

Child and pet-centred services make successful franchise businesses

Life's a walk in the park

THE OLD movie dictum is that you should never work with children or animals — but hundreds of franchisees would disagree.

With about 4.8 million children between four and nine in the UK, child-centred franchises are growing as dual-income couples seek help with their children.

Some child-centred franchises, but not all, need teaching qualifications, and with many you do the work yourself, though others are management franchises. You must be happy working with children, and have a professional manner and sound commercial sense. You may need a police check.

Jo Jingles, the pre-school music classes franchise, celebrates its tenth anniversary this year.

'Services for children is a growth area because parents are more aware of the benefits that a range of activities brings,' says Jo Jingles' Caroline Crabbe.

'Our core market is children up to five, and we have seen a surge in demand, especially from nurseries and after-school clubs, partly because provision of music in schools has been reduced.'

Jo Jingles is looking for another ten franchisees to take classes locally at times to suit themselves. For an investment of £6,000-8,000 you get full training, so you don't need previous experience but you should have a tuneful singing voice.

Among the new crop of franchises for children is Monkey Puzzle, which manages nurseries. You don't need

by **Linda Whitney**

childcare qualifications because you recruit qualified staff, but sound commercial experience is vital, plus excellent management and communication skills and a natural manner with children. You'll need an investment of £54,000.

Another new franchise is Go-Kart Party, which runs go-kart tracks at children's parties, sports days and fairs. Equipment includes four karts and an inflatable circuit. You can work part-time, as demand focuses on weekends.

It suits business-minded types who like children. You start hands-on, with the aim of running a team of operators later. It costs from £12,500 to set up. Remember to carefully check new franchises.

Britain has 25 million pets, and plenty of franchises for pet lovers.

'Pets are no longer just animals — they are surrogate children or partners,' says Monica Loosely of Pals4Pets, a franchise of pet sitters and dog walkers.

'Demand is increasing from busy people who want someone to look after a pet for the day, or while they are away, or even just while they go out for the evening.'

'We arrange for carers to move into clients' homes to look after pets while they are on holiday, or offer the pets an alternative home, and care for sick or diabetic animals while owners have a break.'

It's a management job, and while you don't need specific experience,

you must be able to empathise with both animals and their owners, be discreet — current clients include celebrities and minor royalty — and enjoy the marketing involved. You'll need at least £5,000 liquid capital to start.

Bark Busters franchisees deal with dog behaviour problems by re-training both dogs and owners.

'You have to be good at communicating with dogs and people because often solving the problem involves training the owner to retrain the dog,' says Bark Busters' Tony O'Herlihy.

HE ADDS: 'You also have to be businesslike — and we give new franchisees training in business as well as dog training.' Bark Busters seeks another ten franchisees and set-up costs about £20,000.

Franchisees with Animals At Home care for pets while owners are away, posting pictures and updates on a website so owners can check on pets. They also walk dogs, and arrange transport for veterinary appointments.

Training includes professional animal-handling and you need to be fit (for all that walking) and be checked for a criminal record. Investment is from £4,000.

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KAREN NOAKES, 40, from Nunhead, South London, has a Soundsteps Music School franchise in Croydon, employing two office staff and nine teachers to run 76 classes at schools, halls and community centres. Music graduate and piano teacher Karen says: 'Working with children keeps you young at heart and active, but children benefit if you lay down firm boundaries for them. They're energetic and fun.' But she adds: 'Running a franchise means being very organised, and as well as having teaching skills, you need to be

happy dealing with figures and finance. Fortunately, music and maths have a lot in common, as both require organisation, self-motivation and discipline. 'People with caring or teaching backgrounds may be on unfamiliar ground when it comes to running a business, so make sure your franchisor offers business training.' Soundsteps is looking for more franchisees. You don't need teaching experience but must be able to read and write music and play keyboard or piano to grade five standard.

■ Soundsteps: 020 8668 4825.