

echo

IT'S ALL ABOUT PEOPLE

'You don't have to be perfect all the time'

EVER turned up at work with a bit of mashed Weetabix on your skirt, or got to your child's school late because you couldn't get away from the office?

Then don't worry, you are not alone. And supermum Bethan Darwin is determined to show that it can be done but doesn't have to be perfect all the time.

As she puts it: "It doesn't matter if your pants and bra don't match, nobody is perfect and much as we all long to be the perfect mother, wife and have career success, most of us have to cut corners."

The mum of two is one of the main organisers of the Superwoman charity conference, which gives businesswomen the chance to meet each other and open up about their experiences of trying to juggle life.

By **CATHY OWEN**
cathy.owen@mediawales.co.uk

She finds time to look after her two children, juggle her high-powered job as a partner in a legal firm, support her husband, David Thompson, who is chief executive of rugby league side the Celtic Crusaders, write a book and organise the conference. Bethan admits she is lucky because she can be more flexible with work, meaning she can often take the children to school, get to school sports days and do a lot of work in the evenings after Caleb, nine, and Megan, three, have gone to bed.

And she does have a part-time nanny and two sets of grandparents who can help out. But she often has to leave the house in a mess, send flowers by Interflora when she has forgotten a birthday or anniversary, doesn't have nice nails and doesn't get much sleep.

Now in its fourth year, the idea for Superwoman began during a night out. "It all started during a night out with a bunch of girlfriends who had drunk too much

wine," explains the straight-talking mum, from Wenvoe.

"We started swapping tips and ideas on things like how to find a good decorator or basically how to deal with family problems.

"We were lamenting about how the other women we come across appeared to manage so well. They seemed to be running successful careers and still finding time to go to the gym, keep immaculate houses and immaculate manicures and sending their kids off to school with nutritious well-balanced lunches.

"Meanwhile, I was lucky if I found time to wash my hair and had more than once resorted to fishing school sweatshirts out of the laundry basket to select the least dirty one to be worn again after a quick spray with Febreze.

"Someone said we should organise a get together specifically for women with families and jobs and try and raise some money for charity at the same time.

"I suggested we should call it Superwoman because all women need to be that nowadays, juggling work, family commitments and a social life. We could have a great big get together and share our stories of how we tried to do it all and still just about manage to find time to iron our

capes.

"We figured we weren't the only business women cutting corners at home in order to make it in business or if we were wanted to know how those other women pulled it off."

So the next day Bethan found that not only did she have a hangover but that she had also agreed to organise Superwoman.

It was attended by 50 women and raised about £2,000 for their nominated charity Valleys Kids. Last year there were 120 attendees and this year they are hoping for even more. The event has raised more than £8,000 for charities including Bobath Cymru, Barnardo's Smile Train and the Noah's Ark Appeal.

"It is a networking event which is like an extension of things that girlfriends tell each other at some point over the second bottle of wine," she explains.

"But, nevertheless, a business event with some useful business topics and a networking opportunity. An evening for superwomen who sometimes get snags in their tights."

Bethan thinks that one of the main reasons she can get it all done is because women are different from men.

"In the time it takes my husband to shave I can

unload and re-load both dishwasher and washing machine, make packed lunches and hunt down the right gym kit whilst simultaneously getting dressed and slapping moisturiser on my face and décolletage in the vain hope that the new expensive Oil of Olay cream really can reverse the appearance of fine lines and a nascent scraggy neck," she says.

"It's not that he is lazy. He's not. He qualifies as a New Man, more or less. He cooks, he shops, he picks up from nursery. He'll even at a push watch Brothers and Sisters. It's just that he moves a lot slower than I do and consequently gets less done in the little time that exists either side of bed and work."

Bethan returned to work very quickly after having her children, with Caleb she was off for eight weeks after the birth and with Megan three months.

But she really doesn't feel she has missed out. "It sometimes gets too much for me and I think about giving it all up and moving to West Wales," she admits.

"But as my husband points out, I am the sort of person who would see the local shop for sale, buy it and before too long be just as busy as ever."



SUPER MUM: Bethan Darwin with husband David Thompson and son Caleb, nine, and daughter Megan, three

PICTURE: Richard Swingler ©

Working mum Bethan Darwin reveals how she juggles a full-time job, two children, a husband, writing a book and organising a charity conference...

cathy
what everybody's talking about... with CATHY OWEN

Nursery life is action-packed

IT comes to something when your toddler has a better social life than your own. We have just received the autumn newsletter from nursery with a list of events that would make Paris Hilton envious. There are Halloween parties, Bonfire night parties, nursery rhyme parties, a celebration of Diwali and I don't even know where to start with all the different Christmas dos planned throughout December. I know it will only become more hectic as he gets older, up until the day when I'm telling him to be home before midnight and threatening to show his mates those pictures of him sitting on the potty if he so much as thinks of smoking any funny smelling cigarettes. So for now I will have to sit back and plan my own social calendar - I might be free in 2025!

I CAN'T quite believe it myself but I have already bought this year's Christmas cards. Every year I vow to try and be organised, and it always starts off quite well before it descends into chaos on Christmas Eve. The cards are for a charity very close to my heart but the problem with getting them so early is this: I will put them in a safe place, forget where that safe place is, have to buy and send some new ones on the last posting day before eventually finding them on Christmas Eve! So, I'm just putting it on record they're in the dresser in our dining room.

THE annual Superwoman charity networking event returns to Cardiff next month with speakers including Menna Richards, controller of BBC Wales, and the organisation's political editor Betsan Powys. The event will once again raise cash for Valleys Kids, a charity which helps disadvantaged children in South Wales, and for the Trust for Sick Children in Wales, which builds accommodation for families with poorly children. Due to the demand for tickets in previous years the number of places available has risen from 120 to 150. The event will be held on Thursday, October 16 at the Copthorne Hotel, Cardiff, from 6pm and tickets cost £35. For tickets and information, send an e-mail to: chazell@darwingray.com



BUSY MUMS: Bethan Darwin at the Valleys Kids project which the Superwoman charity has raised funds for

quote of the week

"If your bum started descending when you were just 14, it doesn't really matter where it is today"
- Actress Dawn French on ageing.

sign of the times

APPARENTLY the collapse of family in today's society is down to one person - Bridget Jones. Crazy Conservative David Willetts believes that the 'Bridget Jones Generation' is to blame for too many well-educated young women being unable to find a suitable match. He says: "They (men) are no longer given the opportunity to bring home the bacon, and the evidence is that that is bad for families." It could only come from a man!