

DIAL-AN-ANGEL

At first glance, DIAL-AN-ANGEL seems an unlikely example of a recruitment company but look deeper and you will find a national organisation that is able to fill the in-home recruitment needs of tens of thousands of its clients. The company has become a "one-stop shop" for every aspect of home help, including housekeeping and cleaning, childcare, in-home nursing and care of the frail aged.

Recruitment for childcare, in-home nursing and eldercare requires an entirely different approach to other types of staff recruitment and selection. When you are dealing with intimate aspects of family life, with people who are vulnerable to exploitation, dedication is the order of the day. Recruitment is taken from the commercial realm of "how many placements have we made this week?" into "how well have we served those clients for whom we have found the perfect Angel?"

Not only is it a unique business but the concept and commencement of DIAL-AN-ANGEL is even more interesting. Dena Blackman started the business in 1967 on a \$200 bank loan while caring for her three young children. The birth of her third child was the catalyst for its commencement.

To put Dena's achievement into perspective it was only one year after the removal of the marriage bar in the Commonwealth Public Service that required all women to retire from the workforce upon their marriage. Moreover, it took until 1971 for the first bank to provide a loan to women without a male guarantor. It was against this backdrop that Dena launched her business.

When Dena placed her first advertisement in the *North Shore Times* she hoped for a "warm" response. It was a totally unsophisticated letter of appeal to all those wonderful women who had a few hours to spare to help young mothers and be paid for their efforts. The advertisement had a banner headline of "Wanted - 100 Angels!"

The response was overwhelming! Before Dena was able to interview and screen the first "Angels", she had a waiting list of 22 clients!

So it was that DIAL-AN-ANGEL exploded onto the scene with the first office located in suburban Lindfield. It was high above the Pacific Highway and accessed by two extremely steep flights of stairs. Dena believed that applicants who could climb the steps for an interview would probably be able to cope

with the physical demands of caring for lively young families and the homes they lived in.

DIAL-AN-ANGEL has always been family oriented and family operated. Four generations of Dena's family have been involved in the business over more than four decades. Her eldest daughter holds the Franchise for Brisbane. Her second daughter set up their first computer system and her mother ran the North Shore Domestic section for almost 12 years. Her third daughter, Danielle Robertson (the catalyst for the commencement of the business) worked alongside her mother for 17 years before taking over as CEO in August 2003.

Very recently, Dena Blackman was recognised by Family Business Australia (NSW & ACT) as the State finalist for the prestigious Jason Lea Award. A vital ingredient in the success of the business is Dena's belief that a family business is the high point of two amazing and unparalleled experiences. One experience is the raising and nurturing of a family - spouse, children, grandchildren and others - through a lifetime of ups and downs, frustrations, and achievements. The other is the building and nurturing of a business as a livelihood and an expression of personal vision and achievement - through a lifetime of ups and downs, frustrations, and achievements.

A new chapter in the DIAL-AN-ANGEL story

With the energetic and focussed Danielle Robertson at the helm, the business has evolved and adjusted to the demands of the 21st century. In times of full employment in every State of Australia, like most recruitment companies, they struggled to find skilled and capable candidates. Both Dena and Danielle have always believed that a vital ingredient in the continuing success of the business is the assertion that Angels regard their work as an honourable vocation, requiring real skills and making a valuable contribution to the entire community. There are no "down-trodden Sadies" registered with DIAL-AN-ANGEL because its staff insist that clients treat Angels with consideration and courtesy.

The highest standards in conditions and remuneration are negotiated and unreasonable requests and unfair practices are actively discouraged. DIAL-AN-ANGEL found itself at the leading edge once again by recognising the valuable contribution that Angels who work as little as three hours a week can make to the workforce.

Now as the economy changes again, they are delighted to see a new stream of high calibre candidates come through their doors. Danielle believes that one of the most fascinating aspects of this style of recruitment business is the "people" part. She says: "Seeing the development of latent and acquired skills in both colleagues and field staff, gives me great pleasure. Recognising potential is relatively easy - but seeing it being realised - is gratifying in the extreme."

Over 42 years ago the business was predicated on Dena Blackman's vision that assistance should be as close as the phone - the "dial" may have all but disappeared - but the Angels are still flying! ■



Dena Blackman and Danielle Robertson