

FAMILY



Guernseymums has provided a web lifeline and an internet site for local families for the past year - and its popularity has grown beyond all expectations. **Shaun Shackleton** reports

The net set

IT ALL began when three mums got together for coffee. The result was a bright, easy-to-use and informative website.

And a year on, guernseymums.gg is proving an essential source of information for local parents and carers. Sarah Winsall, Milly Dudley-Owen and Jane Rhodes set it up in October 2009. 'We felt that there wasn't one single point for information on everything child / family / baby orientated. So we thought we'd do it ourselves. 'English websites were targeting the Channel Islands, but they were completely irrelevant,' explained Milly. 'How could mothers in Guernsey go to events or use services in the UK?' Guernseymums is not a commercial enterprise but a family-oriented one centred on the needs of parents. And it seems that parents need it.

The monthly newsletter is emailed to 1,500 people, Facebook hits have reached 1,000 and its anonymous chat room, Guernsey Grapevine, has more than 200 people sharing information. Topics on the forum - especially IVF and post-natal depression (482 views in six months) - have been popular and some have resulted in support groups being formed. 'People are arranging to meet and swapping contact details,' said Sarah. 'We've even had people from France and the UK finding out what's going on in Guernsey because they're coming over here on holiday.'

Guernseymums.gg has hosted tabletop and nearly-new sales and organised Plant a Pot days for kids and parents at Le Friquet Home and Garden Centre. It has also supported Lloyds TSB's Child Carer of the Year Award which, as well as offering a prize of £500, helps to promote awareness about childcare in Guernsey. Now a year old, guernseymums celebrated the birthday with a party and family trades fair at Beau



Milly Dudley-Owen, Jane Rhodes and Sarah Winsall set up the website a year ago. (Picture by Tim Langlois)

Sejour. It showcased more than 50 exhibitors, ranging from local home crafts to activities and products for children and families. As well as face painting, bouncy castles and a colouring corner, Fun Dance, Tatty Teddy and Kiddy Kapers kept the children entertained. The concourse and the Sir John Loveridge Hall were packed with stands, activities and people.

'When we arrived, there were people queuing outside,' said Jane, 'and 200 goodie bags were gone within the first half-hour.' Groups who support and advertise with guernseymums.gg, as well as many who were at the launch last year, were there. 'They're doing a fabulous job,' said Lisa Vidamour. She works for Andy Priaulx, whose Priaulx Premature Baby Foundation uses the site regularly. 'The foundation hasn't yet got its own designated website, so guernseymums.gg helps us to raise issues that we wouldn't normally be able to air. We hope that the relationship will

grow.' Jo Horsepool of White Rabbit Parties said the site was invaluable. 'We've advertised with guernseymums.gg and we have a link to the website. It's fantastic to see all the information in one place and great for business.'

The website has also gained the support of healthcare professionals, including midwives at the Princess Elizabeth Hospital. 'On the Facebook site we got 150 hits in one week about our Vaginal Birth After Caesarean Section clinic,' said midwife Shelley Blake. 'We've also stopped providing baby clothes, and we've found it a great way to tell mums-to-be to bring their own. 'It's a brilliant site and really useful for getting things out.' The Women's Institute, Homestart, the National Childbirth Trust and the Fostering and Adoption Service all had stalls at the event. 'We're supportive of them and work with them wherever we

can,' said the NCT's Sarah Langford. 'This is a great event. It fills a gap in the market.'

The fair ran for only three hours but the huge footfall was a measure of the site's popularity.

'More than 1,500 poured through the doors between 2pm and 5pm,' said Milly. 'Altogether £500 was raised, which has been donated to various local charities including the Priaulx Premature Baby Foundation and the St Martin's Church Charitable Giving Fund. 'There are so many things that we still want to do,' she added. And enlisting the help of members to publicise what's good about Guernsey is one of the main ones.

Milly promised that guernseymums would always try its best to provide a good, reliable service. 'We're three full-time mums and we've all got jobs and husbands. It can be difficult to focus. 'Obviously we'll never keep everyone happy, but we'll certainly try.'



This week our dad is driven to distraction by car window stickers - some of which seem more appropriate than others when there are young passengers on board...

CAR window stickers - don't you just love them? No, me neither. 'My other car's a Porsche' - hilarious. 'If you can read this you're too close' - smart alec. And of course the '... on-board' collection, including Bump, Baby, Cheeky little monkey and even Daddy's little princess. Yeuk. They're guaranteed to induce feelings of mild contempt and possibly anger in the driver of the car behind, thereby creating the opposite of the desired effect. But there are a couple I've seen recently that aren't just unfunny, they beggar belief because they're on vehicles of people who are clearly associated with children. There's a car driving round that has a Girl Guides sticker on one side of the rear windscreen and another saying '___ happens' (you can guess the expletive) on the other. Strange combination. I mean, I know kids' organisations have been updated and gone all modern, but I don't recall them having changed the Girl Guide Promise to '___ happens', unless I missed the subheader: 'And we'll teach you how to deal with it when it does.'

Another slightly unsettling sticker is one I've seen several times during the school pick-up on the back of a mum's car. It reads '___ on board' (where the blank is what you call a female dog). Now, apart from the obvious thought that it's a bizarre sticker to have when you've got kids of primary school age, it raises a number of other questions. For a start, who bought it? Was it her husband? In which case she might want to question the foundations of their relationship. Maybe he stuck it on the rear windscreen without her knowing it, like the schoolboy prank of slapping your mate on the back while attaching a sticker that says 'Kick me'. Or perhaps it was the mother-in-law.

Maybe it was stuck on by a fellow mum, after one too many school car park altercations, to act as a warning to other mums - don't mess with this one, she's a nutter. Or it could just be a misunderstanding on my part and they're simply dog lovers who wish to warn approaching vehicles that they may be carrying one in the car - and a female one at that. In which case, I take it all back.

The only other option - and it's quite a scary one - is that the woman bought it for herself. In which case she's definitely somebody to be avoided.

Head turners - WIN a CobWebs Company hat

THE newborn is on for a cashmere strawberry. The toddlers? Two-tone stripes in shades of blue. There's been a baby boom in my family and as an aunt who strives to be great in every sense of the word, I'm on a quest for gifts that are not just the bee's knees but beautifully made and original, writes



Di Digard.

The CobWebs Company's handcrafted baby hats are real head turners. Its range of fruity and floral 'bunnays' are also enormous fun - you can kit your favourite baby out for the season in an orange, a Christmas pud or even a fir cone, or top Lilies and Daisies in tiffers to match their names.

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made to order service for older children and prices start at a very reasonable £9.95. Last orders for Christmas on 18 December.

● We have two beautiful hats to give away. For your chance to win

one, phone 240241 and leave your name, contact number and the answer to this question: **Where is The CobWebs Company based?** Competition closes on Monday 29 November.