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City

# Juggling act



**CAREER BREAKTHROUGH** – Helen Slingsby runs her business from home in Pangbourne and, right, in action in a workshop Photos: STEVE TEMPLEMAN (06) 61378626

Career and family life balance isn't always easy to achieve. Wanting it all and having to do it all are two very different things. But **KIM FRANCIS** found one working mum who is leading the way in showing other women how to make working really work for them

**M**OST working mums will admit that juggling family life with career can often be hard, leaving you feeling overwhelmed and isolated. Some may feel there is a lack of understanding, not only from society but also those close to them. Consequently mothers want to re-evaluate their lives and careers after giving birth – it can sometimes feel like there is nobody to guide them.

Helen Slingsby was in a similar position after giving birth to her second child. A successful journalist she found she was becoming disillusioned with her career and began to think about a change in direction.

She was commuting from her Pangbourne home to work in London and the demands of work and family life were proving too much.

A chance meeting with another woman set her on the path to making changes in her own life that would allow her the flexibility to create the perfect work/life balance and give her the ability to help

other women in a similar position.

After completing an MSc in career management and counselling, she set up Career Breakthrough, running career workshops to help women ways to combine work and family life.

Helen explained to *City Woman* how the venture evolved into a business: "Those working mums who cope best are usually women who stay in one area of work and are able to build up goodwill from employers, who are willing to accommodate them when needs be.

"It can be a major problem for women, like me, who find themselves at a crossroads after starting a family."

Helen added: "Having a child gives a woman a natural break in her working life and it is reasonable to assume that many women will re-evaluate their lives at this time to return to a family."

"When these women decide that they want to return to work but want to take a different direction, it is not always easy.

"Sometimes it can seem like an impossible task.

# Woman pays off

"I think it is true to say that of all social groups, mothers find it most difficult to find work full stop."

This is where Helen comes in. Her workshops look at returning to work after 'time out', changing jobs or careers, ideas for the future and other work-related issues as well as focussing on building self-confidence.

Helen said: "Self-confidence is a key area. In the workshops, we look at when confidence might have been at its highest in a person's life, examine why and try to re-capture this. We look at the transferable skills women learn while at home – organisational skills and so on – that can be applied in the **workplace and enable women** to see what they have to offer."

Each workshop lasts for two hours and sessions run weekly during evenings or school hours for three consecutive weeks after which participants should have a clear idea of what they want and how to get it.

The workshops are tailored to suit the people who attend and include talks by individuals who have made a success of changing direction.

Helen believes that part of the problem faced by mothers trying to return to work lies with the state of childcare in this country.

She said, "The system is dreadful. In France, kids go to school from the age of three and are looked after from then. It might not be a system everybody agrees with but at least there is consistency."

"There is no consistency here. A recent survey said that up to 70 per cent of childcare is carried out by friends, family and neighbours in this country."

There is a perceived lack of opportunity in the world of work for women after having children and this is something Helen aims to tackle head-on with her workshops.

"I show women how they can get what they want. If they crave mental stimulation and/or have the motivation to earn their own money, the impetus to go back to work is there and we can work together to banish self-defeating attitudes and make it happen for them on their terms."

To find out more about Career Breakthrough, you can contact Helen on (0118) 984 4962 or visit [www.careerbreakthrough.co.uk](http://www.careerbreakthrough.co.uk).

Post readers can take advantage of a special offer on Career Breakthrough workshops at a reduced cost of £90 for three sessions. Call Helen and quote *Reading Post* to book.

