

## CONSUMER 10 REPORT

# More stay-at-home moms working from home

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WBNS-10TV

Spurred by the slumping economy and tightening household budgets, more stay-at-home moms are entering or returning to the working world - without leaving home.



The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that mothers with young children make up one of the fastest-growing segments of the American work force.

About 10 percent of working mothers with children under the age of 6 now earn money from home, either by working for companies that permit the practice or by operating a home-based business.

Nationwide, according to the federal agency, more than 525,000 mothers with children younger than 6 have a home-based business.

One of the biggest advantages for such moms - that they can stay home to care for their kids - is also one of the biggest downsides: Experts say the absence of regular face-to-face contact with co-workers or industry peers can leave people feeling isolated. It also can deprive them of ideas that might enable them to boost their productivity or expand their businesses.

Renee Belbeck, a 39-year-old mother of two, thinks she has a solution to the conundrum.

As a virtual office assistant, the Gahanna resident works from home, sometimes with her 4-year-old perched on her lap. Although she has always valued her career's flexibility, she used to find herself missing adult interaction.

So last year, Belbeck, along with friends Autumn Hutcherson and Christine Kinney, founded Like Minded Moms, which bills itself as a networking community "created by moms for moms."

Initially, the moms planned to meet in Hutcherson's home. They had to shift gears, however, when the group's first invitation elicited responses from 75 prospective attendees.

"I thought, 'Wow, I can really start my business and start networking,'" said Renee Vidor, a 26-year-old Powell mom who sells health and diet products.

"I went to the first meeting, and I've been to every one since. I love it."

Members gather regularly to brainstorm, swap experiences and listen to guest speakers. The get-togethers have themes such as "Surviving the Summer with Kids," "Creating the Life of Your Dreams" and "How to Fit Fitness into a Busy Family Schedule."

Whenever and wherever members meet, their children have access to a nearby playroom and adult supervision. That is a must, Belbeck said, for moms worried about child care.

Belbeck said she's confident that Like Minded Moms is making a difference in members' lives.

"I hope that we show them that they're not alone - that they can do it."

Twenty-two months after its creation, Like Minded Moms has three Ohio chapters: in Dublin, Gahanna and Cincinnati. This summer, the group started a chapter in Temple, Texas, where Belbeck grew up.

And Belbeck said its membership now includes a work-at-home dad.

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