

Mo-House:

PRACTICAL FASHION FOR NURSING COMFORT

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Yuka Mitsuata (right) speaks with one of her store managers

THE office of Mo-House in Tsukuba City, Ibaraki Prefecture, might differ a little from your typical image of a Japanese business. Inside, women work with children strapped into baby carriers at their chests, while a napping area with children's toys and books is set aside in one corner. But then, this is to be expected of a company focused on supporting nursing mothers.

Mo-House grew out of an incident in 1997, when founder Yuka Mitsuata started breastfeeding her hungry one-month-old daughter on a train. The looks of surprise she immediately drew from other

passengers pointed her to a need for clothing that would allow women to breastfeed discreetly in public.

Two months later, Mitsuata's first shirt was ready for launch. Yet she found a surprising lack of interest. "At the time, it was considered common sense for nursing mothers to stay at home," she explains. "So I realized I would first have to try to change people's mindsets."

Mitsuata initiated the first of a long-running series of events where she invited nursing mothers to her home to wear her clothing and "demonstrate that women could breastfeed while talking with friends and drinking tea." These 'breastfeeding shows' proved popular, and soon she was generating substantial interest in - and sales of - her nursing wear.

More than 15 years later, Mo-House not only supports nursing mothers with functional inner and outer wear, but provides opportunities for them to work as well. In addition to most of her staff having children of their own, many of them are also nursing mothers. At the Mo-House store in Aoyama, Tokyo, some mothers bring their infants to work, holding them as they interact with visiting customers.

In 2009, Mo-House received the Women's Challenge Prize from the Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office for its efforts to employ nursing mothers and contribution to the advancement of women in society, while a Good Design

Award in 2010 recognized the company's outstanding product design. In a speech given in April 2013 on strategies for economic growth, Prime Minister Abe even referred to Mo-House's success to illustrate the possibilities of entrepreneurial achievement open to child-rearing mothers. "It was a real surprise," Mitsuata recounts.

Mo-House products have found some unexpected success outside their target market as well. Mitsuata notes that "our bra has been very popular among elderly women, and even breast cancer patients" who are sensitive to comfort.

Just as her company's clothing lines have helped women feel more comfortable undertaking a natural part of their lives, Mitsuata ultimately believes that "making the work environment open to nursing mothers will in turn foster a better environment for others, including people with disabilities, men and the elderly." And, of course, the babies benefit as well. ▮



Mo-House products conceal layered openings that are quick and discreet