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Picture this - a baby business

BY DENISE DEASON

FOR Point Cook mum Gemma Higgins-Sears, getting involved with an innovative program called *Bizness Babes* has enabled her to set up her own business.

The 26-year-old was recently awarded a \$5000 interest-free loan which she used to establish Iris Creations Photography, specialising in maternity and newborn pictures.

It's a dream come true for the young mum of 20-month-old Emerson – who has another baby on the way.

Before joining *Bizness Babes*, Mrs Higgins-Sears was picking up some photographic work at live music events and night gigs – a lifestyle she felt couldn't be sustained with a young family.

She wanted to be a stay-at-home mother but also contribute financially to the household she shares with her auto technician husband, Garrison.

Bizness Babes, a partnership between the *Body Shop*, the

American Express Foundation and the Australian Red Cross, provided the answer.

The free program helps empower women from disadvantaged backgrounds by providing the skills needed to establish a working business of their own.

"I'm now running a very successful business from my home," Mrs Higgins-Sears said.

"I've been able to spend time with my son while not having to worry about nine-to-five hours, Monday to Friday.

"I love what I do – portraits of pregnant women and then the newborn babies."

Mrs Higgins-Sears also gives back to the community in a heart-wrenching area.

As a member of the Australian Charity of Child Photographers, she donates her time and skills to provide lasting memories for families suffering the experience of a premature, stillborn or terminally ill child.

"Years ago, the approach was to take a stillborn baby away, without the mother even seeing

it, and telling the mother to get pregnant again straight away," she said.

"But it's been proven that spending time with their stillborn baby will help the parents through the grieving process.

"I go to the hospital and take a photograph of them with the baby.

"Not many people are able to do this work, but I feel very privileged I can help a family with this service."

Mrs Higgins-Sears admits it's very difficult to do.

"It's extremely emotional," she said.

"I come home, stick on the iPod, listen to music and sit in a little bubble for a while.

"My son also gets very big cuddles. But I keep thinking I'm not the family who's suffering.

"It's a shame the service is required. It would be wonderful if every child was born healthy and survived, but these things do happen."

Bizness Babes provides women with training, mentoring

and the confidence to shape their business ideas and get them off the ground.

Mrs Higgins-Sears used her interest-free loan to buy a professional camera.

"What I loved most about *Bizness Babes* was I was surrounded by similar-minded women, many of them young mothers driven to set up their own business," she said.

"It was an inspiring environment to be in.

"I'd always been passionate about children and had a longing to focus my photography work in this area.

"I also wanted to build a business that offered something different and set me apart from other photographers.

"At the time, I was pregnant with Emerson and feeling bored and lonely.

"I had nobody in a similar situation to bounce ideas and questions off.

"That's when I stumbled across *Bizness Babes*."



Empowered ... For Gemma Higgins-Sears, her photographic work is a dream come true.

Picture: LEN WILLIAMS