

Way for businesses to make parenting easier

More bosses see benefit of providing childcare facilities at workplace

SHIVANI SUPRAMANI(/TAG/-/META/SHIVANI-SUPRAMANI) / 30 NOV 2020 / 13:14 H.



Ariza Husof with her twins Hayder Andrian Hadi Hasnul (left) and Hayden Allyyan at Sime Darby Plantation Childcare Centre.

PETALING JAYA: Every morning, when Ariza Husof goes to the office, she would have her twin boys in tow.

“Knowing that my children are in a safe place and that I am within easy reach is comforting,” the assistant manager at Sime Darby Oils told theSun recently.

Ariza works at the Sime Darby Plantation corporate office in Ara Damansara where there is a childcare centre to meet the needs of parents with young children.

“It gives me a chance to connect with my children as I drive to work. I can focus better on my work knowing that they are happy and safe,” she said. (For the record, Ariza works from home now because of the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown that followed.)

More employers today are beginning to see the benefit of providing childcare facilities at the workplace.

A study by the National Population and Family Development Board shows that one of the main reasons women leave the workforce is to look after their children.

National Council of Women's Organisations (NCWO) secretary-general Assoc Prof Dr Sabariah Baharun said that apart from easing the burden of having to look for suitable childcare services, it is also ideal for mothers who have to breastfeed their babies.

Rashyid Redza Anwarudin, the head of group sustainability at Sime Darby Plantation, said the company has childcare centres at most of its estates.

"The facility has been introduced for the convenience of employees and to relieve them of having to worry about their children's safety while they are at work," he told theSun.

For the company, the benefit is a big increase in productivity from the parents.

Under Budget 2021, the government has introduced a RM20 million matching grant for businesses to set up childcare centres at the workplace as an initiative to encourage mothers to remain in the workforce even after giving birth.

Batu Kawan MP Kasthuri Patto pointed out that fathers will also benefit from the initiative given that childcare is a shared responsibility.

Nonetheless, she said, priority should be given to ensuring that there are proper guidelines and that only childcare professionals familiar with children and their needs are engaged for such tasks.

Malaysian Employers Federation executive director Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan agreed that the matching grant to get businesses to provide childcare facilities is a good move but warned that there are challenges, too.

He told theSun that in the late 1980s, there were close to 100 companies that provided childcare facilities at the workplace but the number has dropped to only about 30 today.

"It must be noted that not all workplaces are suitable for children. For instance, there should not be a childcare facility at a chemical plant because of the dangers involved," he said.

For senior systems engineer at Sime Darby Plantation Mohd Syarifuddin Ab Hamid the childcare facility at his workplace is ideal in terms of cost as well.

"The monthly fees are low. My children have been able to sharpen their social skills and since children of various ethnicities share the centre, it also promotes multi-racial interaction," he said.

Ariza said children's learning abilities have improved, thanks to the very understanding and child-centric teachers. That, for her, is a bonus.