founded in 2016 by coordinator Anna Simon (University of Wisconsin) after 15 people attended an informal meeting about motherhood and art librarianship she organized during the 2016 ARLIS/NA conference. After having her first child and struggling to fulfill the demands of parenthood and the ambitions of a new career librarian, Anna noticed that professional support groups in ARLIS/NA and the wider library profession overlooked this critical period of one’s professional development. Thus, the impetus for founding this group was to create a support network that acknowledged the difficulties of managing a career and family while forging a constructive path forward. With input from attendees at the first meeting, the group quickly coalesced to also become an advocacy group. Rebecca Friedman (Princeton) had already devoted a poster session to this topic at the 2014 ARLIS/NA conference, “U.S. Academic Librarian Parents and Caregivers: An Exploration”, and created a comprehensive bibliography on resources for the academic parent. She is the group’s advisor and co-coordinator. Stephanie Fletcher (Art Institute of Chicago) became moderator in 2017 and Gabriella Karl-Johnson (Princeton) volunteered as blog developer.

ALPACA Statement of Purpose:
The goal of this SIG is to promote dialogue, support, and advocacy pertaining to balancing an art librarian career with being a parent or caregiver. A significant percentage of the Society will deal with the challenges of negotiating one’s role in the profession while simultaneously raising and caring for a family, encountering issues and making decisions that will subsequently impact their career. This group seeks to support this demographic by providing a forum for discussing federal and state family leave laws, flex-time, professional development, tenure or similar requirements, work/life balance, the negotiation of equal pay, better benefits, and improved childcare options. We seek to promote discussion among ARLIS/NA leadership, during annual conferences, and in the broader Society in terms of supporting parents and caregivers.
2017 Activities:

• Annual Meeting: Nineteen members attended our annual meeting on February 6, 2017 at 4:00pm in the Trafalgar Room at the Hilton New Orleans Riverside. At the meeting, we reviewed the formation of the group and our accomplishments thus far, especially the Executive Board’s support for a two-year pilot program to provide childcare at the 2017 and 2018 ARLIS/NA conferences. Goals for the next twelve months included revising the childcare proposal and better integrating it into the conference registration process; enhancing the blog; expanding our scope to include more caregivers with dependent family members; making efforts to improve the conference-going experience for members who bring their families; and establishing mentor/mentee opportunities to assist and support new parents.

• Conference Childcare: In order to make the annual conference more family-friendly and accessible for working parents—particularly for those with nursing infants—ARLIS/NA and ALPACA is trialing a two-year conference childcare program. Debuting at the 2017 New Orleans conference, this initiative offers on-site childcare during the main conference program and allows nursing mothers to drop by and feed their children between sessions. Five children used the service in New Orleans over a three-day period and parents were very enthusiastic about being able to simultaneously manage professional activities and parenting responsibilities. To keep the cost of on-site care low, the program is funded through a manageable cost to parents and special funding from the Society. In 2017, we employed nannies from A Charmed Life Child Care Inc., a local New Orleans agency. Nanny Poppinz, a national nanny placement agency, will provide childcare at the 2018 New York conference. Eumie Imm Stroukoff, ARLIS/NA president, stated: “Providing conference childcare for ARLIS/NA members distinguishes the Society as part of an emerging class of professional groups and companies who acknowledge the challenges working parents face and who are endeavoring to provide accommodations for the healthy balance of work and family life.”

• Poster Session at 2017 ARLIS/NA Conference: Cathryn Copper (Woodbury University), Elizabeth Lane (Hartford Public Library), and Kim Loconto (Brooklyn Museum) presented a poster on advocacy for working parents in libraries. The poster supported ALPACA’s mission to “promote dialogue, support, and advocacy pertaining to balancing an art librarian career with being a parent or caregiver.” It examined family-friendly benefits internationally, nationally, and at the institutional level.

• Session Proposal for 2018 ARLIS/NA Conference: Organized by Stephanie Fletcher, Anna Simon, Amy Ballmer (Fashion Institute of Technology), Bronwen Bitetti (Bard College), and Jill Luedke (Temple University), this session brings together speakers at the forefront of the work/life balance movement. One goal of the SIG is to propose a session every year.

• Social Media: Gabriella Karl-Johnson created our blog, http://alpaca.arlisna.org/, which includes these sections: Work-Life Balance Resources; Nursing+Pumping Resources; and Caring for Aged Parents. One goal for 2018 is expanding the SIG’s use of the blog and exploring options for a “Members Area”, such as a peer-to-peer support group.

Upcoming Events:

• 2018 ARLIS/NA Conference: ALPACA’s session, “Finding a Better Balance: Personal and Institutional Solutions to the Contemporary Work/Life Crisis in Libraries, Archives, and Museums”, is on February 26 at 1:45pm in the Gramercy West room at the New York Hilton Midtown. This session features four speakers on the topic of
establishing family-friendly policies in libraries, archives, and museums (LAMs). Despite having a high percentage of female professionals, LAM workplaces have been slow to embrace flexible work schedules and policies that accommodate working parents. The speakers, including librarians and work/life policy leaders from outside LAM professions, contextualize this work/life crisis and discuss topics like flexible work schedules, parental leave, infant-friendly work environments, and other factors that would create more inclusive work environments for employees at cultural and educational institutions.

• Annual Meeting: The next annual meeting is on February 27, 2018 at 6:00pm in the Morgan Room at the New York Hilton Midtown.

ARLIS/NA Strategic Directions:
Diversity and Inclusion: ALPACA’s core values are equality, commitment, diversity, and inclusion. Members of this group are committed to fulfilling their roles as librarians and parents/caregivers to the best of their ability, simultaneously. Our goal is to support and enable one another to navigate these roles more successfully while advocating the development of institutional policies that promote the well-being of families through adequate flex and leave time. Many parents and caregivers benefit from the professional support this group provides, promoting inclusion. The existence of a parenting and caregiving group within a professional organization is nearly unheard-of, so we diversify the Society through our efforts to challenge our profession to develop institutional policies that promote and support childbearing, childrearing, and caregiving.

Leadership and Advocacy: ALPACA promotes leadership and advocacy by offering peer mentoring, sharing stories of successes and failures when negotiating for better working conditions and family-friendly policies, and teaching our members how to advocate for themselves and their dependents. A large swath of the art librarian workforce contends with work/life balance. Many of us aspire to hold leadership positions in ARLIS/NA—and we will, with the right support. ALPACA provides that community of support necessary for parents and caregivers to achieve leadership roles within the Society and at their own institutions.

Examples of recent initiatives that align with these Strategic Directions are conference childcare, the poster presentation at the 2017 conference, compiling a list of breastfeeding resources on the ALPACA blog, advocating for and securing lactation space at the annual conferences, and organizing a session for the 2018 conference that focuses on work/life balance.