



Returning to work after a career break can be a difficult time for anyone. In this interview we talk to Angela Kennedy who took a nine year career-break to start a family and who decided to run her own business on her return to work. Angela acquired a Baby Sensory franchise in 2009 and she now manages a team working in three separate territories.

What career did you have before you started your family?

I have a Bachelor of Primary Education (B.Prim.Ed) degree. I taught for seven years, in a junior school.

When did you stop work to start your family?

I stopped teaching, during my pregnancy, with my first child, in 2000.

When did you start to think about your options for a return to work?

I started looking for options, for returning to work, when my second child was four years old, in 2009. This was the year before he started school.

What options did you consider?

I considered returning to full time teaching, part time teaching, and teaching assistant positions. I was keen to have a good home/work balance, so that I could still be actively involved in my children's lives. I also looked at a few 'child based' franchises.

What were the advantages and disadvantages of each option?

The advantage of returning to work in a Junior School, is that you are employed, and you can rely on a salary. I absolutely loved my teaching years, but I didn't feel I'd be able to give my teaching the same level of commitment, that I had, before I had my children.

I felt I'd find being a teacher's assistant frustrating, as I'd be itching to be the teacher. However, I wouldn't have the same level of responsibility, as being the teacher, which appealed to me, with two young children.

How did you discover Baby Sensory?

I was looking at 'child related' franchise options, and I came across Baby Sensory. It immediately appealed to me, as with my teaching background, I knew that the first year was crucial in a child's learning and development. I felt that by teaching Baby Sensory classes, I would be helping parents to lay a very solid and strong foundation, in their baby's learning and development, which would have a positive impact on their child's later education.

Before you discovered Baby Sensory had you considered any other franchise options?

I did consider franchises, which ran classes for toddlers.

What were the main points that persuaded you that a career with Baby Sensory was the best option for you to take?

I went to meet, Dr Lin Day, the founder of Baby Sensory, I watched her teach a class, and was immediately hooked. It was very touching watching parents interacting with their babies, in such a positive and beneficial way. There was a wonderful atmosphere in the class, and I could see Lin was extremely enthusiastic and passionate about babies and how they learn. The fact that Lin has years of experience in working with young children and babies, and that she had thoroughly researched all the activities, appealed to me.

I loved the fact that there was a purpose behind each activity, and that the well laid out lesson plans would enable me to give parents the necessary information, on how the activities would benefit their babies. I liked the structure of the classes and that each lesson plan was well thought out. As a busy mum, with two young boys, the fact that Lin had already prepared the lesson plans and the music, meant I didn't need to think/plan weekly new lessons. It was a 'proven business model', which was reassuring.

I also went to meet Ian and Keeley Sharland, Baby Sensory's business directors. I felt reassured, that I would receive an enormous amount of support and advice from them, on how to go about building my Baby Sensory business. This was very important for me, as I had no experience at all, in the business world, and I faced a steep learning curve.

I was impressed that Baby Sensory teachers were trained by Dr Lin Day, and it wasn't 'just an online training programme'. As I had no business experience, and I knew the business training day would be hugely beneficial to me.

Did you have any worries about taking on a franchise?

I was nervous about making the financial investment, and knowing that it was up to me, to make it succeed. I felt confident I could teach the classes, as that was my background, but I was very nervous about marketing my classes and the business side of the franchise.

How have you overcome any worries and concerns?

Head Office provided me with a step-by-step manual for starting up my business. This helped me to plan how I was going to grow and develop my business. The guide gave me advice on how to advertise and where to advertise. This included a comprehensive range of 'ready prepared' templates, which helped enormously. The day of business training, with Head Office, was excellent. I came away 'buzzing' with ideas on how to grow my business. What is great with Baby Sensory, is that Head Office's support doesn't stop once you've signed your contract, it is on-going. They are so approachable -I've always felt help was just a phone call away.

Does your new career allow you to meet your personal and professional needs?

Initially I planned to teach classes on two days. My business grew rapidly, and within half a term, I was teaching three days. After a year, I was teaching five days, which was excellent from a business point of view, but busier than I'd like to be as a mum. I then chose to employ and train a teacher, to share the teaching with me. I now teach two days, and I have 'admin days' at home, which meets my home/work balance far better. I've expanded my business further, and I now have three franchisees teaching in additional territories. I plan to expand my business, by introducing Toddler Sense, in to my territories.

I find my role as a Baby Sensory teacher incredibly rewarding. In two and a half years, I've worked with over a thousand new parents and their babies. Baby Sensory is a high quality programme and I feel it is a real privilege, to have shared and been actively involved in so many babies' early learning and development, during their first year.