

## Referral network targets day care

By CHRISTOPHER CLARK, LONDON FREELANCE WRITER

No matter how much they love their offspring, there are two words parents everywhere come to cherish as a salve for their sanity -- child care.

Whether for the occasional Saturday night out or all day, Monday to Friday, qualified child care is a crucial component in the lives of many families.

Sabina Manji recognized this before she had a family of her own. She started the London Caregivers Referral Network a decade ago, and has matched caregivers and families ever since.

"There was an incredible need. People started using our service right away," says Manji, who now understands the need even more. She gave birth to son Mikaeel, her first child, nearly two years ago.

"I run the business from home, but we hired a nanny to come during part of the day so I could focus on work. And then when I'm not working, I can focus my attention on Mikaeel."

When she began the service, Manji ran ads on behalf of clients and conducted initial interviews to narrow the list of potential caregivers. Then she turned the information over to her clients to make the final choice.

"It's not a cookie-cutter service. We work with clients to help them find the perfect caregiver, so that can take a lot of different forms," she says.

The most recent form is the referral network's online database of caregivers. Launched this month, it attracted more than 100 qualified caregivers in the first week from London and surrounding communities.

Parents seeking home-based day care or a nanny to come to them during the day can search the database to see if anyone matching their criteria is listed. If there are matches, they pay \$40 to get the details and have 90 days to continue their search of the ever-changing database.

There is no charge for caregivers to register on the site.

Manji says many parents start searching for in-home day care, but broaden searched to include nannies when they compare costs and convenience. For families with several children, the costs often are similar, she says.

The service does not handle live-in nannies or arrange for caregivers from out-of-country. It is limited to day care, either in the client's or provider's home.

"A lot of parents start their search and aren't really sure what they're looking for," Manji says. "We help them narrow down the options and see what will work for their situation. Everyone's circumstances are different in some way."

Whether they find a match through traditional advertising or the website, parents are responsible to complete the process by interviewing candidates and making arrangements directly with them. The referral network is not involved at that point and receives no payment for successful matches.

When she's not running the network, Manji works on the magazine she started about the same time as the referral service. Mom and Caregiver magazine has grown along with the other business and provides plenty of practical information for moms (and



dads) and caregivers.

## LONDON CAREGIVERS REFERRAL NETWORK

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