

## News

# Childcare app aims to recruit high-flying professionals

**Greg Hurst** Social Affairs Editor

Finding affordable childcare is a struggle for many working parents — so an arrangement that comes with nutritious sit-down meals, a ban on screen time and regular book clubs might seem like a pipe dream.

Yet this is what the founder of Teach First is planning to provide with a pioneer-ing new app.

Brett Wigdortz's venture is seeking to recruit thousands of professionals to switch career and work in childcare.

He wants to build a community of child-minders who take their charges for shared activities in the neighbourhood to recreate the social-development benefits of a nursery. Mr Wigdortz, 46, who started Teach First to recruit high-flying graduates to teach in England's most challenging schools, said there were many parallels between the two ideas.

He added that he did not like the term childminder. "It seems a very old-fashioned term. Parents often have a lot of myths around child-minders, just think they are there to mind a child, to babysit a child, when actually they have to follow the early years foundation stage framework. They are educators, they have to go through training, they have

Ofsted inspections." His business, called Tiney, will offer a bespoke curriculum, training, advice and payments system via an app. Care providers will set their own fees, typically from £4 to £10 an hour, but Mr Wigdortz will offer them advice on the cost of local nurseries and suggest they set fees about 20 per cent below these.

Parents will also be guaranteed

alter-native childcare should their practitioner be ill, initially via a childcare agency but in time through the company's own network.

The number of registered childminders in England has fallen from 57,400 in 2012 to 39,000 last year as curriculum and inspection standards have become more demanding. Mr Wigdortz said his research found that isolation and lack of support or training were also factors.

"It reminded me of the early years of Teach First," he said. "What you have in this amazing job working with small children, you can make a massive difference in children's lives if you have a skill set around it, it is very fulfilling but a lot of people who would be really good at it aren't going into it. It is not being set up well for them."

He has a partnership with Mumsnet, which asked its followers about childcare priorities: some thought childminding was seen as less professional or lacked quality control and they valued the events that nurseries organise such as Christmas shows and Easter egg hunts.

Tiney's practitioners, who will call themselves "home nursery owners", will form groups where they live to provide activities such as book clubs with support from the National Literacy Trust, visits to soft play centres or performances.

"When we started Teach First people said top graduates are just not interested in teaching in low-income schools. Now they say people don't want to become child-minders but early on we have seen that's absolutely not true. We have gotten lots of good applicants," Mr Wigdortz said.

### Case study

**T**ania Daniels never considered working in childcare (Greg Hurst writes). She began her career working in logistics at large companies and then in a property business.

Now Ms Daniels, 46, right, whose own children are aged 17, 14 and seven, is planning piano lessons, German tuition and

healthy food menus as she prepares to launch a Tiney

"home nursery" at her detached home in Beckenham, southeast London. "I know I like looking after kids but I never thought of it as a career," she said. "I know it is something I am pretty good at, I have space at home. I can do something I enjoy and still be around for my children."

