

**HD** Future Kids interview: Samantha Malkoun

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Statistics about the brain are manifold and fascinating. Did you know that the **energy** used by the brain is enough to light a 25 watt bulb?

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Or that it has one trillion nerve connections based on 100 **billion** nerve cells, is 75 percent water, and only weighs about three pounds? It's one of the most sophisticated and powerful parts of the human body, but perhaps still one of the least well known, even by experts. And although widely discredited, the much-repeated maxim that we only use '10 percent of our brains' gets us thinking at the very least about the highly likely possibility that we're not using them to their full potential. This is something that Samantha Malkoun is trying to change. The native Australian launched Future Kids late last year - and education centre for children aged six months to six years designed to give more weight to the training of the right side of the brain - the side which is too often neglected in conventional education. The right side of the brain is more focused on emotional, expressive and creative tasks, while the left side of the brain is more logic driven, believed to be better at analytical thinking and reasoning. Most school systems across the globe tend to lean towards left sided learning, but Future Kids aims to buck the trend by offering training for both sides of the brain, with an emphasis on the right. Describing herself as a "creative person", Malkoun taught adults and children in **China** for 18 months using a variety of unorthodox methods. Article continued on next page... She says: "We did things like putting a magazine together - getting the students to write the different stories, piecing it all together, and so on. It was a lot of fun and they got a lot out of it." The mother of three also worked with brain training in Australia for six years, and when she moved her family to Dubai, she decided to carry on where she left off and set up a brain training centre. "I always say the same thing," she says. "What spurred me on is that I had a child who was eight months old, and all the activities available to us were based around baby groups and coffee meet-ups for mums. There were a couple of nurseries and things like that, but nothing more." "We would go to Melbourne Symphony Orchestra sessions, book readings from authors, and things like that which gave a greater element of education. But I found I wanted my children to start school and be ahead of the game. I didn't want them to have any difficulties with their learning." Notable differences in her children's behaviour led to other parents asking what she was doing differently, which would later **lead** to Future Kids launching in Dubai's Knowledge Village. "I would give my fourteen month old daughter an instruction and she'd understand and follow it," she says. "She was able to speak early as well, and everything I was doing with her was really helping her development." "We had been coming to Dubai on and off for about six years because my husband owns Arabian horses here. Eventually we decided to move permanently, so I decided to open Future Kids." With the help of TECOM, Malkoun was able to set up her business "relatively easily", explaining that she had "a lot of support from my TECOM representative, which really helped a huge amount." Indeed, she says she had more difficulties starting a bank account. Article continued on next page... The smooth setting-up process gave her more time and **energy** to put towards her fledgling **company**, ensuring Future Kids made good on its promise to 'maximise children's potential development and skills'. "Getting our programmes right was essential," she says. "What we do is right brain training. Most programmes out there are left brain, with an objective, factual approach. We want to create a balance." Recent research shows children who have balance perform much better than those who have a weighting to the left brain. It doesn't mean we don't look at the left brain, we just try to balance things out. "Developing the right brain can actually help children perform left-brain orientated tasks too, so we try to link the two sides so they work together." The Future Kids programme includes several sensory, visual, and observational classes, using music and games to help the children learn. "They're not just fun though," explains Malkoun. "Each activity has a reason behind it. For example, we do an imagination activity where we picture a bubble above our heads and we blow it up bit by bit until it explodes. This is fun, but it also

teaches the children how to control their breath."You really do see the difference. Most babies will come for about ten weeks, and by the end of that time they will have better focus and concentration. Their eye-tracking will improve, their observation will be better, and so on."We have a lot of music activities which help them with sound processing and helps them hear perfect pitch. Much of what we do builds their general knowledge, and it helps them express themselves better. They have more resources to draw on."Article continued on next page...One of the key aspects of Future Kids that Malkoun is proud of is the way the **company** promotes parent-child integration.She explains that she doesn't want parents to "leave their kids here and that's it", but to use the centre as a foundation for improved interaction at home.She says: "We're asking parents to take on board the importance of working with their child - especially in the baby age group."We have a classroom environment, but we like mums and dads to be there. It promotes such a positive engagement. When their baby counts from one to ten and they know they've had a big hand in helping them, it means so much."The centre opened in October last year, and has already expanded, taking on two new teachers to take staff numbers to eight.A second centre is also due to open in Jumeirah imminently."The reaction has been brilliant," says Malkoun. "Mums are glowing and the kids are learning a lot. It's really rewarding. They can't believe that their children are maintaining their concentration so well, or making such big advances in the way they play and interact. The way the parents interact with them is really changing."One of the reasons she cites is that Future Kids offers a viable alternative to the existing options, adding: "Parents tend to like coming here because they don't want to go to nursery. What we do isn't day care - it's always educational.Article continued on next page..."We also teach the nannies. Parents often don't want nannies at home all day, so we teach them how to speak with the children in a different way to help foster the child's development."Everything we do has to be focused on being supportive and positive, whether it's for the kids, parents, carers, nannies, or anybody else."With the working culture in the region putting a lot of strain on parents and the time they have available to be with their children, Malkoun also says she would like to help strengthen familial **bonds**."Children often spend a lot of time away from their parents, and it's something we need to pay attention to."Speech is one thing in particular. When parents put their children with nannies all the time, there is usually a difference in language, and certainly in speech, which is challenging for the child in terms of development, expression and so on."I'd love to see parents spending half an hour every day with their kids at the very least. The kids love that connection, and if the parents are helping them learn, they will love learning even more.Article continued on next page..."Across all groups the key is a love of learning. You can't instil that so easily after six years old - you have to do it early. Your brain is fully formed by age of six, so after that you lose the ability to develop children who love learning. If they haven't had that focus before they are six years old, it's hard to give it to them.""A lot of parents are amazed at how much a baby can pick up at just a few months old - but they have such an amazing capability. Exposure to specific stimuli can really benefit them."While the **company** helps develop children's brains, it appears young people are the only ones growing.Having been so well received in such a short space of time, expansion plans have already come into the foreground."We definitely want to grow," Malkoun says. "We've been to Malta to the Ministry of Education. They're thinking of having us as part of the national curriculum. Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, and around the Middle East people are interested. As well as London, South Africa, and even Nigeria."It's just a case of doing things in the right way."If the first few months are anything to go by, it doesn't take a genius to see that Malkoun and Future Kids are managing that very well already.

**RE** dubai : Dubai | austr : Australia | apacz : Asia Pacific | asiaz : Asia | ausnz : Australia/Oceania | gulfstz : Persian Gulf Region | meastz : Middle East | uae : United Arab Emirates | wasiaz : Western Asia

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