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Connecting mums with jobs

Mums@Work's founder Sher-li Torrey helps to match mothers with employers who offer flexi-work arrangements

Grace Chew

INCREASINGLY, mothers are realising that it is important not to just put food on the table for their children but also spend quality time with them and take an active role in nurturing them.

Some mums today put their jobs on the back burner to look after their children when they are young.

But many are still trying to find the perfect balance between being a mum and pursuing a career.

It was a dilemma which 35-year-old Sher-li Torrey had to face when she had her first child.

"After returning to work, I felt 'pulled in many ways'," says the former senior career services manager, who had intended to continue working after having children.

In the end, she decided to give up her full-time job at Singapore Management University to stay home to look after her one-year-old daughter.

Wanting to keep herself in touch with the working world, she started looking at flexible work options but realised that there were limited jobs available to graduate professionals and executives.

"I was surprised that despite so many headhunting firms around, there was no single avenue for mothers who wanted flexible work options," she recalls.

She then figured that with her career advisory background, she could set up a professional portal for mothers to seek out such jobs.

Building bridges

Early last year, she left her job and started a social enterprise called Mums@Work.

Mums@Work acts as a bridge between the working world and mothers who want flexi-work options.

It recognises the desire of many mothers to marry their professional experience with their shift in priorities upon the arrival of new family members.

"There are many women out there like myself who are torn between caring for their children and having careers," she says.

"But the truth is, women can still contribute to society while looking after their children at home."

Her objective is to reach out to mums who either want to run a "mumpreneur" business or take up flexi-work arrangements by listing job positions, organising workshops, networking events and providing career coaching.

She is particularly stringent about the job listings on her website and only accepts "professional and executive positions" simply because that is what her members want.

For the same reason, she ensures that everything she puts out is not purely commercial-driven but has a genuine focus in promoting work-family balance.

Workshops and events

Her workshops focus on giving real tools to participants, and qualified individuals are invited to speak on topics like brand-



Ms Torrey organises mini-career fairs, networking sessions and workshops on starting small businesses for mothers. PHOTO: M. BASHEER

ing, social media marketing and website design.

When asked how she decides on the topics, she says: "It is very much on a need-to basis. I normally do a quick survey with my participants to get an idea of what their needs and preferences are."

Her events include mini-career fairs for mothers, mumpreneur networking sessions (a collaboration with U Family) and various workshops on starting small businesses.

To promote mumpreneurship, she also organises a biannual event called the

Mumpreneur Networking Bazaar, where mumpreneurs set up booths to promote their wares or services.

While response has been encouraging, she says there needs to be a paradigm shift in mindset and expectations for both employers and mums who choose to work from home.

She often has to let mothers and employers understand the typical mindsets and possible solutions behind having flexi-work arrangements.

But being a mumpreneur helps her "step into the shoes of the women whom

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— Ms Sher-li Torrey

she represents", she says.

"Working from home, balancing family and work time are all issues that are very real to me. For that reason, I can share my personal experiences with member-mums and am able to raise genuine concerns of professional women on flexi-work options when speaking with employers."

Currently running a one-woman show, she hopes to build a small team to assist her so that she can focus on growing Mums@Work to a point where it benefits as many mothers as possible.

As to why she started this as a social enterprise, she explains: "I did not want this business to be entirely profit-driven. I wanted the flexibility to run events that benefit the 3,000 plus members-mums in our database even if they are less profitable."

Ms Torrey, who used to take home a six-figure annual salary, now earns less than half that amount.

However, she admits that despite this, she is much happier now that she gets to spend more time with her family.

"After all, I did not come into this world to be rich but to make a difference," she says.

For details, visit www.mumsatwork.net