

ONES TO WATCH

Sinead Murphy Shnuggle

By Amy Leonard

A creaky Moses basket leading not just to a new career but a whole new way of life; who'd have guessed it?

Not many, but then not many are brave enough to challenge the norm, to create the change they want. Not many are like Sinead Murphy.

The winner of the Women in Business NI 'Best Exporter' Award 2016 and 'Best Small Business' 2015, could have still been working in debt services if she had merely accepted the nightly noise as another part of parenthood.

But she did not, and now there are parents worldwide who are no doubt glad she didn't. The business that stemmed from this seemingly small issue is Shnuggle, which designs and produces what they call Clever Baby Products and now exports to retailers in over 25 countries.

Sinead, from Belfast, met her husband Adam, from Peterborough, at university in Hertfordshire where she studied psychology and he engineering. They married nearly 12 years ago and now have three children. Rose is nine and has Down Syndrome, Liam is seven, and Ruby May is two and a half.

"The traditional Moses basket was really creaky. Rose was often sick as a baby and it made a racket every time she moved" Sinead explains, "and the basket was always on my side of the bed!"

While she can laugh about it now it was extremely impractical, especially for new parents whose sleep patterns were already off kilter. She also found it very hard to clean; not exactly ideal for your darling little bundle of joy.

They realised that it was something that had never been reinvented, so Adam mocked up



Sinead Murphy pictured with husband Adam picking up another award for Shnuggle

their prototype on CAD and they took out a personal loan to buy the tools to make their first product.

"It was a risky move, yes, but we wanted to prove the concept to ourselves, to know it would work, before going any further with it" says Sinead.

The business was officially registered in 2009 and John Lewis was one of their first and, still, most significant retailers. So not a bad start to things then.

At least on paper that is. Immediate interest, whilst encouraging and positive, made life a little hectic.

Sinead had been working full time managing debt for not-for-profit organisations, specifically the Citizens Advice Bureau. Adam also worked full time in product design. Both continued to do so for the first two to three years of Shnuggle. And don't forget they had two young children by now.

The pair would complete their full working day, come home and look after the kids and only once they had them settled in bed was it

time to get stuck into packing the orders.

Sinead herself was the very first full time member of Shnuggle and it was then that the huge growth happened with the help of Invest NI and private investors.

There has been a lot of personal growth in the process says Sinead: "We were two people used to working full time, but for other people, in other people's companies. It's been a steep learning curve; we've learnt everything from the ground up."

And the most personally valuable thing about running the business? "We get to use our own experience as parents, which means we completely understand our customer. Everything from price to appearance to functionality plays a crucial role in how we make our products."

It sounds like what they themselves were once wishing to buy, practical, stylish and modern baby products, are finally available, from their very own company.

You know the old saying, if you want something done right, do it yourself. ■

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