

Women Supporting Women: 13th March 2009 - the Headlines

The symposium was attended by 55 women and the air was thick with ideas and enthusiasm all morning.

"This morning has an unashamedly feminist agenda, seeking to work towards a better lot for the women of Milton Keynes, and therefore a better lot for local families and the local economy as a result."

Kim Davies, Chair of Women & Work

Question 1: What is it about women that gives us hope in the current economic situation?

Women's skills are legend: multi-tasking, flexible, creative, supportive, good communicators, empathetic, resourceful, good listeners, altruistic etc. The list suggested that women at the event felt strongly that many women will rise to the challenges of an economic downturn and be ready to support and work alongside other women in order to make the best of opportunities and cope positively.

What are the wider opportunities this downturn offers?

The main themes were around:

- o Reassessing life and work balance
- o Learning new things
- o Creating new business
- o Building support networks
- o Volunteering

and of course the involvement of men in the discussion and reflection around these themes is important!

What opportunities can we identify for women to support women through this time?

Three main themes came through:

1. Networking: through forums, expanding current networks, setting up specific networks (e.g. around motivation) social networking etc.
2. Mentoring: related to specific skills (e.g. business, IT) and across sectors. Capitalising on the feminine characteristic of wanting to support and help others
3. Support: Work-shadowing; sharing childcare, knowledge and good ideas; setting up groups to discuss, have fun and debate.

What sort of practical changes, transformation and developments would we like to see happening? Who can do it?

This activity illustrated women's wish to make the most of the opportunity to think radically; no sacred cows! Key points raised were:

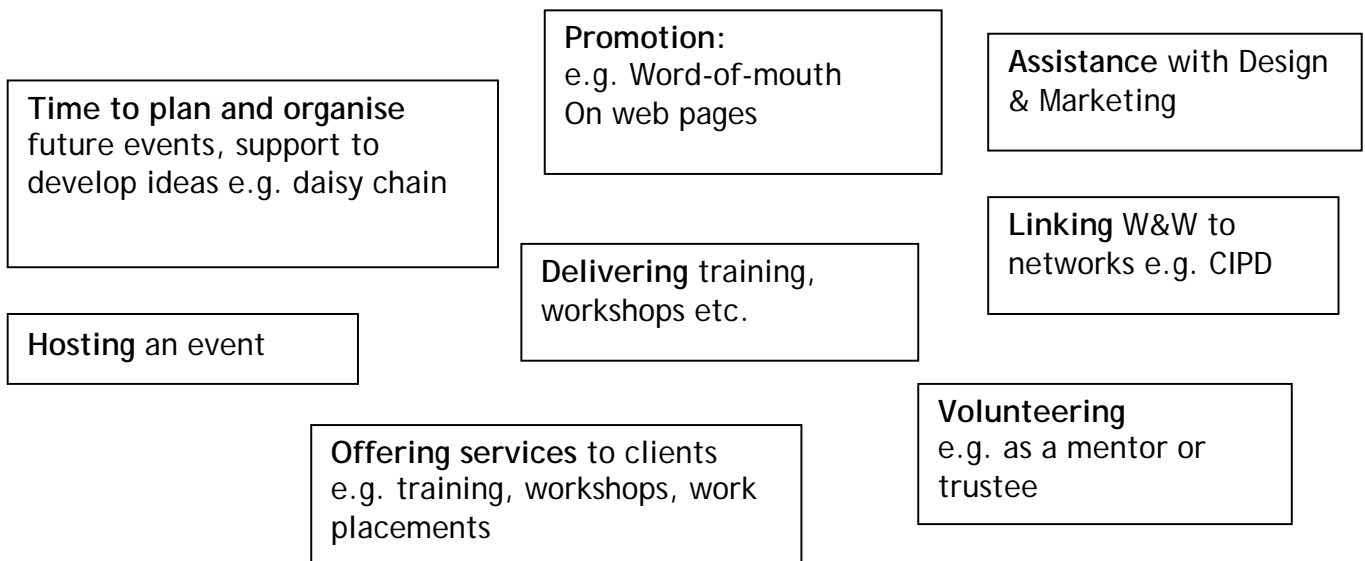
- o Child-centred and flexible childcare - get rid of Ofsted!
- o Valuing 'natural relationship-oriented' childcare
- o Facilitating a paradigm shift in employers' thinking around:
 - the benefits of flexible working: break the 9-5 boundaries
 - promoting Train to Gain (and other skills development)
 - preparing to come out of the recession

- Setting up start and finish task groups to move ideas on, and the daisy-chain approach
- Looking for a single point/central hub, with ambassadors or champions to share and disseminate resources, best practice etc.
- Developing female role models and peer support systems
- Workplace support groups for returners

How can women support Women & Work to support women?

The common themes were: promote Women & Work; signposting; mentoring; research; share career histories; work placements/experience; utilise women here to engage employers. Requests also included to repeat this forum with specific topics/tasks.

Pledges made. The offers include:



And what did you think of it?

Lots of aspects you liked, and in future you wanted more focus and time, with champagne rather than coffee!

So what next?

Because there seemed to be 2 issues that came through 'loud and clear' alongside the interesting and radical thinking, Women and Work are offering three events before our AGM on July 10th, which are:

1. **Flexible working:** What is it and how can we get change to happen in MK?
Key speaker - Deirdre Anderson, Doctoral Researcher, Centre for Developing Women Business Leaders, presenting the business case for Flexible Working
Date: Friday 1st May 2009
2. **Support for W&W:** Looking in particular at promotion, mentoring and work placements. Date: Friday 22nd May 2009
3. **Women Supporting Women, the Next Step!** This will pick up on some of the other issues raised on 13th March including the radical and innovative.
Date: Friday 26th June 2009

More details soon but please put the dates in your diary, oh, and is anyone offering to buy the champagne!

Thank you very much for your time and wonderful input.