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Calm down
& slim down

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Babies and business

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fires to warm it" - Lucy Larcom

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June 2007 AUS \$6.95 NZ \$9.90* (inc.GST)



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Melanie Grant shows off one of her designs from the Snugglebum sleepwear range.



The baby boomers

For a growing number of people, parenthood is providing the ideal inspiration for launching their own business. Rachel Davis meets three such enterprising parents.

"After I had my first daughter, that was it – I had my business. I realised there was a market opportunity in quality children's sleepwear; what was on offer in Australia wasn't what I wanted to put my children in to wear to bed" – Melanie Grant



THE EXPERIENCE OF parenting offers daily challenges. Working parents often struggle to balance their work and home lives, the demands of their employers often conflicting with the needs of their family. As familial responsibilities increase, many working parents find their career stagnating as they prioritise extra time with their family. The solution for an increasing number of Australians is to open their own business, often choosing a home-based office to afford them more flexibility. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics there are an estimated 1,269,000 small businesses operating in Australia. About 65 per cent of small businesses are based at home and up to half of these are owned and operated by parents with children still living at home.

Most small business operators are driven by a desire to be their own boss and generate income on their own terms. Deciding on the right business opportunity is the difficult part – finding an unexplored niche in today's saturated economy is an exhausting process of market research. For an inspired few, their own experiences and personal drive have presented them with a business idea – they have encountered a problem and fixed it by creating the solution. For these three entrepreneurs, becoming a parent was the catalyst to a radical change in their career goals; their children and the experience of raising them defined the nature of their business enterprises.

Melanie Grant, owner, Snugglebum

With a background in financial services and marketing, Melanie Grant had always dreamed of opening her own business, but didn't hit upon the perfect idea until after the birth of her first child. "I had been looking for a business opportunity for years, but after I had my first daughter, that was it – I had my business. I realised there was a market opportunity in quality children's sleepwear; what was on offer in Australia wasn't what I wanted to put my children in to wear to bed." Melanie took her inspiration from European manufacturers and Snugglebum sleepwear was born. "I wanted to design children's sleepwear using pure fibres that fitted the children snugly so they were kept warm in bed. The benefits as a parent were obvious to me – you don't need to worry about your child waking up because he or she has thrown the blankets off." After months of research, Snugglebum launched its all-in-one and two-piece sleepwear in

Quote of the day

"If necessity is the mother of invention, then resourcefulness is the father" – Beulah Henry

the Australian market and became the first children's sleepwear company to use a full-length zipper rather than traditional press studs. "Our range was a result of what was lacking in the branded sleepwear you could buy on the high street – it doesn't shrink and is fade resistant. The zipper was a must for me; press studs are fiddly and take away precious sleeping time. I didn't realise how important these qualities were until I had my own children." Snugglum is now attracting interest from Europe, Asia and the US. "Our garments have attracted parents who, like myself, wanted better quality for their money and even the chance to pass a garment down to siblings – something that is impossible to do with most store-bought sleepwear, which has a short life span."

Melanie manages Snugglum on a daily basis but everyone in her family is involved. She looks to her husband, Chris, a professional AFL player, for advice on colour and design and always runs her ideas past her daughters, Isabella and Sascha. "My husband has a great eye for design and the children give the business a fresh approach. They are the target audience, so I always listen. Mostly they love what we produce, but on occasion tell me they don't like something – I really value their opinions."

Melanie splits her time between the office and caring for her young children and admits it has been a lesson in time management. To balance her work and home life, she sometimes resorts to working at night. "When you are a parent of small children and run your own business you constantly juggle priorities and have to be prepared to work during non-office hours so you can meet your family commitments. Chris and I work hard at balancing everything and get it right most of the time. Running my own business hasn't created a huge conflict – family comes first."

Christopher Mitchell, inventor, Lullabub cot rocker

Sleep deprivation was the spark behind Christopher Mitchell's idea for the Lullabub, the world's first remote-controlled cot-rocking device.

Six months after giving birth to their daughter, Grace, Sarah Mitchell was diagnosed with postnatal depression. "My wife had a vacant look in her eyes; she couldn't sleep or eat and suffered terrible mood swings." For Christopher, the diagnosis was a relief: "We had an explanation for the changes in Sarah's behaviour and, while it took a two-and-a-half month stay in hospital to bring her back, life wasn't as scary with the diagnosis." Based on Queensland's Gold Coast, Sarah and Christopher went on to have two more children, Charlotte and Olivia. Sarah experienced postnatal depression following both births, but was able to receive professional care. Christopher

experienced first-hand the dangers of sleep deprivation during this time and remembers one night holding his crying baby in his arms. "There is a point at which you can lose control. I didn't, but there are many parents out there who, through tiredness, may have behaved in ways they are ashamed of."

Christopher and his wife endured a harrowing period, but it led to a pivotal change in his career. "It was early one morning and I was rocking our second baby in my arms, watching car racing on TV, when I pretended to be a car and put my baby on my lap. I was tired and willing to try anything. With the rapid and jerky motion I created, I noticed my little girl going to sleep," he recalls. Christopher believed he had found a way to help ease the anxiety caused by sleepless nights. His idea was to provide a safe motion, via rockers on the base of cot legs, to help

"My own personal experiences with sleep deprivation will hopefully help other stressed-out parents who need a break"
– Christopher Mitchell

soothe restless and tired babies to sleep. Christopher resigned from his job as a carpenter to begin the lengthy research and development of his revolutionary product – the Lullabub cot rocker, which mimics the soothing motion of a car. With his insight into the problems many new parents face, Christopher designed the Lullabub to provide a safe environment for children that allows parents to take some time out, sleep or even work.

The process awoke the crusader in Christopher: the Lullabub website, www.lullabub.com, offers parents advice and information on the dangers of sleep deprivation and shaken baby syndrome, and Christopher believes his cot rocker will help prevent unnecessary tragedies. "My own experiences with sleep deprivation will hopefully help other stressed-out parents who need a break," he says. In 2006, Christopher's product won the Australian Design Award and is now receiving international attention. Testament to his innovation, the Lullabub was showcased on the ABC Television show 'The New Inventors' in March this year and was selected as the best invention winner for that episode, as well as receiving the People's Choice vote.

Since the birth of his children Christopher has been actively involved in their care and now runs a business, Babyhugs, from a home office. With his wife fully occupied looking after their three young children, he's on hand to help whenever needed.