

# Should I stay or should I go now? Parents' day-care dilemma

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## WATERLOO REGION

**T**ricia Mumby's decision to return to the workforce after a year of maternity leave was, at first, an easy one.

She had been home for a year, had changed hundreds of dirty diapers, played hundreds of infant-aged toy games and spent hours on end cleaning her Kitchener home. "I wanted to go back to work," she said. "I was getting bored and I needed adult stimulation."

When she returned to the

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printing company she worked for, Mumby was amazed at how good it felt to do the simple things in life — go to the bathroom alone, eat lunch, go for coffee with friends.

"The first month I thought I was in heaven," she admits.

But then things changed.

She was falling behind in her house cleaning. She barely

got to spend time with her husband. And, perhaps worst of all, she started realizing how much time her daughter, Ruby, was spending away from her.

"I just felt I was doing a million things and not doing any of them well," the 33-year-old said.

She quit after six months.

Instead of working full time, Mumby decided to expand the small business she had been running on the side with three of her girlfriends. Mabel's Labels Inc. makes personalized coloured labels to help children identify their belongings.

**SEE PARENTS: PAGE A11**



DAVID BEBEE, RECORD STAFF

Working mother Kerry Potworka with her daughter Ella, 18 months, in their Kitchener home. "It's a struggle but you do the best you can."

# Parents 'just want the best for their children

**CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1**  
By working at home, Mumby can schedule her own hours and spend as much time as she wants with her daughter.

Beth Lee, co-ordinator of Child Care Connection — a KidsLINK program that offers parents information on making child care decisions — said it's common for many parents to struggle with the decision to go back to work or stay at home.

"They never cared for somebody so much in all their lives and they want to make sure they're taken care of," Lee said. "They just want the best for their children."

Lee said there is no right or wrong answer when it comes to staying at home or going back to work. Parents simply have to choose what works best for them and their children. Likewise, choosing between day care or home care is also the parent's choice.

"I always tell them to go by their gut

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feeling," Lee said.

When choosing an appropriate day care, parents should look for several different things, including whether the caregiver agrees with the parents' philosophy, whether the provider interacts well with children and how many children are in the group.

Kathryn Brown, manager for KidsLINK, said if a parent plans to go back to work, they should start researching day cares early since infant spots fill up quickly. There are only 12 centres in the Region that take infants.

Mary Parker, director of child services for the Region of Waterloo, said the demand for child care far exceeds the supply in this region. If a parent can't find a quality caregiver it can force them to struggle with the choice of what to do.

"Parents are all striving to make the best decision for their child," Parker said.

Also factored into the decision is finances. Some families make enough money to afford good quality care while others find the expense outweighs their salary. In this case, some parents find it makes more sense to stay home.

Depending on the age of your child and where you place them for care, the cost can vary. For example, licensed day care for infants in the Region can range from about \$800 to \$1,200 a month for full-day care. For toddlers it can range from \$700 to \$800 a month. Preschool children, aged two and half to five, cost about \$600 a month.

Licensed home care can vary depending where you place your child. Wee Watch Enriched Home Child Care in Kitchener, which helps parents find licensed home care, costs \$170 a week for a child of any age.

Subsidized care is also available through the Region. Anyone can call (519-883-2200) and apply for an income test to determine if they are eligible.

Sheri Phillips, manager of the region's child-care subsidy program, said a family earning \$20,000 or less would qualify for full subsidized care.

A family earning anything above that would begin to pay a percentage of their child care.

Kitchener mother Dana Strickland, 33, decided to quit her job after having her third child. While she misses the



DAVID BEBEE, RECORD STAFF

Tricia Mumby works on her computer as her daughter Ruby make Valentine cards for friends in the sun room of their Kitchener home. Mumby quit her job to have more time to raise her daughter and then started a business with friends, Mabel's Label's.

money her job brought in, Strickland said she and her husband budget their day-to-day expenses and watch what they spend.

Strickland is currently starting her own gift design and party planning business, named Soirée, to help expand their income.

While she found the work life to be a bit of a relief from her everyday mommy duties, Strickland believes she made the right decision — especially when she sees the look on her son's face when she picks him up from school or when she gets that afternoon hug from her daughters.

"I wanted to be more involved in their lives," she said. "I wouldn't want to miss the things we've experienced together."

Kitchener mother Lisa Heslip, 33, is home now enjoying her maternity leave with her second son — two months old Jackson. While she's enjoying being home, she plans to return to work when her maternity leave ends.

"My mind is always working," while

at her human resource management job, she says. As well, she likes to have the extra money so her family can take vacations and "not be on a very tight budget."

Ideally, she says, she'd like to have the best of both worlds and work part-time. But she knows a lot of businesses aren't able to accommodate such a request.

Kerry Potworcka, 34, feels the same way. She currently leaves her house at 6 a.m. to make it to her sales manager job in downtown Toronto on time. She gets back to Kitchener between 6:30 p.m. and 7 p.m.

"If money was no concern at all I don't know if I would have gone back," she said. "If we wanted to stay with the lifestyle we had, I had to go back."

Luckily after interviewing several caregivers, Potworcka was able to find the right one to help take care of her 18-month-old daughter, Ella. As well, she says, her husband and Ella's grandparents are a lot of help.

"It's a struggle but you do the best

you can," she says. "You have to do best with what you have."

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