



Baby Sensory Case Study

Jo Urquhart has been running her Baby Sensory franchise in Crawley, Mid Sussex for seven years and is a high performing franchisee. We are delighted to share her WOW story so far.

What was your background prior to starting your Baby Sensory Franchise?

I was PE teacher in a secondary school and Head of Year 13 so I've gone from one end of the teaching spectrum to the other! I loved teaching but started to find it less and less rewarding when the politics started creeping in. Also, once having children found I had less and less time to give the job the time I thought it deserved and my priorities shifted from wanting to do a fantastic job at work to wanting to be the best mum I could.

Why did you choose Baby Sensory?

It really was a no brainer for me. I fell in love with the programme when I took my eldest to classes in 2013/14. Long story short, an opportunity came up to buy a franchise before I went back to work after my maternity leave ended with my eldest son and despite getting quite far down the line with the purchase that sadly fell through. I knew then, however, that this was something I was certain I wanted to do moving forwards. I had to go back to teaching for the meantime but then fast forward a few years and I returned to classes with my second son and reconnected with the Franchisor to let them know I was still keen. Then, to my delight, another opportunity came up to buy a local franchise in 2016/7 so I jumped at it. I had looked briefly at other franchises in the meantime, but none had the longstanding reputation as the BEST baby classes, and I also felt passionately about the value our programme has to parents having already experienced it twice myself. Purchasing a franchise that already had such a great reputation in the UK gave me confidence to take the plunge as I knew I'd have the support of Head Office behind me and would have a head start with marketing.

What do you enjoy most about running your business?

I love the flexibility of being able to work when I want and be able to grow the business at my own pace. I feel so lucky that since starting the business I've gone from running 7 classes 2 days a week to running 17 class 5 days a week. I'm currently only running one of the days in class myself and have 2 amazing class leaders who run the other days and do the majority of the birthday parties, weekend specials and Hello Baby programme. This now means I have an admin day at home and then 3 days with my toddler which I'm so grateful for.

Another thing I love is now being able to take on the role of a mentor and go out and visit other franchisees classes. We can learn so much from each other and it's been fantastic being able to see how others do things and hopefully offer some advice based on my own experiences too.

If you started your business again, what would you do differently?

Is it ok to say nothing?! I'm pleased I started slowly and gradually built up our offering when demand was there and have managed to balance this with bring up now 3 gorgeous boys.

What does a typical week look like for you?

My week normally starts in the garage! I hire a garage about 15 minutes from my house where I store all my kit so at some point over the weekend I'll go and pack the kit for my class leader to collect on Sunday evening. I do need to be organised with this and have already checked in advance if I need to order any more props for a lesson plan or bring over balloons or anything I store at home. Mondays I spend with my toddler, then Tuesdays I'm in classes all day, picking up the kit from my class leader on route. After classes on Tuesdays, I drop kit to my other class leader. Wednesday is my admin day when I'm child free, so I spend this planning, doing admin, sorting kit in the garage and prepping bits for the following week and normally get my nails done too! Thursday/Friday are also days with my toddler which I love. I tend to do admin in the evenings and reply to some emails/messages on the go where I can.

What are the biggest challenges you have faced and how have you overcome them?

For me personally the biggest challenge is balancing the admin side with being a mum and being present for my boys. I'm a single mum now so it can be a juggle and I do try to not spend every evening working. This will get a lot easier when my youngest starts school but as we run classes every day of the week, I do get a lot of messages/emails/enquiries every day that often need dealing with quickly.

How has working with your Franchisor and the wider Wow network helped you in your business?

It's nice to know you have a network of support behind you and our online community is great when you have questions/queries about anything. We also have a Whatsapp group for our region which is great for support and to share ideas. It's nice to see each



other socially too and meet with people who know how important it is to buy exactly the right sort of bubble mix and have the invaluable skills of 'half-tying' a balloon! The company (WOW) also organises ongoing training and networking opportunities which is great for upskilling and keeping up with the market. It's also nice to know that so much is being done behind the scenes to support your business - being kept up to date with the latest research, current trends, marketing advice etc is brilliant as it's something you don't then need to do yourself!

What skills and characteristics are important to be a successful Baby Sensory franchisee?

I think passion is the most important. In addition to this you need to be fun, well organised, driven, have great interpersonal/communication skills and hold a strong belief that the classes you are providing are often absolutely invaluable to your customers.

What are your plans for future growth?

My current focus is to keep growing my numbers. I've recently crossed the VAT threshold, which although feels like an amazing achievement in that I'm successful financially, it also means I need to see a bigger growth in income in order to make the same profit. Longer term (once my youngest is at school) I'm considering taking on Toddler Sense too or perhaps another neighbouring region.

Finally, what advice would you give to someone interested in establishing their own Baby Sensory franchise?

I cannot stress strongly enough how amazing this journey has been for me, my work/life balance and financial security. Firstly, I would say do take the plunge, owning my own business has been a game changer and I just love the flexibility that comes with it.

I'd advise starting slowly to give you time to find your feet. I found the first year the hardest as it takes time to learn/plan each class but once you've done it all once through it gets so much easier and you can spend more time focussing on growth/marketing etc depending on how you want your business to look in the future.

Jo Urghart, Baby Sensory, Crawley