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Research in Graubünden

Flexibility for career and family

On female role models, fathers, and research

Two geographers, two small children, and the desire to combine demanding work for both of them with family life in such a way that no one is left behind - is that possible?

Jeannette Nötzli, who holds a doctorate in geography, and Andi Hasler, an electronics engineer and also a doctor of geography, live and work with their two children in Davos. Jeannette does research on permafrost in the mountains at the WSL Institute for Snow and Avalanche Research SLF and is project manager of PERMOS, the Swiss permafrost measurement network. Andi works at the Davos-based KMU SensAlpin GmbH, which designs, builds and operates monitoring and alarm systems for alpine natural hazards. When Andi received the offer to work at SensAlpin GmbH five years ago, the young family decided to move from Zurich to Davos. Jeannette's work, at that time exclusively for PERMOS, was already closely linked to the SLF. The proximity to the research object permafrost was also an obvious advantage in Davos. The "highest city in Europe" with its various research institutes offers jobs in research-related industry as well as the appropriate infrastructure - for example good childcare facilities. However, it was not only the profession that tipped the scales, but also the love of the mountains and the many outdoor sports opportunities.



Jeannette Nötzli and Andi Hasler doing field work (private photos)

It was clear to them from the very beginning that as parents they wanted to be equally involved both in professional work and in bringing up their children. Today, they each work 70 percent in their jobs, share family work on a balanced basis, and use the childcare facilities, including occasional help from friends and grandparents. “I do not see my part-time work as a sacrifice in favor of my wife,” says Andi, “but as a privilege to build a close relationship with my children”. But how does that work out in everyday life?

Flexibility and organisational skills are at the heart of this - not only in the family, but also very much at work. This means that employers and employees do not have fixed daily working hours, but instead rely on the quality of work and meeting deadlines, which, as Jeannette emphasizes,

“requires trust, professionalism and good communication from both sides”. Both parents explain that they are given a lot of flexibility by their employers to ideally plan and coordinate their work and childcare. However, they also offer the employer a high degree of flexibility, for example, when weather-dependent field work over several days, scientific conferences abroad or urgent work is due. The special situation of the past few months, caused by the Corona pandemic, has clearly shown how much more flexibility is possible in everyday working life and how very strict work patterns can be broken without any loss of quality for the results. A realization that can benefit families and companies alike.

For women in research to be able to achieve and retain positions of responsibility without giving up the desire for sufficient family time, flexible part-time jobs for both women and men as well as good childcare facilities are crucial. Equally important, however, are male role models to enable young men to recognise that it is a gain for them to play an active role in shaping family life and to be able to build a close relationship with their children. Finally, employers are needed who regard flexible part-time employees as an asset rather than a drawback.

Find out more about the SLF at www.slf.ch, more about SensAlpin GmbH at www.sensalpin.ch

Find out more about research in Graubünden: www.academiaractica.ch, www.graduateschool.ch.

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