

Media: The Australian
Title: Mums give birth to a business
Date: 27/4/08
Circulation: 135,000



MUMS GIVE BIRTH TO A BUSINESS

The Body Shop is giving young mothers a head start in business,

writes Jo Studdert

IT'S hard enough to start a business when you've never done it before, but imagine how difficult it is for an untrained young mother.

Well, there are a growing number of young mums out there setting up businesses as a result of help from The Body Shop and the federal Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST).

American Express and the Red Cross have also recently joined the program.

It works like this. Advertisements are placed in local papers offering places on the course, and all an applicant needs to be is a mother under 25 with a keen desire to run a business, says program manager Paula Cunniffe.

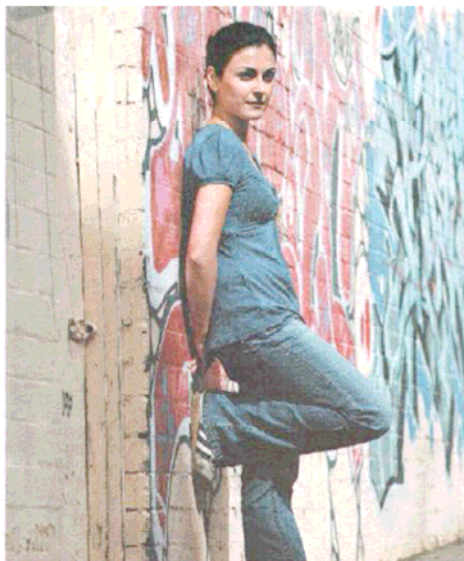
Over several months, The Body Shop's Business Babes program puts mothers through 11 days of

business training at premises with child care and creche facilities.

The women do not have to have a particular business in mind but, Cunniffe says, they need to have a passion for business itself.

The women can apply to the department for small grants to cover initial outlays and materials. Once they have a business plan, and have begun to establish their business, they can apply for interest-free micro-loans of up to \$5000 from American Express.

The workshops introduce business principles, planning, budgeting, taxation, marketing and networking. Basically the course builds on mothering skills which can all be translated into business: commitment, organisation, creativity, perseverance, communication, flexibility, long-term goals and generosity.



Clean break: Melisa Bentaberry has set up a soap business. Picture: Shanne Morris

where a first group is in training; and two courses have been completed in Brisbane. Most courses involve about eight women.

"It is fantastic," Cunniffe says. "A lot of these women had been doing it pretty hard, but this gives them a real life and a way to support their children.

"Many say they felt very poorly judged as young mums, but find that after the program they get treated with respect as business people.

"It also gives them a fantastic network, both personally and for their businesses," Cunniffe says.

Melisa Bentaberry is one of the graduates of the first Melbourne course and she is in the process of setting up a business making natural soaps.

She has worked in various jobs but was interested in nursing and medical matters.

A series of personal blows, unemployment, a child with chronic sleeping problems and the departure of her partner left her in dire straits.

"I had time to think about what I wanted to do and increasingly I wanted it to be something connected with organic, natural healing.

"I had suffered badly from eczema and needed special soaps and shampoos for my skin. It seemed a natural development to begin making them myself. But I also got interested in the healing power certain plants have, in their scents and essential oils and wanted to combine those with the soaps.

"I was ready to make the commitment to setting up my own business but I had no money, no credit rating, and knew I'd *never* get a loan.

"And that's when I saw the ad for Business Babes. Now, I am making my own hand-made soaps and beginning to establish a business, Untoxcity, which I can run from home."

Her plan is to make soaps that address issues connected with the seven chakras of complementary medicine. "making soaps that counter the imbalances we create in our bodies by our lifestyles", she says.

During the course, mothers draw up a business plan and hear from visiting experts who give advice and help and who remain available to the women for subsequent advice and mentoring.

The women research manufacturers and suppliers, types of marketing, bookkeeping, tax records and financing methods.

The program pays for the registration of each business name and now, after one year, there are eight graduates running a business.

Will Business Babes continue?

"We will keep running the program for as long as we can fund it," Cunniffe says, and notes that DEST is very happy with it.

One can hope, therefore, that Business Babes will be around for a while yet.

The idea came from The Body Shop's social inventions manager, Alex McDonald, who had been involved in the company's campaign against violence towards women. This started him thinking about what else could be done to help women in difficult situations. And so the idea was born.

The Body Shop applied to DEST for an Enterprise Development for the 21st Century grant and was offered funding for three years. The first group began training in early 2006.

At present, the program is available in Melbourne, where two groups have completed training and started businesses; another course has begun in Sydney,