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**Co-founders & chairs of Centrica Working Parents Network**

**Why did you first start working with Educating Matters?**

**What were your objectives or the issues you were trying to resolve or support employees with?**

It was really serendipitous, actually, when we met Educating Matters. We had had an idea to hold a one-off session bringing parents across the organisation together for an hour just to have a bit of a chat about what it was like to be a parent in a corporate organisation, and then, particularly, what it was like to be a parent for Centrica. And very quickly, we realised that there was a **real need for a working parents network across our business for a number of different reasons: to share ideas, share best practice, and also to be able to feedback to the business as a whole as to how they were experiencing being a parent within Centrica.**

There was a real need for some form of positive parenting guidance. Loads of people were complaining about **feeling guilty because of that dichotomy that they were trying to reach and actually the work-life balance wasn't great**. We spent loads of time on the internet trying to research information about how we could respond to or help support some of our parents.

And then, all of a sudden, we got a phone call from our diversity and inclusion team to say that a company, Educating Matters, had been in contact saying that they offer a load of webinars, one-to-one supporting corporate people or corporate parents. Then we had a meeting with yourself.

**We were just struck at not only how professional and flexible and experienced Educating Matters is in the subjects that you were talking to us about, but also you guys were really approachable.** And you in particular, so warm and so relatable. So it just seemed like a very natural pairing. **We were so pleased because of the quality of the work that you brought in and the quality of the resources and the sessions that we had. It was brilliant because our parents recognised that as well.** One webinar became two became three, and so this partnership has thus grown.

**What mediums have you tried so far and what have you found to be effective?**

I think ideally we had it in mind that we would have loads of seminars. We've got offices all around the country. It seemed like a great idea to get you into the office. But we only launched the network in January 2020 and then COVID hit in March 2020. I think we only ended up having one face-to-face seminar.

It then moved into a webinar format and actually, it was much, much better for our parents. We've had a number of webinars and really we're focusing on supporting positive parenting.

**So a webinar approach worked great because our business is international. It meant that anyone who wasn't available to attend that actual session could then look at a recording of it. And the recording was a really high quality.** We actually managed to bite-size the recording down so that they could watch it in five-minute segments, so that time didn't become a barrier to people being able to access the information.

And then the other thing as well is that because it was a webinar, we didn't have to have pick a central location where people had to travel to. **So the attendance was much better because you could literally just click on a link and there you were.** You didn't have to think about childcare, to travel to a location that potentially wasn't your own, et cetera, et cetera.

**How easy or difficult is it to communicate to your employees and your network that this is available, to get them to attend events, and to get on board?**

When we started the network, we created a team platform. That's where our network is solely based on this team forum. So obviously, we directly reached out to our team members through that platform. Also, we have the luxury of an intranet. We were able to promote you guys on there, the sessions and the webinars that we're having on the internet too. Also, we are joined up with all the other diversity and inclusion networks, so we got those are the networks to promote your sessions through their platforms as well.

**And now we're starting to cross over to some of those networks. You're working with our disability network as well.**

**That intersectionality is really important. It's really helped boost not only our member numbers but also that reach** and that promotional reach that we can have, like you said. Because Educating Matters covers such a wide variety of topics and has such expert knowledge in these variety of topics. It was very easy to kind of do that handshake and say, "Oh, our disability network, here's Educating Matters. They do cover loads of things on neurodiversity."

And the other thing is it's not just for children and parents. We've had loads of feedback from our parents to say that **the skills and the tools that they've learned during the sessions with you have been transferable skills into the business as well**, especially around neurodiversity. I've had a few parents contact me afterwards and say, "Gosh, I really struggled to work with so-and-so in the business. And actually having attended that series or that session, I've realised that it's probably because they are neurodiverse, and the way that I've been communicating with them is incorrect. And actually, it's made a huge difference in the way that we collaborate."

**How well do you feel that we tailor-make our offerings to suit your specific needs?**

I think **you're really accommodating.** I think we can normally come to you with our requirements of what either we think would be good or around certain themes of the year, what our members have asked for or would like to see. **You always embrace that topic or that theme and you build or tailor your content around that.** So I think that's what's really lovely. We can have a really good chat with you upfront and you can then come up with your own ideas of how it could work. We're always open to the creativity of that, so that's what I've really enjoyed with working with Educating Matters.

**For an organisation that's never worked with us before, how would you describe the main benefits for employees in working with us?**

So I think the main benefit is that you guys offer a **huge amount of experience and know-how, and it's not just the theoretical know-how.** I mean, you referenced loads of books. The amount of literature that you referenced and that you pull your resources from is incredible.

One of the main things that our people refer to is the **user-friendly tips and tools that you offer. So it's not just the theory, it's about how do you put that theory into practice**. And the fact that all of the people that we've worked with within your organization are parents and are parents to a multiple number of children. **So it's the learned experience that comes with it too.** So I think one is this huge wealth of experience that you have and knowledge that you hold.

And then that **flexibility.** The fact that we can come to you with a, "We want to get you in, but we're not quite sure what we want to get you in for." And you guys are able to then say, "Well, these are common themes that are going on around parenting networks or around organizations that we've been speaking to." Or we'll say, "Actually, we've had a few talk to us about X topic." You are then able to create a really worthwhile hour's worth of content around an idea that's been had or a single comment that's been made.

I think we've had four or five seminars with you now. They're each as good as each other. There's not one that you come across as better or more knowledge about. **The knowledge is far-reaching and it's really impactful. The delivery of it is so attainable as well. It's really relatable.**

**Is there any way to actually measure the results or the impact that it has?**

I'm not sure if we have a specific way of measuring results, but **we definitely have seen an increase in membership following our seminars through word of mouth and also when we post the recordings online. Also, the feedback that we receive off the back of the webinars, is a hundred percent positive.** We don't have any, "Oh, well, this could be better or that could be better." It's just people singing the praises and, "When are Educating Matters coming back?" So that's why, obviously, we're listening to our members and having you back, planning you out throughout the year.

We definitely feel that there's a positive presence there from having you within the business.

**Do you think creating a network and providing these kind of resources helps people to feel more supported and that their role outside of work is really recognised and acknowledged?**

Absolutely. I think organisations that have networks, diversity and inclusion networks as a whole, have a much better and a much more positive employee experience. But I think when you start to think of the percentage of the population that are working parents, the percentage of population that are trying to make work-life balance work, and actually the huge variety of children's needs and adult's needs and how corporations are changing, there is a huge need and a huge benefit to not only having networks that support people, either through one-to-one support, having somebody that you can phone up with, and just to have a good old moan or say, "This is my problem," and have a bit of a discussion around it.

Being able to provide people with an hour webinar that covers a really relevant topic for them one, **makes them feel that they're not alone.** Two, **provides really important information that potentially they don't have time to access otherwise. It really does create that sense of community and that sense of "I'm not alone**. I'm not the only person experiencing this," and starts to boost self-esteem as a parent, but also as an employee.

A lot of the content that you cover is not just for parents. **It is very, very translatable into the working environment.** We've had a lot of feedback from our parents to say that it's worked great at home and I've been able to use this tool or this trick. But actually, it's really opened my mind and opened my eyes to some of the people that I've worked with and about how I can potentially work more collaboratively with them and more successfully with them.

**It's just over a year since the launch of your network. What are your plans for the future?**

So our network is now just over a year old and actually, we've had a really successful year. We had seen a lot of success prior to COVID, but I think COVID has really exacerbated that work-life balance that a lot of parents have been struggling with for many, many years. Then COVID hit and that separation between home and life has become almost impossible. I think the plight of working parents has become a lot more visible through the COVID pandemic. But also that pull and that friction between the two, work and life, is seen a lot more.

Long-term plans for us is continue to grow the network, continue to provide positive parenting content on our team's site that we run our network from through webinars, through links to interesting articles, etc. One of the big things that we do is we hold returner sessions for parental leave returners. So we hold it on a quarterly basis. We send a note out to managers and to returners themselves and invite them to come and have a bit of a conversation to create almost a postnatal group of people that are in this similar situation. Also to understand what Centrica can do better for our working parents, and that's really what our roadmap is built around.

Then the other thing is we have a buddy network. It's made up of 19 different colleagues who support on specific parenting issues. Things like, "I am a parent to a disabled child," or "I am parenting a child who's questioning their gender," or "We've had a death in the family. How do I speak to my child about that?" We've got members within our team that are specialists in that or have experience. This year, we really want to capitalise on being able to offer more tailored support, either by holding sessions or reaching out and providing a little bit more information on those topics.