



Rachel Carrell, founder of Koru Kids; and, inset, Penny Streeter, once housed in homeless accommodation, is now on The Sunday Times Rich List

'Childcare doesn't really reflect how we live now'

Returning to work after her first child: "I discovered the childcare system was inadequate in so many ways," she says.

"It's incredibly expensive but that's not the end of it – it's inconvenient, it's patchy, it doesn't really reflect how we live now."

Carrell raised £3.5 million for her start-up, pitching to investors while pregnant with her second child, and again after his birth.

Her husband took two months' Shared Parental Leave, allowing him to go with her to meetings. He would stay with the baby in City firm foyers while she pitched in the boardroom.

"The reality is having small children and a business is hard work," says Carrell.

Like many female entrepreneurs, Carrell says social media has proved a vital source of business

inspiration and support. Social intelligence insights conducted by social intelligence agency Storyful support this. The Storyful report, commissioned by Dell last month, found that online communities were essential for entrepreneur mothers, who tend to relate strongly to one another's struggles. The insight also found that digital marketing skills were vital for mothers who, unsurprisingly, prized the flexibility of social media very highly.

Where you live and work can have a big impact on how easy it is to juggle work with other caring responsibilities.

The Dell Women's Entrepreneur Network (DWEN) researched 17 cities worldwide and discovered London is ahead of most in championing upward mobility for female entrepreneurs.

Helpful measures include flexible 52-week statutory maternity leave and development programs for women entrepreneurs tailored to new mothers. But there

is still a way to go. "With more women than men caring for children in London, challenges in achieving a successful work-life balance are still a significant barrier to female entrepreneurship," says DWEN's global director, Ingrid Devin.

"Too often, women are shut out from opportunities simply due to bias – whether unconscious or not. Women entrepreneurs have a powerful voice and our network encourages them to take an active role, meet with key decision makers, share research and turn insights into action."

Find out more at dwen.com



whatever the date. "I remember on Christmas Day helping my kids unwrap presents then saying, 'Right, I'll try to be back in two hours'.

"If you are the primary carer while founding a company, how on earth do you afford childcare? You need to plough every penny into the business," she says. Although she describes "constantly feeling guilty", Streeter says that being her own boss means the payback for the family is much greater. "In terms of role models, of being in charge of your own destiny. In some ways it can give you greater flexibility."

Even so, as she has built A24 Group into a multimillion pound company with more than 300 employees, the juggling has not become easier. "It may seem that the more successful you are, the more you can pull back, but actually it's the reverse," says Streeter, who ranked 585 in the most recent The Sunday Times Rich List.

Her experience tallies with findings from the government-backed Alison Rose Review of Female Entrepreneurship published last year, which pinpoints that women are twice as likely as men to mention family responsibilities as a barrier to starting a business. "Combining unpaid care work with the time, energy and finance needed to start a business can be a real challenge for many women," notes Sam Smethers, chief executive of the Fawcett Society, which campaigns for gender equality at work, home and in public life. "For women with young children, access to affordable childcare is key," she believes.

"We need to redesign our parental leave system to better respond to the needs of the growing proportion of the female labour force who are self-employed."

With her afterschool nanny and nanny-sharing company Koru Kids, Rachel Carrell set out to build a better childcare system.

KEEP IT IN THE FAMILY

Starting a business while raising small children is a real challenge – as these women's inspiring stories show

Entrepreneur Penny Streeter is adept at overcoming challenges. In 1989 she set up a recruitment firm, which failed, and soon after she got divorced – while pregnant with her third child. Struggling financially and with responsibilities as a single mother, Streeter and her children ended up in accommodation for the homeless. They stayed there for two years.

The experience did not dampen her determination. In 1996 she founded A24 Group – then called Ambition – a company that specialises in providing healthcare professionals around the clock. Streeter answered work calls while her competitors slept. Somehow she juggled long working hours with looking after three children.

Streeter worked weekends as a children's party entertainer to pay her fledgling company's bills. In Ambition's early days she personally drove nurses to shifts,



Enterprise Nation is a UK-wide network of small businesses. Founder Emma Jones suggests:

- **Multi-task:** Practise for a client pitch while cleaning the car, or listen to relevant business podcasts during your commute to work.

- **Base the business at home:** It not only helps keep costs under control, it also means entrepreneurs can care for the business and family from a single location.

- **Access support at a time to suit you:** Platforms such as Enterprise Nation offer 24/7 online support, and host events at

times to suit parents and carers, with day, night and weekend options.

- **Get the family involved:** Doing a one-day pop-up or market stall? Take the kids and give them experience of frontline retail and customer service. It also means you spend time together.

Smarter ways to juggle home and business success

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