



Having worked in the same Banking organisation for 18 ½ years and having risen to the heady heights of running a national department, one would have thought I would have been completely satisfied. After all I was happily married, had my wonderful children; Nicole aged 3 ½ and James aged 2 ¼ and a nice home. From the outside everything appeared completely in line with the well-documented media image of happiness, contentment and balance. However, I felt a fraud! I was constantly exhausted, felt that other Mums were able to spend more time and had more patience for their kids – I didn't want one hour of quality time a day, what I really desired were lots of hours where the Kids and I could just be together rather than having the pressure of making every minute count.

In May 04, I left my comfortable world of Banking as I no longer wanted to continue with my lifestyle the way it was. And completely out of character for me, I had no plans on how I was going to replace my lost (and necessary) salary. I had passing thoughts on 'wouldn't it be nice to work school hours', as my daughter was to start school in Sept 04 and I would love to walk her to school every morning, so I looked into to being a School Bursar. It appeared that despite my extensive experience no one would employ me on the hours that I wished to work. Shock! Horror! School Bursars work full-time hours all year long! I looked into undertaking consultancy work but again felt I would end up with the familiar lack of time for my Kids. My husband and I talked around many different options including downsizing and moving to Devon etc. None of the options were really viable and we were both very concerned over the future.

At the same time, I was desperately looking for physical activity classes for my son as he was clearly ball obsessed. He was sleeping with balls, shooting hoops, using a cricket bat and hitting well and when we went to the park he would stand looking at the bigger Kids playing football until he was asked to join in. I had to find something he could do to channel all his energy and interest. A friend gave me a magazine and I found the Little Kickers number for Football activity classes for children aged 2 up to their 5<sup>th</sup> Birthday – just what I had been looking for. I phoned and was really disappointed to learn they had no classes near me, however they did say a franchise may be opening close to my area and to call back in a month. Well I did, and I was told the same thing. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> call, the lady remembered me and said in a very light-hearted way that if I was that desperate then maybe I should open my own Franchise. The thought stayed with me and changed into an opportunity when I contacted the Head Office, spoke to Christine (one of the owners) and we agreed to meet. I went in with an open mind but completely sure that I would be able to pull the financial forecasts apart. After our first meeting I was totally intrigued, the financial forecasts were sound and all my questions were fully answered – I was impressed.

Fast forward to Nov 04 - Little Kickers has been featured in The Independent on Sunday and I have 8 classes operating per week in Bushey, Mill Hill and Hampstead with another two classes due to open in Swiss Cottage in January. However what I have achieved, that's even more precious to me than a business that works, is that elusive work/life balance that seemed unattainable for so long. I walk my daughter to school, my

husband takes my son to Nursery in the mornings, I pick up both my kids in the afternoon and we have time to play. We spend time with friends and I cook proper dinners from scratch (not cordon bleu style, just fresh and nutritious). I do have occasional days when things don't go to plan and work impacts on the kids but that's just life and it's fine, because most of the time I am now being the mum I wanted to be and I also have a really enjoyable and interesting working life.

When I look back at 2004, I cannot quite believe that this is my life and I made it change to meet all of my needs - this happens to other people not an ordinary person like me! And to top it all, one of the Mum's at the Mill Hill Class - Nicole Myers told me that her son Brandon aged 3½ says " I wish everyday was Monday so I can go to Little Kickers Football " How cool is that and what a far cry from my previous life - Long may it last.

If you are interested in classes in North West London please call 0208 201 1084. Little Kickers are offering Franchises across the UK. If you are interested, call 01235 833854 for more information.

Little Kickers classes introduce football to children aged from 2 to their 5<sup>th</sup> birthday. The programme was developed by FA qualified coaches and nursery schoolteachers. Rather than focusing purely on football, the programme incorporates a number of early learning goals. Valuable concepts such as sharing and teamwork are introduced in a fun environment. Classes also enable children to develop agility, co-ordination and balance whilst providing them with a positive introduction to sport and were recently featured in The Independent on Sunday. Classes operate in Bushey, Mill Hill and Hampstead with further classes due to open in Swiss Cottage and at other locations in and around North West London. A course of 12 weeks costs £81. Please contact the Little Kickers (North West London) Ltd hotline **0208 201 1084** for further information.