



ACCIDENTAL SUCCESS: Kathryn Macmillan found a demand for people with limited time.

Picture: SIMON ALEKI

Marrying life skills with the workforce

Jobs are available for people with limited time, but many don't realise it, **Fran Molloy** writes.

KATHRYN Macmillan thought it would be easy to find a job after selling her business five years ago. She had run a successful dance school for 18 years, managing staff along with budding prima donnas and their parents. She had many valuable skills.

As a business owner, Macmillan had been able to juggle her work around her young son Hamish - now 11. But the employment market didn't seem as adaptable.

She is now back in business, addressing that gap in the employment market.

"Nine2Three is a recruitment company that specialises in mature-age candidates looking for part-time roles with flexible hours," Macmillan says. "There are so many people out there with wonderful life skills who just need that little bit of flexibility."

Business is booming. The skills shortage has led employers to be more flexible, Macmillan believes.

Most of Nine2Three's candidates are women who have been out of the workforce for some time, usually raising families. The agency does have some male candidates, and their workers are aged from mid-20s to over 60s.

"Employers are getting a fabulous employee who comes with all these life skills," says Macmillan. "They can handle responsibility. They have maturity, time management, conflict resolution - all the things that you learn as a

mother, along with everything that they have done before. Transfer all these skills into the workplace and you get a very able employee."

The idea for the recruitment agency took a few years to implement. Macmillan had to sell her dance school after contracting the autoimmune disease lupus. It was some months before she landed the perfect job as a trainee bookkeeper with an understanding employer.

Attending TAFE business courses, Macmillan met other women doing the popular Work Opportunities for Women course designed to help women upgrade their skills to return to the workforce, usually after taking time out to raise a family.

"I met all these women who had done wonderful things in their prefamily lives. Then they had lost their confidence and felt that they couldn't get back into the workforce, it was a bit beyond them," she says.

Several times she bumped into women who had completed the course but had not returned to work. "They didn't really have the confidence or the skills to market themselves."

At the same time, Macmillan was struggling to keep up with her bookkeeping clients who were happy for her to work within school hours.

She started up the recruitment agency in October 2003, working with two staff from a couple of converted bedrooms in her home. "When we started, we found bookkeepers for small businesses wanting anything from three days a week to one day a month."

She is now placing candidates for positions ranging from one day a month through to five shorter days a week.

"What is really exciting for us now is that bigger businesses are coming to us," she says.

> CASE STUDY

Flexibility, compromise hit the spot

Mike Dunkerley faced a dilemma when his company, Identity Systems, was taken over by an American organisation. With the core financial functions moving to the US he could no longer employ a full-time accountant, but still had to meet Australian requirements and do some financial reporting.

His accountant had heard

of Nine2Three and Mike phoned Kathryn Macmillan. Within a week he was interviewing Rose Goodwin, a bookkeeper with two school-aged children and many years of experience.

"Both Kathryn and Rose came in during the last couple of weeks that the accountant was there," Mike says. "That way, if for some reason Rose didn't

work out Kathryn could come and fill in for a week or so until we found someone else. It was a good service."

Mike initially wanted someone for two days a week. Rose was able to work only during school hours, but over three days - so Mike has someone in the office for three days and Rose was able to work around her daughters' schedules.