

By the numbers

According to Statistics Canada, there are more than 70 small businesses for every 1,000 people across the country. **NEWS CANADA**

Software saves time

Accounting software can print cheques, create invoices, track expenses and set due-date reminders to keep track of money coming in and out. A survey of small business owners showed 80 per cent of users save 10 hours a month by using software. **NEWS CANADA**

Small Business

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Maternity leave 'non-existent' for owners

Tricia Mumby, 35, one of four co-owners of Hamilton-based Mabel's Labels (mabel.ca), fit her maternity leave into exactly 10 days — the time between when she gave birth, and when one of her other co-partners did. "I got the call — she had her baby, and my mat leave was over!"

Welcome to the world of the "non-existent" maternity leave for small business owners, who aren't eligible for benefits themselves, and can't often take leave, since they can neither afford to be without their own salary or let the business slide. However, they're obliged to work around staff leaves and keep their jobs open for their return, no matter how key those positions are to the company's success.

Lee-Anne Arkell, founder of Peekaboo Child Care Centres (peekabookid.com), which has 17 owner-operated and franchised facilities in southern Ontario, knows the challenges of losing staff to maternity leave.

Arkell founded the operation in 1999 because she had difficulty finding childcare so she could return to her job at Honeywell after her first child was born in 1997.

She now employs more than 500 people, 90 per cent of whom are under 30. All but five are female.

Arkell, who had her second child after she founded the company — "I had her on a Saturday and went back to work on the Tuesday," she says — is feeling the stress of maternity leaves, mostly in her management team.

"Knowing in the future



Small business owners aren't eligible for income replacement benefits while on maternity leave, so they return to work almost immediately after the birth of their child.

we would have managers on leave, and knowing it would only get worse," the company created assistant supervisor positions at every centre, Arkell said.

"We do a lot of training so they're ready to take

over for the year while my supervisors are on mat leave."

And because so many staff aren't ready to come back after one year, Peekaboo will hold their jobs for a second year, to encour-

age them to come back when they're ready, rather than to go somewhere else down the road. Otherwise, all the "work you've put into training staff is gone," says Arkell.

That said, small business owners could benefit from government programming to assist in staff training, she says. "There's nothing to help people get training for management staff."

Government assistance for small businesses whose staff are on maternity, sick, or elder care leave is something the Canadian Federation of Independent Business has been demanding for years, says the group's president, Catherine Swift.

"Everyone supports people being able to take care of their babies, but can't you give some relief somewhere else?" she says she's asked Ottawa.

"Help them bring someone else in for a year, or give them a holiday on paying Employment Insurance premiums. Show an olive branch," she's urged.

"So far," she says, "there's been nothing, of course."

The biggest challenge small businesses have around maternity leave, she says, is that they have fewer staff to fill in when others are on leave.

Women who are operating small businesses, like Mumby and Arkell, aren't eligible, Swift notes.

"There's no such thing as a mat leave when it's a small business and you're so involved in management," says Mumby.

"A small business is another baby," she says. "You don't want to miss its first years any more than your child's." **METRO NEWS SERVICES**