

Work can be child's play

by Linda Whitney

THERE are many franchises that involve working with children, and experience in nurseries, schools, childcare or as a parent could be the ideal qualification to get started.

'Working with children can be hugely fulfilling, and you can run a successful business while making a real difference to your community,' says Nigel Toplis of ComputerXplorers, where franchisees teach computer skills to children aged three to 13.

You do not need experience as a teacher or with IT, because training is provided in the package, which costs £24,500.

When working with children, expect to have your background checked and to do the same for any staff you take on. Franchisors can help here.

Amanda Coxen, of childcare recruitment franchise Tinies, says: 'Quite rightly, the checks on people who want to work with children are far more rigid than in any other industry. Central office back-up for our franchisees includes a legal department and a centralised system for carrying out Criminal Records Bureau checks.'

Tinies franchisees offer nannies and maternity nurses to parents, and childcare workers to nurseries. The start-up cost is from £17,000.

Many franchises involving children are aimed at parents, and they can be fitted around a family.

Talking Tots, for instance, involves running sessions to

develop pre-literacy and communication skills to prepare children for formal school.

'You usually work in term-time only, though you can work in holidays, too,' says Tracey Park, one of the paediatric speech and language therapists who set up Talking Tots.

They are looking for people used to dealing with children who are passionate about child development and communication. Full training and lesson plans are included in the set-up fee of £7,700.

Franchisees with Playtime Activity Centre can even take their children to work — and the children will love it.

Playtime Activity Centre franchisees run a three-storey softplay centre offering children all-weather play, plus snacks and drinks. Parents can work, read magazines and surf the net while keeping an eye on their children.

'Being a parent helps because you understand what children want,' says Victoria Robson of Playtime Activity Centre. It's a full-time franchise, and you need at least £35,000 to get started with all the equipment and fitting out.

■ *ComputerXplorers 01530 513 308; Tinies 020 7384 0322; Talking Tots 01253 735 355; Playtime Activity Centre 0845 013 8249.*



■ **WHEN** you sign up to a franchise you usually commit yourself to providing specific standards of service, so make sure you know what these are. 'Standards might include the time taken to respond to customer inquiries, the method of dealing with customer complaints, dress codes and health and safety regulations,' says Clive Sawyer, of the Business Options franchise consultancy. At Domino's Pizza, franchisees are provided with service level agreements which set out the

standard of service and support which the brand agrees to deliver. Nick Faheem (pictured), from Leicester, who owns five Domino's stores, says: 'The service level agreement sets standards for service for customers and franchisees. 'For instance, we aim to get a customer's order out of the door within 15 minutes of receiving it, and we have been running at an average of 12-13 minutes, so, almost all the time, we are meeting it.' Andy Hirst, of Domino's, says: 'With a national brand it's important that each franchisee

adheres to these standards, as you are only as good as your weakest franchisee.' Total investment is £240,000. Richard Harrison, of the £15,000 garden services franchise Jim's Mowing, says it aims for franchisees to contact customers within two hours of them calling its central office. 'But as the data entered on to the computer is relayed within seconds to the franchisee, clients often find their "Local Jim" is on the phone within minutes.' ■ *Domino's 01908 580 000, Jim's Mowing 0845 009 5467.*