

Women solve child care problems by leaving jobs

Hard to find work to do at home

By CHRISTINE DEMPSEY
Bristol Press

It was the summer of 1988, and Mary Soucy, a Pratt & Whitney Aircraft employee for 12½ years, was having day care problems. Her mother-in-law, who usually watched her young daughter, was sick.

Soucy solved her problem in an unusual way.

She quit her job.

Nancy Peterson and her husband, Edwin, made a similar decision last year. She left her part-time job at Harrison Office Products Inc., and vowed she wouldn't work — anywhere — until her pre-school-age daughter is in first grade.

Soucy and Peterson, both Bristol residents, did something many women can't. Soucy's former job as a material analyst was bringing her three-member family \$25,500 a year. As an analyst, she decided what parts to buy to fix the Southington firm's machines. She had worked her way up from a clerk-typist.

Peterson's four-member family, meanwhile, has about \$6,300 less than it did last year because she left her part-time job. That means they have had to make a lot of little sacrifices, she said.

"We don't have \$12 to go to a matinee every week," she said.

According to Wesley Bell, day care licensing supervisor at the Department of Health Services, it is uncommon for women to leave their jobs to be with their children. Many simply cannot afford it.

"I really don't think that

many people see that as a viable option," he said.

However, for Mary Soucy, an Acorn Lane resident, it was the best option.

Her small family does need a second income, though, and Soucy is trying to find work she can do in her home. That way, she may stay home with her blonde-haired 3-year-old, Bria. Bria's father, Gary, works as an inside sales person at Phillips Medical Systems in Shelton.

In fact, Soucy started working Wednesday as a part-time day care provider for some children. Although she is a registered provider, she is not interested in watching children on a full-time basis, she said.

Soucy was able to make some money selling personalized children's books, but sales dropped off after the holidays, she said.

She said she can't understand why companies don't hire women who can work at their homes. Soucy has a typewriter and an Apple computer that can be used for clerical work, she said. And she wouldn't need benefits, she said, because she has them through her husband's plan.

"My skills far surpass those of some of those 17-year-old and 18-year-old clerk-typists that they hire right out of high school who call in sick because they've had a bad night..." she said.

Soucy said she isn't the only Bristol woman who would like to work out of her home. She

knows a number of working mothers who would quit their jobs the moment someone offered to pay them — but not offer benefits — to do so.

But right now, firms aren't making any offers, she said.

Soucy said she distributed 50-75 bright yellow cards advertising her clerical skills to local businesses.

She heard from none.

"It's very frustrating," she said.

Unlike Soucy, Nancy Peterson of Fall Mountain Road is not looking for work. Not now, anyway.

"Right now, I'm not looking to be employed until next year," she said. Next year, her youngest of two children, Tara, will enter first grade at South Side School. Her other child, Jeremy, is 9.

At that time, she said, she hopes to find a job that she can work part-time, while the children are in school.

Her husband, Edwin, owns a painting and wallpapering business.

At one point, Nancy and Edwin tried switching roles, she said. Edwin worked part-time and stayed with the children the rest of the time, and she managed Harrison's.

But the current arrangement has proven the best. She missed her children too much, she said.

But Peterson realizes that her decision is one that cannot be made by everyone.

"It's a real hard situation today. I guess you have to choose priorities," she said.



PHOTO BY ANDY MANIS

Stay-at-home mother Mary Soucy and her 3-year-old daughter Bria share a book