

## **Baby Sensory – Franchisee Case Study – Michelle Grzbiela, Basingstoke, UK**

**Michelle Grzbiella, is the Baby Sensory and Toddler Sense franchisee for Basingstoke, Hants. She has established an excellent reputation in her region where she and her team run 14 Baby Sensory sessions and 10 Toddler Sense sessions every week. Due to the popularity of her classes there is often a waiting list and parents frequently reserve their place before their baby is born. We interviewed Michelle to find out how she first discovered Baby Sensory, how she has built her business and her plans for the future.**



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

I was working as a member of bank staff at local nursery. I was not actually very impressed with the nursery as I felt they did very little with the children/ Babies. Then one day a Sharon Boyd arrived to run a Baby Sensory session. I sat as watched as she totally engaged the babies as she sang the “Say Hello to the Sun” opening song. She ran the brilliant session and I was hooked. I happened to then bump into her a few weeks later at a local Children music class and told her how wonderful I thought she and the classes were. In one conversation after learning that she was moving I said I would take over the business!! I then arranged to visit a full hour session two days later, this just confirmed my feelings and booked on to the Baby Sensory training programme that day.

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

I did and still do teach dancing to children from 2 and half till 18 years of age so knew that I had the ability to teach. I had worked for a few months alongside this a bank staff at a nursery after being made redundant as a sales administrator for a stationery manufacturer. As well as being a Mummy to two little ones.

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

When time permits I like to dance and choreograph dances. We put on shows at our local theatre for charity. I love spending time with my husband and children out doors going on bike rides and walks through the woods. I also love having friends over and hosting dinner parties.

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

My initial territory was Basingstoke, Alton and Farnham. I have now also acquired the Reading South territory which I have sub franchised.

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

I first started running classes in October 2009

**When did you launch Toddler Sense in your territory?**

I launched Toddler Sense, the follow on programme for Toddlers from 13 months to 3 years in May 2010 as a result of popular demand from Baby Sensory customers who's babies had graduated from the Baby Sensory programme.

**How many Baby Sensory / Toddler Sense Classes do you run every week?**

I personally run 10 Baby sensory classes and 4 Toddler Sense classes every week.

Along with my colleagues we run a total of 14 Baby Sensory, and 10 Toddler Sense sessions a week in the Basingstoke and Alton area. Some of these run in local Nurseries, pre schools and Childrens Centre. Each session accommodated 20 babies and most sessions are fully subscribed. We generally have just under 300 babies and just under 200 toddlers registered for our classes.

We also have run at least two parties each weekend

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

We are finding that we still need to run more classes of both Baby Sensory and Toddler Sense to cope with demand and requirement for flexibility on days. We have quite a few disappointed mummies who are unable to get on to the course and we are keen to ensure that everyone in our territory has the opportunity to attend our classes. We may also look to reach out to areas within the territory where we have not had any sessions running. I also plan to spread the Toddler Sense programme into my second territory also.

Baby Sensory are planning to introduce another programme in the near future and I would also like to look to introduce this programme in my territory.

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

Hard work and word of mouth have been the foundation of my business. I like to give every session that I run each week 110% and this gets parents talking to others about what we have done. I also find that birthday parties are great introduction to the classes. As we run Baby Sensory and Toddler Sense classes we find some that have missed Baby Sensory and have enjoyed a 1<sup>st</sup> birthday party decide to join our Toddler Sense classes.

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

I do a job that I absolutely love and enjoy. It so great to run this type of business as I am able to fit in with my family life. I get to still get to be a mummy in the morning and do the school run, tea and Bed time but have a fulltime job.

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

I found it challenging to get the toddler Sense reputation built up. We had a few teething problems initially trying to get the parents to realise that it was a follow on programme designed for the needs of older children. It took some time for them to recognise that whilst it was not the same it was just as wonderful as Baby Sensory.

**What is your greatest achievement?**

My greatest achievement has been watching the business grow. I have built the classes up from only four when I started as a sub franchisee, to now owning the business and having over 20 classes and a waiting list.

When asked about Michelle's success, Ian Sharland, Business Development Director at Baby Sensory commented, "Michelle has all of the qualities we look for in a franchisee. She runs excellent classes and she is committed to looking after her customers and supporting her team. Additionally, she has one of the most important qualities required to run your own successful business as she is always positive in her outlook and deals with any problems that occur rather than worrying about them."