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Child care services association

June 14, 2001 15+ minutes to read reviews expressed by contractor contributors on their own. Editor's Note: This article extracts from our Child-Care Services start-up guide, available at Entrepreneur Bookstore. The number of working parents, including single-parent families and two employed parents, is creating an increasing number of quality childcare needs. This need creates a huge entrepreneurial opportunity for those who love children and want to build a business that takes care of them. Childcare services range from small home operations to large commercial centers and can start investing as little as a few hundred dollars. You can stay very small, essentially just creating a job for yourself, or you can grow a significant business with potentially millions of dollars a year in revenue. You also have a huge amount of flexibility when it comes to the exact services you choose to offer. You can limit your customer base to children in certain age groups or adjust your opening hours to the needs of a specific market segment. You may not want to make a delivery between the center and your child's homes and/or schools. Maybe you can take the kids on a field trip. As an alternative to childcare, it is worth considering a business that focuses solely on ensuring the transport of children. Of course, the basic work you're going to do - taking care of someone else's children - takes on a huge responsibility and requires a serious commitment. When the children are under your care, you are responsible for their safety and well-being. You also play a key role in overall development, and it may be that someone will remember for the rest of their lives. Filling an important need is one of the biggest challenges facing American families today in caring for their children while parents work. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, only 13 percent of all families fit the traditional model of a husband as a wage earner and wife as a home-maker. In 61 percent of married couples, husbands and wives also work outside the home. Six out of 10 mothers of children under the age of 6 work, and women's participation in the labour market in working years continues to expand. As the number of working parents increases, so does the need for childcare. Another issue that affects childcare issues is the new 24-hour global market. Occupations with a high number of workers - such as caretaker, hospitality, customer service and technical support - are experiencing significant growth, and workers in these areas find obtaining quality childcare even more challenging than their peers from 9 to 5. For many working parents, there is not a single solution to their childcare needs. More than a third use several options, such as day care centers part of the time and friends, neighbors or relatives of other A recent study by the Urban Institute, a nonprofit political research organization, revealed that about 30 percent of working parents have two childcare measures, and another 8 percent use at least three. The study found that 65 percent of parents juggle more childcare measures using a combination of formal day care centers, Head Start programs, and babysitters for relatives and friends. Another 20 percent use two separate day care centers. Do you have what you need? What are the characteristics of a person who works well in a childcare center? Lois M., who started the first part of her six childcare center in Toledo, Ohio, in 1982, replied: A person should be energetic, business-minded, a knowledgeable leader, a knowledgeable leader, a pleasant personality, willing to take calculated risks, be a good role model, have strong financial resources, be consistent with staff expectations, and be consistent in providing the service. If you run a family childcare center, Brenda B. from Stockton, Illinois, adds: You have to really like kids. Janet H. of Exeter, Calif., agrees; says: A person who goes to their own childcare center should love children, a person with a high tolerance for stress, good insurance, and some leadership skills. The childcare business is easy to start in your home with just a few weeks of planning and a modest amount of start-up cash. The commercially located center takes a larger investment in time, energy and money. The size and type of business you choose depends on start-up resources and future goals. Many childcare providers are happy with a one-man operation in their home that creates a comfortable income while allowing them to do work they enjoy (and possibly even care for their own children). Others can start at home and eventually move to a commercial site as their business grows. Even others begin with commercial sites and either content on a site or plans to expand. Startup checklist When you complete startup efforts, use this checklist (and adapt it to your needs) to make sure that all bases are covered before opening the doors. Center type: Will it work in your home or commercial location? Licensing: What licenses should you have and from which agencies? What are the requirements, costs and lead times? Training and certification: What type of training and/or certification do you need? Market: What are the community's childcare needs? Location: Choose an appropriate and affordable website. Legal requirements: Check for zoning and other legal issues. Financial problems: Estimate startup costs and identify start-up funds Health and safety issues: Plan to prevent accidents and diseases and develop emergency procedures. Programs: Develop an appropriate schedule for children. Equipment: What's What you need to properly equip the center, where will you get it and how much will it cost? Insurance: What kind of cover do you need to adequately protect yourself and the children in care? Staff: If you plan to hire people, know the required staff-to-child ratio and develop human resources policies. Links: What social and professional resources are available to you? Target Market Prime candidates who need full-time childcare for parents of babies are 5 years old. Parents with children over 5 years of age are a good prospect for after-school care programs. Two-income families and single-parent households are the most likely market segments to be used in most income categories. Many government programs help low-income families pay for childcare to keep adults in the workforce. Within this very wide market is the narrower group of customers you will serve. Use market research to figure out who these people are and how to best attract them to your center. According to Lois M., in four of the six locations, the primary market is parents who are upper-income professionals; the other two centers serve a number of middle income families, as well as those that are supported by public funds. Janet H. says about half of her clientele consists of dual-income families, the other half are single mothers who receive government support since working through programs designed to bring them down to welfare. Market research aims to identify the market, find out where you are and develop a strategy to communicate with prospective customers in a way that convinces them to give their children to you. When Lois M. opened her first center, her demographic research showed that she was within a 5-mile radius of the site from 9,000 infants to 5 years old; half of the preschool children in the area were in some kind of day care because their mother (or both parents) worked; and the number of households in the area is expected to double within a decade. Within a five-mile radius, there are six childcare centers that served about 800 children. Brenda B.'s research wasn't that sophisticated. Living in a small town, she knows just about everyone and is well aware of the lack of childcare services. There is a great need for day care, he says. I go through times when I get up to five calls a week from parents in need of care and there's no room for them. I had families on my waiting list for two years. Types of services offered to you before you open your doors to your first child, you need to decide what services you provide and what policies you will control in the action. Simply saying that you will take care of the children is woefully inadequate. How many kids? How old is he? What hours? Are you going to give me food, or are you going to ask your parents? activities? What price and payment policies will you have? And the list goes on. The first step is to check the correct agencies to find out what is involved in the provision of each service. For example, each state has its own guidelines for the maximum number of children and the maximum number of children in the family childcare facility. States also have guidelines on how many carers should be required for commercial establishments in each age group. There will probably be other requirements and limitations, depending on the type of facility you are running. Decide what services to offer based on your own preferences and what market research says your community needs. Your choices are: full-time care on traditional weekdays After-school care is not traditional hours (very early in the morning, evenings, night care, weekdays and/or weekends) Drop-in or on-demand care, whether traditional or non-traditional hours of part-time care parents night out (weekend night care) Age-based care Delivery Startup costs For caring for their children can be enjoyable and rewarding, but if you take care of other people's children and accept compensation as well, then your children will be cared for in the business and will be treated accordingly. Even though you probably want to get into this business because you love children and not because you like to keep records, pay taxes and worry about staff, you have to do these tasks effectively if you're going to maintain a viable operation. The high rate of drop-out in the childcare business is largely driven by the fact that many carers are almost exclusively focused on caring for and caring for children and neglecting the financial and management side of their operations. But whether you target a small, family childcare center or build a chain of commercial venues, you need to address administrative and management issues if your business is going to survive. If you plan ahead, it won't be hard. Set up your financial records system from the start to provide your own home information to track profitability and manage your tax return. You may want to hire a consultant or an accountant who specializes in small businesses to help you first; this small investment can save considerable time and money in the long term. Expect to spend considerable time in management, marketing and administration. If you have employees, you have to train and supervise them. Although demand for childcare is high, parents will not be able to find it if they don't have market service. And keep up with administrative details - paying bills, buying stocks, meeting budgets and forecasts, meeting ongoing licensing requirements, maintenance of the facility, etc. If your goal is a sized commercial center, you are unlikely to spend much time actually caring for your children. Although M. spends a lot of time in his centers around the children, he has not been a carer for at least 10 years. I'm Me It was a very conscious decision when I started, he explains. I knew I could hire a secretary to cover the office and be a teacher in the classroom. Or maybe I'm in the office and I can hire the teacher. I decided it was better for me to have one in the office pick up the phone and so the tours because no one else was as invested in this business as I was. A secretary may cover up the motions and give out information, but the secretary won't convey the same passion I'm going to convey when I know I'm in charge of Friday night payroll. Initially, you can double as a caregiver as well as a director, but Lois adds you don't want to have a habit of doing this regularly or the program will suffer. Its six centres employ more than 100 full-time people and about 30 supplements. Location search If you're opening the center of a commercial website, you might want to find the facility near the target market. Some parents prefer the center near home; others can choose a centre close to their workplace. In the latter case, parents can spend more time with their children during the morning and evening commute, as well as the opportunity to spend time with them during the day, perhaps for lunch or special programs. Some site suggestions to consider include: The facility inside or near a residential area or near a school facility in a shopping mall where parents with children are likely to transfer sharing an establishment with other community organizations Office and planned light industrial parks with a slum of labor if you want to open a childcare center at home, before opening discuss your plans with family members and neighbors. Younger children may resent other children who come into your home and change their way of life. Older children - especially teenagers - need to be told what they are expected to do and what to expect as your business starts. Spouses don't fully understand the time commitment involved in this business, so talk about things in detail long before your first client enters You may find that your extended family and friends don't really understand what's involved in a professional childcare business, and you think that since you're at home during the day, you're not really working or you're just babysitting. Talk to your neighbors about the impact your business will have on them in terms of traffic (parents drop off and pick up their children) and noise (think about the decibel levels five or six children can generate while playing). Let them know what steps you will take to minimize irritation or discomfort and assure them that they are free to contact you with any problems or questions. Some family childcare center operators have certain rooms in their homes designated for business; others use their entire homes. Your decision is based on your state policies and personal preferences. Brenda B. has a playroom for the kids, but they're not limited to this area; He says he pretty much uses his whole house and his big, fenced-in garden for his business. Sherri A.'s house in Winter Park, Florida, has an official living room that serves as the primary childcare area. Operations to care for children can be enjoyable and rewarding, but if you take care of other people's children and accept compensation for it, you can care for your children in a business and you need to manage accordingly. Even though you probably want to get into this business because you love children and not because you like to keep records, pay taxes and worry about staff, you have to do these tasks effectively if you're going to maintain a viable operation. The high rate of drop-out in the childcare business is largely driven by the fact that many carers are almost exclusively focused on caring for and caring for children and neglecting the financial and management side of their operations. 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The one-time enrolment fee for half a week tuition hardly raises an eyebrow, but it compensates you for the cost on time, paperwork and special attention to each entrant's needs. Calculating how much of the fee for the space in the resort is based primarily on three variables: Labor and Materials (or Supplies) General Profit The fourth factor is rare for most businesses, but a significant childcare center is the limit that the number of children can accommodate. In most areas, if your business grows, you can only keep hiring employees to serve the growing number of customers. But childcare, state laws and practically limit the number of children you can accept, which is the cover of the income potential of your business. To combat this, operators of a successful childcare centre often open up more space in nearby areas to increase their customer base and income. Payment methods: You receive payments by check and cash, and you may also want to set up a merchant account to accept credit cards. For information about accepting credit cards, contact your bank or different credit card companies. Many childcare and transport providers find that automatically debiting parents' credit cards is the easiest way to make a payment. The automatic fee every month is the easiest way to make money, says Yvette B. There are discounted fees but it's worth it. Marketing in most parts of the United States, the demand for quality childcare is so high that marketing for your business will be relatively simple. In fact, many of the providers we talked to about this book - especially the homebased centers - do little or no marketing because they're creating strong reputations and waiting lists. But every business needs a marketing plan, and yours is no exception. All marketing materials must be professional and letter perfect. Consider hiring a graphic designer and/or professional writer to help with your marketing package. If you have children, you may be able to negotiate the fees barter. When designing your marketing plan, keep these questions in mind: Who are your potential customers? How many are there? Where are they? What are they currently doing for childcare? Can you offer them something they're not getting right now? How can you convince them to bring their children to you? Exactly what Offers? How does the What image would you like to project? The purpose of the marketing plan is to convey its existence and quality of service to prospective customers, ideally taking a multifaceted approach. The childcare center operators we talked about used a variety of marketing methods, from simple word-of-mouth to more sophisticated techniques. Smart Tip Ask new customers how they found out about you. Note the answers and the types of businesses they represent (how many children they might potentially refer to). This will let you know how well different marketing efforts work. You can then choose to increase certain programs and eliminate those that don't work. Resources Associations Consultants and other experts Robert S. Bernstein Vicki L. Helmick, CPA government agencies and related resources Publications

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