



BALANCE AT ORDER'S

*For Ali Hutchinson of Albury, having a family has been a pleasant detour in her career path, not a dead end. Ali tells **Tamara Whitsed** about her gradual return to work at Border Express*

AS MORE women take on roles in the transport industry, companies face the challenge of providing equal opportunities for women, and flexibility for mothers.

Interstate transport company, Border Express welcomes the challenge. The company recognises the value of employing women, investing in their training and making it easy for mothers to return to work.

Ali Hutchinson is Business Improvement Facilitator (Corporate) at Border Express. She says the company's equal-opportunity

childcare at such a young age, but was allowed to take Kate to work when she was needed at meetings. "When Kate was six months old it got hard to bring her in," Ali says. So she organised childcare, and slowly increased her workload up to two days a week.

FLEXIBILITY

Flexibility has been the key to the success of Ali's return to work. "Now I work Thursdays and Fridays but I can change the days to whatever suits me, as long as I get the work done," she says.

"They're very flexible when Kate's been sick. I've been able to work at home for the day."

policies and family-friendly practices make it easy to balance work and family. She speaks from experience: Ali has a two-year-old daughter, Kate, and is expecting her second child in January.

She is one of 117 women working at Border Express, where women account for 18 percent of the workforce. Ali says four staff members are currently on maternity leave, and have been offered the option of a gradual return to work. Other options available to them will include part-time work, job-sharing, and flexible start and finish times. For some positions, working from home might also be on the table.

Ali took three months maternity leave after Kate was born, and then returned to her role at Border Express one day a fortnight. She didn't want to leave her baby in

Ali usually works from the Border Express Albury office, but she is also able to work from home. "I'm doing a bit today. I did a bit last night. It's very flexible with the workload. If I want to take on extra I can. If I need to earn a bit more money I can do more.

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Returning to work has obvious financial benefits. Ali says it has also enabled her to retain contact with the people she works with, and with her role.

As Business Improvement Facilitator (Corporate), Ali has helped implement the company's Human Resource Information System (HRIS) — a tool that enables staff to access information including sick leave and holiday entitlements



on computers at every depot. And now she is helping establish process improvement teams. "We're trying to get employees to talk about things that are making their job hard, and trying to improve ways for them," Ali says.

Ali says other mothers at Border Express are also benefiting from the company's family-friendly policies. Donna O'Shea is Administration Supervisor at the Derrimut depot. She has worked at Border Express for over five years and was working up to 11 hours a day before taking



Ali Hutchinson and baby Kate

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six months maternity leave. She returned to work three months ago, and is happy she no longer works overtime. Donna even had the flexibility to change her starting time to fit in with her childcare.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

Most of the women working at Border Express work in the administration, operations and human resources departments, and there are three women working in senior management, and seven working in the traditionally male roles of drivers and forklift operators.

Ali has been inspired by the success of many women working at Border Express, including Tracie Kachel who was recently promoted to Regional Manager of Perth, Adelaide and Darwin.

When Border Express gives presentations at high school, the company makes it clear the transport industry has a wide variety of roles for both men and women. Tiarne

Pett joined Border Express as a school-based trainee, working two days per week for a year before taking on a full-time position as a data entry clerk with the Perth depot's operations team.

Ali began working at Border Express in 2006 after 14 years in retail. She says the move was at first daunting, but the friendly environment at Border Express eased her transition. "Everyone helps you fit in straight away. People

depot enjoys a monthly casual-clothes day and barbecue. Each department at the depot takes a turn at cooking the barbecue, and Ali says this is a great opportunity for employees from all departments to catch up with each other.

She is also impressed with the programs provided by the company's Employee Welfare team. Men and women have been given the opportunity to participate in Weight Watchers at Work, the 'Step into

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Everyone working at the Albury

Life' personal training program, a physiotherapy program and pilates classes. Border Express also provides an annual flu vaccination program for all employees and quit

kits for smokers. "This all helps to make Border Express an employer of choice," Ali says.

There is also an employee assistance program, providing free and confidential counselling. Ali suggests if mothers were having difficulty returning to work at Border Express, they could use this service. "It's free, and nothing is reported back to Border Express," Ali says.

Ali looks forward to the arrival of her second child in January. She plans to take six months maternity leave, but is considering doing a few hours work a month from home during her leave.

Border Express is supporting Ali to study a Masters in Business Management. "I'll continue to study over the next year or so. And in the long term I hope to get back to full-time work and a good career path." ■

Owner//Driver would like to hear from women in the transport industry with stories to tell. Contact Tamara Whitsed at tamarawhited@activ8.net.au



Ali was permitted to take baby Kate to meetings at Border Express

Administration Supervisor Donna O'Shea was able to change her starting time to suit childcare arrangements

Border Express has 665 employees located in six states, and also provides work for 200 tow operators and permanent subcontractors. It moves freight as varied as paper reels, paint and chemicals with 350 trailers, 120 prime movers and 200 rigids.