

When childcare comes to you

Nurseries, childminders... but what are your options when you don't work nine to five? **JENNIFER SCOTT** meets a local mum whose business provides a flexible 'out of hours' service that's ideal for shift-working parents



Flexible Childcare in Your Home



'WEIRD HOURS': Student nurse Lisa Rachael with daughters Lucy and Emma uses an at home child care service C200607AJL3-2

LIKE hundreds of mums across the city, Lisa Rachael, from Woodthorpe, faces an early morning scramble to get out of the house. A student nurse with what she describes as "weird working hours", she often has to be out of the door by 7am to catch a bus to her studies in Derby.

But while many mums also face the headache of chivvying their sleepy-eyed children off to a childminder's or a relative's house before school, Lisa can rest assured that her daughters, Emma, nine, and Lucy, seven, have been left in capable hands.

For as Lisa bolts out of the door, a childcarer from Nottingham company @HomeChildcare is arriving at the house to take charge of the children's morning routine, oversee breakfast and walk them to school.

In the evening, when Lisa returns from her busy day – often at some point between 6pm and 8pm – she will find her home in harmonious order with the children collected from school, their homework done and their evening meal on the table, courtesy of their carer, Asher Horton.

"The girls *adore* Asher," says Lisa. "It's got to the stage where – even on my days off – they want me to go to work. I'm like, 'Thank you *very* much!'"

Asher is a second year Nottingham Trent student who wants to move into teaching after completing her degree.

Working as an home childcarer is ideal experience for her and she finds the childcare work fits in easily around her lectures.

Emma and Lucy, meanwhile, see her almost as a big sister. She remembers their birthdays, plays games and bakes fairy cakes with them until Lisa gets home.

"It's like having a nanny," says Lisa. "I was going to try to get a nanny but because I'm on a very limited income, it's difficult. And it's nice not to have anyone actually *living* in your home because you get to keep your privacy."

Lisa also considered the childminder option but felt it lacked the flexibility she was seeking.

"My neighbour used to babysit for us, but I felt terrible getting the girls up so early to take them around to her house," she says.

"It's so much easier having somebody come to you in your own home.

"It's the perfect arrangement. You feel safe and you know your children are safe."

The idea for @HomeChildcare was dreamed up by Yvette Oliver-Mighten, from Mapperley Park.

Herself a mum of three, Yvette moved to Nottingham from London with her husband, Barrington, and suddenly found that, without her family close at hand, looking after three young children could be a struggle.

"I wanted someone who could be an extra pair of hands to help me with my children," she explains.

A former English teacher who used to teach Shakespeare in an inner-city London secondary school, Yvette left the profession four years ago to go into childcare.

Initially she considered setting up a nursery but then, prompted by her own experiences, realised there was a gap in the market for a more flexible, home-based approach.

She founded @HomeChildcare two years ago and can now draw on a pool of 40 carers,

based all over Notts, to assist the 32 families on her books, plus a further 11 who require her services on an ad hoc basis.

Carers undergo a vetting procedure including an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau disclosure, face-to-face interviews and written references before taking an in-house induction course and first-aid training.



About your flexible child care, do you have any ex-S.A.S. personnel on your books?

They come from a range of backgrounds, including qualified nursery staff, grannies with that all-important life experience and students.

Each time she takes on a new family, Yvette goes and meets them and discusses their childcare needs.

She then matches them to carers whom she believes will best meet those needs.

"I don't understand why there's such a shortage of flexible childcare in this country," she says.



"It's true the logistics are quite complex. However, I think there's a real need for it."

Indeed, a recent Government report by the Daycare Trust recommends childcare settings such as nurseries should open later for parents who need additional childcare.

"Extended opening hours is one solution but, generally, parents don't want their children to be left in nurseries or after-school clubs for long days, especially in the evenings when children want the relaxed environment of their own home," says Yvette.

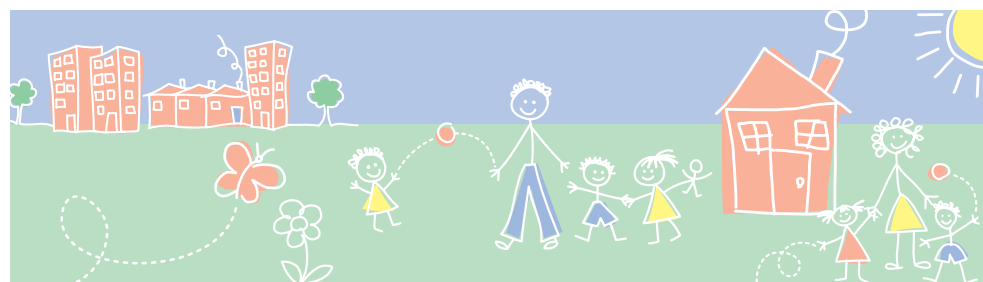
"It's childcare for short hours people are interested in. 'There's this impression families need full-time childcare but that's not true. What they want is childcare that's tailored to their needs.'"

@HomeChildcare is due to register its childcarers on the Sure Start Approval Scheme, which will mean low-income families will be able to put tax credits towards the service.

"I'm very excited about that. When I set up, I was adamant I didn't want to become a nanny agency," says Yvette.

"The aim is to break down some of the barriers to home-based childcare for low and middle income families."

● For more information, call 0845 0760 042 or log on to www.athomechildcare.co.uk.



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