Helping mums' juggling role

Private-sector forum to dish out advice helping them balance work and family

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JUGGLING work and motherhood can be tough – but a new Working Mum's Forum (WMF) intends to help better address the challenges that such women face.

It is the first private-sector initiative of its kind and is intended to be a one-stop advisory platform. Besides a website, there will be a panel of experts – comprising doctors, psychiatrists and dieticians – from whom working mothers can get advice. Members of the Employer's Alliance are also on the panel.

The Employer Alliance, set up in 2001 by the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sport and the Singapore National Employers Federation, is a network of corporations that advocate and adopt work-life practices at the workplace.

A corporate social responsibility project undertaken by Friesland Foods, WMF came about when its general manager Eddie Koh found out that calls to the company's hotline were on topics other than baby nutrition.

"Invariably, the mums calling in would voice anxiety about the challenges they face as mothers," said Mr Koh, adding that many mums said they stopped working because they found it hard to balance being both mother and working woman.

And when he became a father for the first time, Mr Koh said he "started to see the challenges from a husband's perspective as well.

"The company is able to provide advice to women about their babies, but when it comes to providing information about other challenges with home and work life, it is a big issue that is not being addressed," he said. WMF will "turn the attention to the mums as well".

While there are many good government initiatives for work-life balance and family life, said Mr Koh, there are none that specifically targets the working mother. A forum is being planned for later this year and a survey of about 1,000 working women will be carried out to fine-tune topics for it.

Ms Cheryl Liew, a director of the Employers Alliance, said the move to consolidate information into a single platform under the WMF is a good move to help complement existing programmes and information.

"From the Employer Alliance perspective, working mums are a talent group that should be taken care of and valued," said the mother of three.

"The infrastructure is there," she said, but for workplace change to take place, all sectors – workers, employees, government – must work in tandem. WMF hopes that through their multi-sectoral partnerships, more parties will come on board to address workplace concerns of mothers.

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