

Expat mum's problems provide inspiration

By Fiona Hodgkins

Over many years as a child, teacher, then trailing spouse and expat mum, I have become very familiar with the pros and cons of educating children across different countries, cultures and educational systems.

Born in Japan, growing up in S.E. Asia, being sent to boarding school at 11 and then embarking on the expat circuit as an adult with my oil engineering husband, I have experienced education first hand in such diverse locations as Japan, Germany, the UK, Singapore, Malaysia, Zimbabwe, the UAE, Venezuela and Trinidad.

As a teacher, I have seen children arriving from another international move: sometimes they had ground to make-up, at other times they waited for their contemporaries to catch-up. Moving from one school to another, let alone from one country to another, is rarely a seamless transition.

As a parent, around the pools, over coffee in the malls, at those lovely long Sunday brunches, time and time again, it was educational issues, a desire to do the very best for our children, which seemed to dominate the conversation.

Over time, I began to sense a real need for a reliable network of tutors with experience of British education, who could not only help the pupil struggling with a subject or two but also inspirational tutors who could stretch and stimulate the brightest children.

But inevitably, before I had had time to develop my ideas, we were off again on another expat posting. For the children and for me there were new schools and but the same old issues.

And then, as the children got older, I had to meet a new challenge, one faced by other British parents too: how to select and get our children into the right schools back in the UK and on to British Universities. From thousands of miles away, I negotiated the minefield of choosing, applying and successfully finding places for my children.

Having seen both sides, as a teacher and as a parent, I finally decided to use my experience, expertise and resources to provide a service to meet this demand. And so, an idea that had been born all those years ago finally came to fruition – I launched an Educational Consultancy based out of Singapore, offering schools advice and tuition to ex-pat families.

Since then, in another phase of our expat lives, I have moved back to the UK but physical separation from my core clients has not acted as a hindrance to the services I provide as the internet, and particularly Skype, has enabled me to continue to provide quality tuition and advice for pupils in a range of countries, often in places where there is a shortage of educators with experience of the British education system.

Four years on, I have large group of tutors working with me and have provided thousands of hours of quality tuition to and from in excess of a dozen countries. This has been achieved through word-of-mouth recommendations, rather than formal advertising, which I see as testament to the service I provide. And to ensure that the quality of the service offered, I engage almost exclusively with tutors who are experienced teachers and who are known personally to me.

With my network of tutors, we now provide tuition for boosting at Primary level; school entrance exams at 11+ and 13+; support through KS3 and (I)GCSEs up to A Level and IB examinations. Along the way we have helped pupils gain scholarships at Eton, Westminster and many other prestigious schools but our core mantra is always to treat each child as an individual and help them to achieve their very best.

When I look back it seems to me remarkable that my experience as an ex-pat parent (coupled with my background as a teacher) prompted the development of a global business that is now able to help families just like mine.

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