

Find your perfect childcare with Koru Kids

We spoke to Rachel Carrell, Founder and CEO of Koru Kids about being selected to join Tech Nation's Future Fifty programme, founder life and plans for the future.

Temps de lecture : minute

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You have recently been selected to the Tech Nation's Future Fifty programme. What are your expectations and how does it feel to be identified as a future unicorn?

Going to 10 Downing St for the kick-off underlined that this is actually quite a big deal! I am really looking forward to getting to know the fantastic founders in the cohort, and the constellation of excellent people that surround the programme, for example through the network of coaches and mentors that are available to us throughout the programme.

What was the catalyst for launching Koru Kids?

When I had my first child, I realised how bad the childcare system in the UK is. I was the CEO of a healthcare company at that time, and all my friends were having kids at the same time. I saw them struggling with childcare, as I was, and thought, 'There must be a better way.' Not only do families in the UK now spend more on childcare than they do on their mortgage, the childcare that exists is often too inflexible to accommodate

working parents' schedules. Once I started to feel how difficult it was first hand, I knew I'd hit upon my life's work. We have one of the most expensive childcare systems in Europe and it is an utter shambles. That's bad for our kids, bad for women (whose careers are impacted) and bad for society. When we don't have women in senior roles, like in the judicial system, in government, in business, we make worse decisions. So what we are doing is incredibly important for multiple reasons. It isn't an easy job. But we don't do it because it's easy. In fact quite the opposite; we do it because it's hard. I'm scared that if we don't do it, no one else will.

Tell me about the business - what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

We're driven by a triple mission: to help families - especially working mothers - juggle the hardest years of their life; to help caregivers thrive in a difficult role; and to give children a childhood full of everyday adventures, setting them up for life. We have nannies for kids aged 0-10 years and are particularly good at 'after school care', providing care for that most difficult part of the day for so many families. Through [Koru Kids](#), parents get a regular nanny who looks after the children at home so the kids can go to their after school activities, chill out, have dinner, and parents can come home to have quality time with them before bedtime. We also have great nannies for the younger kids too, and for families that want care all day. All Koru Kids nannies are energetic, enthusiastic, flexible and reliable - we only accept 6% of applicants and we've spent 8 years finding out what really makes for an excellent nanny experience. We select our nannies for reliability, care, commitment, and kindness.

How has the business evolved since its

launch?

Building a 'full stack' business is hard as you have to build many different businesses at once. We recruit, train, match, and manage nannies - that's four very different activities. So since our launch in 2016 we have needed to be excellent at managing complex operations, people, and technology. Additionally, childcare is particularly high-stakes. Success requires superb execution with no room for error.

After years of hard work we are now one of the UK's biggest childcare brands, having delivered well over 3 million hours of childcare, and created thousands of great childcare jobs. We deploy more than 2000 nannies each day, profoundly transforming the lives of thousands of families.

Tell us about the working culture at Koru Kids

We put a lot of time and effort into making sure that everyone in the team shares our core values. We make it clear in our job ads and in every recruitment interaction that we really value qualities like friendliness, willingness to take feedback and accept responsibility, and diligent follow-through. The very first question we ask everyone is, 'Why Koru Kids?' We want to see a real connection with the mission of the company, which is to build the world's best childcare service. Some team members identify most strongly with working parents, and love the idea that they're working to make parents' lives easier. Others identify most strongly with the nannies, and love the idea that we're giving nannies fantastic jobs and supporting them in their careers. Still others love the way that great childcare can be transformative for the kids, and our plans to make this even better. These three different lenses on 'the customer' make us a well rounded team. We're also very customer-centric.

Our team is made up of seasoned startup veterans as well as rising stars,

and our culture is hard-working, innovative and kind. We are constantly reflecting on what could be better, testing, tracking, learning, and implementing changes. It's this that gives me confidence that we're really building something sustainable and worthwhile, which will really change the game in childcare and help working parents.

What is your favourite thing about being a founder?

The absolute best thing is that you get to choose who you work with. And so I have brought together just the kindest, smartest people I could possibly wish for. It's a dream and a privilege to get to go to work with them each day.

Also, I get so much strength from other founders, they are the most wonderful and positive group of people. Every problem I have, I turn to my founder friends. My husband is also incredibly supportive and there's no way I'd have been able to do this without him, either.

It's really impressive how much support there is out there for startups these days, especially for female founders. I have had so many people advising me, mentoring, giving pitch feedback, connecting me with other people working on ideas, getting excited alongside me about what I'm doing, lending emotional support and venting with me. We're in a golden age for startups and all you need to do is ask. Especially in London, there are countless avenues for help.

What's in store for the future?

We want our childcare to be a loop of care around our families and childcarers. 'Koru' literally translates as 'loop'. It's always been the vision from day one.

We think about impact on 3 dimensions: firstly we want firstly to ease access to childcare so that parents, especially mums, are able to return to work, secondly to create rewarding jobs and careers for childcare professionals at scale, and thirdly to provide high quality childcare to the children we look after so that they can flourish their whole lives long.

We want to create meaningful career paths for childcare workers, with ongoing personalised training and feedback systems so that every day they get better at their jobs. And we want to do at all at a price that families can afford—which is where tech comes in. Sometimes we sum it up as ‘building the world’s best childcare service’.

What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

Enjoy the journey. I am a person who tends to delay gratification and also I am really bad at celebrating things. I have to keep reminding myself to enjoy the daily moments more, and to cut myself some slack at times. I am not very good at doing that. Having young kids really helps a lot, as they live entirely in the moment. The most joyful moments of my day are always doing things like playing peekaboo or telling stories. I draw on those moments for strength for the whole rest of my day.

As a mum of three, I’m often asked for tips on balancing the demands on your time. I don’t think there’s a ‘hack’ for juggling. There are only trade-offs. You have to sacrifice some things. I knew I’d really changed when my husband noticed a new trend in coats before I did, and pointed it out to me. Pre-kids, I was really into fashion. Now I wear the same thing every single day because it simplifies my morning. No dress is worth giving up cuddles or sleep for.

And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

I don't need an alarm to wake up, I have young kids. Often I wake up when someone jumps on me. I use our Amazon Alexa to set tons of reminders in the morning, so that everyone knows what they're meant to be doing when. We do a family 'Word of the Day' each morning, and the kids get ready for school. Our nanny arrives at 8am and my husband and (if it's an office day) I go off to work. I spend Wednesdays in Bloomsbury with other founders at the moment, which I really love, and Thursdays in Old St with my team. I take over from my nanny again at 6.15pm, and usually do some work in the evenings after their bedtime.

Having kids focused me on what is important in my life. My tolerance for wasting time has never been high, but it dropped through the floor when I had kids. If I'm going to work at all - if I'm not going to be with them - I need to be doing something that I think is really important. With Koru Kids I truly believe I'm working on the most important thing I could possibly be working on, and that's an incredible privilege.

Rachel Carrell is the Founder and CEO of [Koru Kids](#).

[Tech Nation's Future Fifty Programme](#) is designed to support late-stage companies with access and growth opportunities, the programme has supported some of the UK's most prominent unicorns, including Monzo, Darktrace, Revolut, Starling, Skyscanner and Deliveroo.

