

Solving the Puzzle

It can be tricky finding a business that puts your management skills to the test, but also offers freedom and personal fulfilment. Running a child-oriented business is an ideal solution, as the founders of new franchise Monkey Puzzle Day Nurseries can testify



With more mothers choosing to return to work early and more tax incentives for them to do so, there is an unprecedented demand for nursery places in the UK. Monkey Puzzle Day Nurseries is launching a franchise opportunity to tap into this market, providing a secure, caring, pre-school environment for children aged from three months to five years.

Various national studies have shown that children who have attended nurseries are better prepared for primary school than those who don't, and they tend to achieve more. Typically, a child will attend nursery for three to four years and will be succeeded by a sibling for the same length of time. An 'average' family with 2.4 children can therefore be a customer of a nursery for around ten years.

This continuity of demand is one huge advantage of running a nursery business, and Monkey Puzzle aims to provide such an excellent nursery service that parents are happy for all their children to attend for years – and recommend the company to other parents. That kind of customer loyalty and longevity is the key to the success of any business.

Monkey Puzzle franchisees have sole rights to a clearly defined territory, and are given a tailored curriculum to implement that meets children's cultural and age-specific needs. Monkey Puzzle's educational coordinator is involved in all aspects of nursery provision, including setting daily routines and room layouts, and the food menus are created by an experienced children's nutritionist. Children

are nurtured in well-equipped, attractive premises with competent, well-trained staff, so parents can be confident that their little ones will thrive.

FROM INFANCY TO MATURITY

Monkey Puzzle's company directors are husband-and-wife team Rebecca and Mark Crosby, who both left successful careers in the city to follow a family tradition of providing nursery care. The Crosby family's experience in the childcare sector dates back to 1978, when a previous generation opened their first day nursery in Cambridgeshire. More nurseries followed and the operation expanded, trading under the name Ladybird. This laid the foundation for the core business, now situated in Hertfordshire, which since early 2005 has been operating under the more distinctive and trademarked Monkey Puzzle brand. An ambitious expansion programme has seen the nurseries in Hertfordshire grow from initially offering 30 places to filling 150 places in less than three years.

Mark says: 'Monkey Puzzle offers a great opportunity for anyone without childcare experience to enter the sector. We offer full training and support to franchisees in a sector with considerable regulation of both staffing and premises.

'It is now obligatory to comply with guidelines set by education regulatory body OFSTED, so opening a day nursery is no longer a simple matter. But we are ready to lead franchisees through the maze, showing them how to set up from scratch, manage their businesses and achieve a first-class return on their investment.

LEARNING CURVE

Considerable emphasis is placed on training franchisees to ensure Monkey Puzzle's high standards are uniformly maintained. The training package comprises three elements: classroom sessions at head office on marketing and day-to-day operations; shadowing a manager at a nursery to gain experience; then onsite support from a member of Monkey Puzzle's team at your own premises, including support during initial nursery classes.

There's also long-term support for franchisees on operational and financial matters. Mark says: 'We will keep our franchisees updated on regulatory, HR and marketing matters, and we also raise all invoices on behalf of franchisees and facilitate fee payments by direct debit.'

So, what attributes make for an ideal Monkey Puzzle franchisee? Mark says: 'Apart from a wish to work with children, potential franchisees will need great people management and communication skills and a warm and understanding disposition.'

With a typical investment of £54,000, annual turnover can be around £500,000, and for the right franchisee potential earnings are high. ■

further information

To find out more about Monkey Puzzle franchise opportunities call 01442 825 558 or email markcrosby66@hotmail.com