

All in the Family

By Ashlee Ryan
Photos by Karen Kripalani

Rebecca Howard has always had that mothering instinct. It's why, when working as a nanny hired through a nanny referral agency, she realized that something was wrong with the process. The agency had never run a background check and, after checking with her references, Rebecca discovered none of them had ever been called. Despite this, the family she was referred to had paid around \$2000 to use the referral service, that you could receive just by putting a "nanny wanted" ad in the newspaper. So, when she was twenty-four years old, Rebecca set out to create a more professional nanny referral agency, Bella Bambino Nannies.

Right around the time Rebecca set out to create Bella Bambino Nannies, she got pregnant with her first children. Yes, children – twins, a boy and a girl. This helped her in several ways. After five months, she was ordered to bed rest by her doctor, but Rebecca, ever the Type A personality, took this as an opportunity to quit her other job and spend all day in her office talking to clients and interviewing nannies, often still sending emails out until one in the morning. When Rebecca's twins turned two, they began going to a program at preschool a couple days a week, enabling her to focus on expanding the business, from San Diego up to Orange, Riverside, and Los Angeles counties. When it exploded like a "mushroom cloud" according to Rebecca, she had to bring her sister into the business for extra help. Her mom also works part time, checking new nannies' references. Her husband helps some with financials, and her daughter, at just age five, has already expressed interest in someday taking over the family business.

But, having children of her own helped the nanny agency do more than just get off the ground. She can now relate to clients who cry over the phone because they have to go back to work and leave their children in the hands of a nanny, because Rebecca herself has felt that same turmoil. When her business grew too big for her home office, she moved it to an office in San Marcos, leaving her own children in the part time care of another. This understanding usually leads to more than just a client-consultant relationship, but a friendship. And this is what Rebecca had always wanted from Bella Bambino Nannies, handing out her cell phone so that clients know they can always reach someone. She also provides links on BellaBambino's website for services her clients find helpful like child proofing companies, family photographers, and nanny taxing tips but only after she has used the service herself, or investigated it and checked its references.

It's this personal, family-oriented attention that has contributed to the growth of Bella Bambino Nannies. The company thrives on word of mouth as ninety-five percent of her nannies have been either placed by her before or heard about it from a friend. Despite the rigorous background checks, nannies keep recommending Bella Bambino

because they know that Rebecca has their best interests and that of her clients at heart, and wants them to end up in good homes. Rebecca, for her part, wouldn't feel good about limiting her background checks because she wants to know for sure that her nannies are clear in the present and in the future, entering them into Trustline through the California Department of Justice that keeps them in the system permanently, among other checks Rebecca runs. In the end, everyone knows they're in good hands.

Further down the line, Rebecca's considering expanding the business to include governesses, college educated nannies, chauffeurs, and butlers, a business which, if successful, might turn into its own division – Sterling Domestics.



We know that whatever Rebecca does, it's going to be good. "If I'm going to put something in the community, I don't want it to be sloppy...it's a reflection of me," Rebecca says. It'll have that family-oriented, personal touch and it'll be something that, someday, she would be proud to pass onto her daughter.