

It's a fact that many of us are working longer hours. The bags under our eyes tell us that all work and no play isn't doing any of us much good.

Our playtime is cut even further by all the extra, unpaid work we do at home. According to Phil Ruthven, chairman of the research and business information company IBISWorld, the average household spends the equivalent of \$39,150 a year (or 29 hours a week) doing unpaid work around the home. This includes preparing meals, gardening, shopping, transporting the kids to and from sport, laundry, pet care and home maintenance.

Shocking isn't it, but there's help at hand, though of course there's a cost. Whether it be pool care, dog walking or personal shopping, Australians are starting to see the

benefits of outsourcing domestic duties.

Ruthven says: "Currently the personal (household) services industry is worth around \$46 billion and is growing. By comparison the Forestry

and Agriculture sector is worth \$34 billion (including those old staples like wool and wheat). This emerging sector employs over 720,000 and contributes about 3% to our GDP.

"The key drivers of this relatively new industry are the cash-rich/time-poor double-income households. These people can't see the point of working two jobs between them and then coming home to two more jobs! So, we are seeing more household activities being outsourced. They include meals, child minding, house cleaning, lawns, gardens & pools, car washing, tutoring and much more. Not only is this trend restoring disappearing leisure time, it is also creating new jobs."

Driving the personal services industry forward are entrepreneurs with new ideas and methods of tackling household chores and activities in more efficient ways.

One such entrepreneur is Dena Blackman, the founder and CEO of Dial an Angel, one of Australia's leading home and family care management services with 12 offices across Australia. It employs more than 10,000 casual workers and services around 30,000 clients. Dial an Angel was launched in March 1967, a

couple of months after the birth of Dena's third daughter, Dannielle Robertson, who is now a director and spokesperson. "Not long after I was born Dena became very ill and the doctor advised that she return to hospital," Robertson says. "She refused, saying that she couldn't afford to leave her three young children and her husband in the lurch." Dena stayed at home and rested as much as she could. During this time the idea for Dial an Angel came to her.

"Dena realised that there were probably thousands of mums like her who could do with a helping hand after the birth of a child," says Robertson. "So after discussing

Help around the house



Carol Posener of Get Organised

SHARON HICKER/POLAR ART

the idea with her husband, she wrote her business plan on some butchers paper and went to her bank manager for a loan."

After much deliberation Dena finally got her money and kicked off Dial an Angel, which over the past 35 years has broadened its services from postnatal support to an array of family and homecare services.

"Our most frequent requests from clients involve finding cleaners, gardeners, nannies and housekeepers; paying the bills, filling the fridge with food; managing dinner parties and picking up the dry cleaning. But we've also had plenty of unusual assignments. One client asked us to find him a pet snake, whilst another guy needed us to mind his unhatched ostrich eggs while he was overseas. My personal favourite was finding one elderly lady a dance partner."

New business opportunities spring up all the time, which Robertson attributes

to the increasing numbers of double-income and single-parent families who are working longer hours. Robertson says: "This has resulted in the growth of personal services paid for by big companies. Corporates want to do everything they can to keep good employees happy. So, as part of their salary packages, they are offering home services to reduce the hours they spend on domestic work." But Robertson cautions that if you think the personal services business sounds like easy money – think again. "First up, there is plenty of red tape you need to navigate such as the GST, workers compensation and privacy laws. Add to this

skyrocketing premiums on public liability and professional indemnity insurance and making a profit in this business is becoming increasingly harder."

Nevertheless, it remains a simple idea that can lead to a very successful business. In Sydney, Manly-based Carol Posener set up Get Organised, a company that comes to your home and rearranges cluttered kitchens, lounge and dining rooms, bedrooms, home offices and even the garage.

"Many clients find they don't have enough time to organise their homes properly," says Posener. "Take the kitchen for example. Groceries are stored in the wrong place, people don't have the right cooking utensils to prepare basic meals, the fridge is empty and there's unpaid bills and other clutter lying all over the place."

"Without doubt, home clutter is a big issue for busy people and is a major source of stress. But what do most people tend to do about it? They let it build up and up rather than doing something about it."

Posener worked as a money market dealer until the 1987 stockmarket crash. She then went overseas and when she returned worked as a secretary and personal assistant. "I saw a lot of very busy professionals who just didn't have time to get their personal and home life organised," she says. "I really enjoyed organising things and decided that it seemed like there was a gap in the market for a domestic organisation business."

"I decided that I would test my assumptions about the market, and paid for an advertisement in my local paper, promoting myself as a personal organiser. I spent a couple of hundred dollars on printing up 500 flyers that I distributed throughout the local area. I bought a computer (\$2,500) and a label machine (\$400). All up, it cost me less than \$4,000 and I was ready to go."

She soon had three or four regular clients. She now has hundreds of clients. When she started back in 1993, Posener charged around \$25 per hour for her services. She now charges \$50 an hour for a minimum four hours. With Get Organised Domestic so successful, she recently launched Get Organised Corporate.

"Whether you're organising an office or a home, the principles are the same," says Posener.

"I have also started finding cleaners, maintenance people, window cleaners and caterers for my clients as well. Some clients also ask me to do the odd bit of personal shopping for them, although most people still like doing their own shopping."

"I call myself a professional organiser. It's huge in the States where there is actually an Association of Domestic Organisers."

Without a doubt, the personal services industry offers great prospects for small businesses. As Phil Ruthven says, we have touched only the tip of the iceberg.

Don't do it yourself

- Australians complete on average around 29 hours of unpaid work per week.
- The personal services industry is growing as more cash-rich/time-poor professionals outsource their domestic chores.
- Simple ideas can develop into great business opportunities.
- Low start-up costs are typical of personal services business.
- You don't need a degree or previous experience to be successful.
- You need a high level of commitment to customer service.



A business opportunity has opened for those willing to take over domestic chores, as ANTHONY O'BRIEN reports.