

'Mompreneurs' mix work with 'job' of motherhood

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term to me and it's stuck.

Candace Alper, 31, is one.

Trained to be a high school teacher at the University of Toronto's Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, she graduated in the late 1990s but couldn't find work in local schools.

"There were no jobs open to me. It was incredibly disappointing," says the Richmond Hill mother of one.

She ended up entering the retail sales ranks and surprised herself by loving the job. Alper knew working long hours and weekends in a busy clothing store — a growing company with lots of room for advancement — wasn't the right career for her at this stage in her life. When her daughter Hannah came along two years ago, she checked out.

"If you are going to take a risk, this is the best time to do it," she reasoned. "You become empowered. (Motherhood) changes everything."

Alper started her own business called Name Your Tune, (nyt.ca on the Web), that creates made-to-order music CDs for children. She takes classics such as "Old MacDonald" and "Wheels on the Bus" and inserts the

name of your child into the music. "Old MacDonald had a farm" becomes, "Little Tanya had a farm," she explains.

Now Alper works her own hours and from home. She admits sometimes it's hard, having both a small child and a business revolving around children. But she keeps plugged in to the adult world by making an effort to stay connected with her friends. She's also found a group of other

Many new mothers give up long hours at work for the chance to spend more time with their young children

mothers who left careers and started their own baby-based businesses. One launched her own jewellery-making business after her baby was born.

One day a week, Alper she heads for the store she loves. "I put on my heels and makeup. I go to the store and I get to talk to other women about pretty things. I love it."

Julie Cole's frustration over the amount of kids' stuff that left the house and never came back home led the 34-year-old lawyer with three young kids and another on the way to start a

business with three women in her family.

The desire to track down those errant clothes, shoes, bags and Tupperware pieces, led to the creation of Mabel's Labels Inc. Cole and her sister Cynthia (a teacher), her sister-in-law Julie (a financial planner) and her aunt Tricia (a graphics manager) started the firm. All four "mompreneurs" are taking a break from their careers as they raise children and run the business.

The four were friends at university and among them they have nine children, share family holidays and "provide parenting relief on those days the kids drive us to distraction."

The business idea was inspired by the lack of labels on the market, says Cole. "We couldn't find any labelling products, so we started producing labels."

First came the colourful dishwasher- and microwave-safe name stickers. They expanded into iron-ons and shoe labels, bag tags and even allergy labels. Parents place the allergy labels on plastic food containers, bottles, lunch boxes, as reminders to caregivers that a child is, for example, allergic to peanuts.

It's hard to be a lawyer is part-time, says Cole, who lives in Burlington. "When clients call, they want to talk to you."

A legal career just didn't seem feasible, especially after her first-born, Mack, now 5, was diagnosed with autism. "In my case, it was essential I stay home to provide support and consistency for my 5-year-old son's ABA therapy and be available to advocate for him," she says.

The business started because the four women wanted to be at home for their kids but still have something else on the go. "Now it's be 'careful what you wish for,'" she laughs. "The business is going really well. It's getting to the point where we need daycare so we can run the business."

Mabel's Labels, (on the Web at www.mabel.ca), incorporated last year.

Cole has no regrets leaving the law behind and starting down this new path. "It's been great. We are a dynamic group of women."

She pauses briefly then adds: "It's always the women adjusting our lives, let's face it. It does come down to us, doesn't it?"

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