



Mum turns 'mobile creches' into franchise

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Rhodri Clark, Western Mail

A MUM who provides mobile creches for conferences and other events is franchising her business to answer soaring demand from professional parents.

Mother-of-three Julie Williams saw her Mobile Creche Company boom after new regulations led her local conference centre, Llandudno's Venue Cymru, to close its creche.

Delegates from across Britain attend events there and many bring their children because they have no alternative childcare or want some family time in the resort.

The Mobile Creche Company enables people at events, most recently the Labour Party's Welsh conference, to leave their children on site with qualified childminders.

Permanent creches closed at other venues across Britain because of the same new regulations, and Ms Williams, 38, soon found it a struggle to keep up with demand. Now her company has become the first in the UK to offer mobile creches as a franchise opportunity, along the lines of McDonald's, Specsavers and Prontaprint.

She expects to sign her first franchisee, in Manchester, today, after three months of negotiations and checks to ensure the company's standards and reputation will be maintained.

"There are companies that will market franchises for daycare and nursery care with mobile creche tacked on. We're the first with a stand-alone mobile creche business," said Ms Williams, who lives in Old Colwyn, Conwy.

"We've been doing conferences for the last four years. The demand outstrips supply, especially in Wales where we're completely booked up.

"I looked at setting up branches but I want people who are as dedicated as I am. If it's their own business they will be."

Head office will handle marketing and ensure franchisees meet legal and company standards, leaving the local businesses to concentrate on providing the service.

Employers are under growing pressure to provide childcare at work and for events such as seminars and courses.

The National Day Nursery Association says almost 40% of UK employees have dependent children but only one in 10 employers helps its staff with childcare.

There is only one childcare place for every seven children in Wales. Some areas, such as Blaenau Gwent, have one place for every 20 children.

Ms Williams, who set up her business seven years ago, said fathers often took as much advantage as mothers of creches at events.

"When it's a professional couple, they might both be working or going to a seminar. These days you have to have both parents working.

"When we provide a creche for the National Union of Journalists, the majority of parents who use that facility are fathers. The mothers might have other commitments or may be working somewhere else. Or the dads really enjoy being with their kids for a weekend."

Separated parents also value mobile creches, whether they normally look after their children or the conference falls on their weekend with the kids.

Ms Williams, whose children are 10, eight and three, became a single mum herself a year ago and says she can now empathise even more with the situation of working single parents.

Her company provides mobile creches for courses in community venues designed to appeal to people who would balk at a formal college setting. "They don't have the childcare provision on Anglesey, in places like Amlwch and Llangefni. There are courses on parenting, healthy living and cookery which parents wouldn't be able to access if there was no mobile creche."

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