

## **Baby Sensory – Franchisee Case Study, Helen Dicks**

### **How did you first find out about Baby Sensory?**



I was planning to implement a music and movement element into my baby massage classes and was doing some research online re what other types of baby classes were around. I came across the Baby Sensory website and found they were looking for a franchisee in Southampton. I loved what they were doing and the opportunity seemed to have my name on it. Usually I'm quite cautious about new projects but I was surprised at just how sure I felt about it and that it was the right pathway for me.

### **What was your job before you started your own Baby Sensory franchise?**

I was a qualified complementary therapist specialising in pregnancy and post natal treatments. I also taught baby massage.

### **What hobbies and interests do you have?**

Hmn. Probably not as many now as pre Baby Sensory. My job is quite consuming and I'm always on the look out for articles on baby development, new materials to add to the classes or new toys. Even when we are on holiday I usually manage to see something of value to add to the sessions. I do love walking, the countryside, massages, reading when I get the time and I would love another dog!

### **What is your Baby Sensory Territory?**

My territory is quite large and covers Southampton city and most of the suburbs. It goes up as far as Chandlers Ford (Eastleigh) and as far out as Titchfield in Fareham. There is room for more classes.

### **When did you start running Baby Sensory classes?**

I started running Baby Sensory in June 2007 so I am one of the first franchisees.

### **How many Baby Sensory Classes do you run every week?**

I run 8 classes over three days.

### **How many babies attend your classes each week?**

I usually have just over 160 babies per week.

### **How do you see your Baby Sensory business growing over the next 2 years?**

There is potential for running classes on another day and we are planning on rolling out the follow on programme Toddler Sense so we can cater for babies from newborn up to 31/2 years. This will mean recruiting new class leaders as I don't want to do any more classes myself. I have found the balance of running classes over three days and admin/marketing over two the right one for me. I now have a class leader who is running extra sessions and taking on the birthday parties. I also now have two class assistants.

### **What has been your most successful strategy for finding new customers?**

Flooding the territory with leaflets at the very beginning. The option of having a failing business wasn't on the agenda so I spent a lot on advertising. I also stood outside clinics and in the city centre handing out leaflets. I worked on the maxim that there isn't much point on having a brilliant product if no-one knows about it. I don't do a great deal of advertising now as most parents come by word of mouth. Health visitors and Sure Start have also passed on information about my classes to parents. Having them on board has been a big help.

### **What do you enjoy most about running your Baby Sensory business?**

Being in control and making my own decisions about where we are going with it. Secondly is my love of seeing the babies grow and develop each week. If a baby has been with me for a year it can be very emotional when they have to leave. It's great being able to provide a wonderful environment for the parents to come and have fun with their babies and make friends. Lots of lasting friendships are made at the classes and sometimes I feel like a 'mummy matchmaker'! I love the buzz of there always being something new to introduce every week and the total madness that some sessions become. There's nothing quite like getting your parents to try Irish Dancing or Salsa (with the babies of course) and we have so much fun!

I also enjoy 'mentoring' new franchisees as they have all the same fears I had four years ago so it's nice to be able to say 'Don't worry. We've all felt like that'. Knowing the lesson plans work and the whole programme is the best out there means I can confidently give advice and support.

### **What has been the greatest challenge you have had to overcome when setting up your Baby Sensory business?**

For me personally it has been juggling the needs of my elderly father who has dementia with the business and family. My mother died shortly before I began so it was a very difficult time all round for everyone. Trying to start a new business and juggling the needs of everyone else was not easy. I was also still working as a complementary therapist and as an invigilator at a local school so there was an awful lot of juggling going on. When I look back

I'm not sure how I managed it but the business had to succeed as we had borrowed money so it was a case of head down and get on with it.

**What is your greatest achievement?**

For me it is the fulfilment that comes with doing something I love and wholeheartedly believe in. It has been a steep learning curve at times and involved a lot of hard work but I have had masses of support from my husband and children. They have all contributed to the success of the business and have all had huge roles to play with helping out with different aspects of it.

When I look back four years ago when I first started and it was worrying about trying to find parents to fill my classes. Now it's trying to find spaces for the parents who want to come to my classes. Achievement is definitely having full classes and waiting lists two terms ahead!