

# Susan Gowans

Research Project Administrator, CRASSH

*Interviewed by Marie Synakewicz*

For about 10 years, Susan lived in New Zealand where she worked in the insurance sector. Five years ago, after her daughter was born, she moved back to England. Susan grew up in the area around Cambridge and hence was drawn back here. After taking some time out as a mum she started working part-time for Anglia Ruskin University, before moving to the University of Cambridge about one and a half years ago. Originally, she was employed by CRASSH for 60%, working as a research grant coordinator. Soon however, she was asked to temporarily take on some responsibilities for the Centre for the Study of Existential Risk (CSER) which enabled her to increase to 80%.

Currently she coordinates two research projects at CRASSH, managing budgets, organising events and ensuring adherence to the terms of conditions of the grants. She also goes to the reading groups for one of these projects in particular, which she enjoys tremendously and finds challenging. Although she comes from a very different background, she has been able to learn much and is getting involved in discussions more often these days. Susan also works for the School of Arts and Humanities undertaking administrative duties in the setting up of the newly funded Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence. This has allowed her to increase her hours to full time. However, without any kind of flexible working arrangement, it would have inevitably created the need for more commuting and therefore childcare hours per week. Fortunately, her line manager offered her to work one day a week from home. This saves Susan two hours of commute on that day and it allows her to drop off her daughter at school and pick her up in the afternoon. On days when she is working as usual from the office Susan takes her daughter to a childminder before school who then picks her up most afternoons. Her working-from-home days have not only given her more time with her daughter, and reduced expenses for childcare and commuting, but they have also proven advantageous in another way. Susan has discovered that her productivity at home is a lot more intense. Due to the lack of distraction, she can often achieve more work per hour than in the office. She plans her weeks accordingly and leaves work that requires uninterrupted focus to take home on that day.

The CRASSH offices are a fantastic environment to work in. "The administrator is incredibly realistic about life", Susan says. In the case of an emergency, time can be made up at a later point. Everyone of the support staff has this freedom, not only those with children. "Being given this flexibility and understanding makes you more motivated to be flexible a member of the team yourself", she adds. Therefore, if the office is very busy during term-time everybody puts in a bit more, but then is able to take a more relaxed approach during the summer for example.

Recently, her role as a mother has been changing as her daughter becomes increasingly becomes independent. She can now find the time to think about how she would like her career to progress. Since she has been working at the University she has been able to observe and interact with people who have followed many different paths. To her, these people and the Cambridge environment in general are an inspiration. She has joined the Springboard Women's Development Programme and also considers pursuing a part-time Master's degree.