

## Buying time is No.1 on busy bodies' to-do list



Able assistant ... Jodie Logan makes plans with lifestyle services provider Adrian McCowage while her boys James, 8 months, and Ryan, 2 1/2, play.  
Photo: Adam Hollingworth

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BUSY families are employing professional lifestyle managers to help them cope with everything from grocery shopping to moving house and buying underwear.

The number of multi-skilled, full-time fixers, or "personal concierge services" as they prefer to be known, has quadrupled in NSW in the past five years.

Single mums, couples who can't agree on housework and domestically challenged bachelors are among the new breed of clientele for more than 20 concierge companies operating in Sydney alone.

The Australian trend mirrors that in the United States, where the industry is among the top 10 fastest-growing fields in the personal services sector.

Membership of the International Concierge and Errand Association (ICEA) has grown by 45 per cent worldwide in the past year. Australia now has its own ICEA chapter.

Demand for services is being fuelled by long working hours and the increasing need to juggle careers with family life.

One in five Australians now works a 70-hour week, Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show.

Since 1985, the average working week has increased by 1.9 hours to 43.2 hours for men and by 1.7 hours to 39.3 hours for women.

Research from the University of South Australia has found that half of working men and women frequently feel pressed for time and believe their family life suffers as they try to juggle the demands of modern life.

Adrian McCowage set up his concierge company, Someone Lifestyle Services, in 2002 and has several clients for whom he works on a regular basis. He performs one-off "fixings" for others.

"A lot of my clients aren't particularly rich but they just do not have the time to do everything," he said.

"One of my first clients was a single working mother who didn't have a huge amount of money but was just rushed off her feet and felt she had no time to spend with her kids. I suggested that I did her weekly food shop and put it away for her, so she got time with her children without having to drag them screaming around the supermarket. It just took one thing off her mind."

He said he would do anything - "as long as it's legal".

Jodie Logan, 31, an Abbotsford mother of two young boys, is married to a senior executive who travels a lot. She described Mr McCowage as a godsend.

"He does a weekly clean for me but I can call on him to organise last-minute babysitting or pick up my dry-cleaning, buy gifts for people or do some shopping so there is food in the house when we get back from a holiday."

Darren Robinson set up his concierge company, Sydney Lifestyle Management, last year.

"People are so busy now. In years gone by they may have got live-in help but that is expensive now and it can be intrusive," he said. "I give people the opportunity to enjoy their down time."

Lifestyle managers can:

- Assist clients to relocate to a different city or country by hunting for houses and new schools.
- Run regular errands such as food shopping, picking up dry-cleaning and sorting out the hiring of other domestic helpers, such as cleaners.
- Organise social occasions and birthday gifts.
- Do mundane jobs such as staying in for the arrival of a plumber or electrician.