



Q&A with Julie Burleson, Founder and CEO of Young Chefs Academy

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IN [CHILD-RELATED FRANCHISES, Q & A INTERVIEW](#)



[Young Chefs Academy](#) is the original and premier children's cooking school franchise with more than 30 locations in seven countries. In this Q&A, founder and CEO Julie Burleson discusses the Young Chefs Academy concept, including the franchise opportunity, growth demand, and how it benefits families.

Franchise Chatter (FC): What is Young Chefs Academy?

Julie Burleson (JB): Young Chefs Academy is the leading national cooking school franchise for children. Our mission is to provide interactive experiences that give children the opportunity to learn food preparation skills and develop a lifelong love for culinary arts.

Based in Waco, Texas, Young Chefs Academy empowers kids to get involved in the kitchen, learning how to make nutrient-rich dishes with less artificial ingredients, in turn promoting healthy eating and family bonding – all set in a fun, joyful environment.

FC: Why is Young Chefs Academy relevant for today's franchisees and consumers?

JB: Cooking is one of the hottest pastimes today, with new shows popping up online and on television. Now, more than ever, cooking has become one of the most popular extra-curricular activities for children. With Food Network chefs becoming celebrities and kids growing up in a world where mom and dad stop to post a picture of their meal on Instagram, food and cooking is now an essential part of childhood.

Couple that with the lack of in-depth extra-curricular home economics courses in elementary and middle schools, and we're seeing huge demand for privately-run kids cooking classes.

Also, as we know too well, obesity is at an all-time high and technology is constantly interrupting our family time. Studies show children are more likely to eat healthy foods when they prepare them, and cooking from scratch is heavily incorporated in our curriculum.

Additionally, it's every family's goal to talk about their days around the dinner table to improve communication. Studies show that families who share meals on a regular basis have better mental health and the child-student has better grades. When children help prepare home-cooked meals, they aren't perched up in their bedrooms, tucked away with technology and not partaking in family time.

Additionally, children's services is the fastest growing business sector in the franchise industry, with more than 35 percent growth in the last five years. Being a franchise owner of a children's service business provides a unique opportunity to make a positive impact on children and their families every day.

With more than ten years of teaching children to cook and bringing families together through cooking, the Young Chefs Academy franchise opportunity also comes with strong trademarks, a robust curriculum program, and an unparalleled franchise support system. We are not only providing second-to-none experiences for children and families, but also providing a solid foundation for our franchisees to find success in their communities.

Our focus at the corporate offices is our franchisees' success, by providing them with the tools they need to grow in their communities, including but not limited to ongoing training and support in areas such as marketing, public relations, selling, classroom management, profitability, and business systems.

I believe our commitment to support and our decades in franchising is evident in the most recent data collected from our reporting system, showing an average of 26 percent per unit growth in revenue this past year. Combine that with average of 68 percent gross profit margins, and you have a recipe for success and happiness!

FC: What is the growth outlook due to this demand?

JB: I'm proud to say that we plan to open four locations in new markets including Bel Air, Md.; Allentown, Pa.; Sunnyvale, Calif.; and Wesley Chapel, Fla., by spring 2018. Also, we plan to add 20 new franchisees by 2019 to meet the demand for the educational activity. It's thrilling that we've experienced three years of double-digit growth and we're not slowing down.

Not only are we not slowing down on franchise growth, but we're also not slowing down on franchisee profitability. Being the first to market doesn't mean we're complacent. We're always looking for ways to grow vertically within our strong business model of enriching the lives of children and families through cooking.

Over the years, we have come to be known as the experts in teaching children to cook in communities across the world. It's only natural that we've met a growing demand from our loyal parents for more adult programs. While we've held adult workshops over the years, we've recently added an impressive series of adult cooking classes – delivered by our friendly, experienced teachers, creating a perfect outing for adults looking to expand their cooking skills and socialize in a fun setting.

FC: How did the idea for Young Chefs Academy come about?

JB: I was preparing orders for my catering business in my kitchen at home when my five-year-old son begged to help. I felt torn between spending time with him and completing my work. The idea hit me at that moment: "kids cooking school."

My children were already helping me prepare meals by getting ingredients and mixing them together. They loved assisting with meal preparation. I thought, "Why not take it to the next level by enabling children to immerse themselves fully in becoming chefs?" It was a lightbulb moment, and when I searched the internet for this business model, I found nothing.

Next, I scheduled a kids cooking class at a local restaurant to test my concept idea. I called some friends and told them about the opportunity to involve their children in a small cooking class in our Waco community. That class filled to capacity and sparked so much interest that I knew I had to build upon it. From then on, I knew this would become my permanent career. Once the concept was a proven success, I knew I had to start the first franchise of its kind.

FC: How does a new Young Chef enroll and what's that process like?

JB: It's pretty simple. Children as young as three all the way through high school age can enroll in monthly memberships for about \$99. The classes are held weekly and have unique themes. We recently conducted Asian and French fusion cuisines, for example, which combines elements from both cultures.

All members wear special chef jackets and earn patches toward Master Chef level as they progress. After the second year, chefs wear an awarded and coveted black jacket, having achieved the next level toward Master Chef status. The activities become more complex and sophisticated with experience and age.

Our curriculum, built by a team of certified chefs and educators, provides our franchisees a comprehensive, multi-layered program they can easily execute in their Young Chefs locations. My corporate curriculum team does all of the research, writing, and recipe testing, so the franchisees can do the “fun” part!

FC: Are there any Young Chefs who’ve gone on to become famous in the cooking world?

JB: Young Chefs Academy launched the careers of Chopped Jr. and Master Chef Jr. contestants Mikey Robins and Josh Reisner. Riley B, also of Master Chef Jr. fame, was the youngest contestant to appear on the show. Josh was a Master Chef Jr. finalist and now promotes his own brand through a talent manager. He has tens of thousands of social media followers and the sky’s the limit for him!

FC: Who’s an ideal Young Chefs franchisee and what’s the initial investment?

JB: The Young Chefs Academy franchise opportunity is ideal for culinary-loving and business-savvy operators. No formal culinary experience is necessary to become a Young Chefs Academy franchisee because our extensive training program and ongoing franchise support system allows even novices to become experts in their kitchen classrooms.

Our franchisees benefit from low overhead and start-up costs, as well as access to exclusive territories. The initial investment for Young Chefs Academy, which includes the franchise fee, ranges between \$106,450 and \$134,800, depending on size and location.