Smiley Stars Nursery

*Tamara Marashi left a career in civil engineering to follow her dream and become the managing director of Smiley Stars Nursery in 2010. They now care for nearly
90 children between the ages of six weeks and five years across two sites in Glasgow. Rated as “very good” by the Care Inspectorate in 2018, Smiley Stars has quickly grown in popularity over the past eight years while Tamara remains wary of the challenge that the new government daycare provision will present.*

At Smiley Stars Nursery we offer homely and comforting childcare that is personally adjusted to each child’s needs. We work closely with our parents, to meet their requirements. As a leader, in tandem with my managers, I try to epitomise this style of care and I have built individual relationships with staff, parents and children. With three care rooms that cater for three age groups in both centres, our ethos is to provide a warm, safe and welcoming environment and to become an extended family for our children, somewhere parents feel happy and content leaving their most valuable person.

We are approachable, flexible and willing to listen, and we implement changes requested by our parents and children. Understanding that the needs of individuals may differ and allowing for their input is crucial. Our care plans are always evolving and adapting to our children’s needs to ensure they feel loved, cared for and supported. We work hard to build children’s confidence and self-esteem, prepare them for life ahead, our job is so vital in building a stable, nurtured person.

Doing something I love

Until 2001 I was building a career as a civil engineer but going on my maternity leave and the challenges
of looking after 2 children were great. I decided to attend an HNC in Childcare course at my local vocational college to become a better mum and I learned a lot over those two years. In 2005 I gained a master’s degree in Information Management from Strathclyde University, I gave birth to my third child and I was diagnosed with cancer. Being diagnosed with cancer made me begin to re-evaluate my priorities and ambitions. I decided to pursue my real passion, childcare.

In 2010 that opportunity presented itself in a small nursery in Ibrox, Glasgow which was struggling to reach its capacity. I saw that it had the potential to improve and offer a better service. My qualifications as a civil engineer in construction management gave me some of the necessary experience to manage a team and maintain an office, while I learned several skills through working alongside my professional and passionate staff. In 2010, 26 children used our service, but after a strategic recruitment programme, improved environment and a new layout, we were able to accommodate 39 children a day. We have always been careful to take on new children at a sustainable rate, and we ensure that we can still provide the best possible level of care for every new addition. To create an efficient working environment, our technological systems have been renovated and modernised. We are a hardworking team we have gained the required qualifications to enhance our practice. I take pride in our ongoing personnel development to deliver high standard care. We thrive on hard work.

This year we celebrated our eighth year in business and expanded to another site in Mansewood, Glasgow and our team has grown to 24 members of staff.

Stable staff allow for happy children

Our staff are our greatest asset and their dedication and hard work has allowed for our success. They are highly motivated by their work and their enthusiasm is infectious. Several staff have been with us since 2010, and this consistency provides a stable presence that children can rely upon, allowing them to be more comfortable and expressive in their learning.

Creating a working environment where staff feel able to challenge common practice and senior leadership is a vital aspect of development and improvement and I try to foster an atmosphere where this is understood. Our learning environment is also supplemented by the apprentices, who grow and learn with us. As well as adding their contribution.

Parents commonly remark on the importance of our team ethic, and they notice how it has helped to establish a homely atmosphere. Our staff understand that care is a very personal experience, and this allows us to stand out from the crowd.

Adjusting to legislative change

The Scottish Government has pledged to offer 1,140 hours of free childcare to children between three and five years old by 2020. This is currently being piloted by local authorities in some of their nurseries. Until the scheme has been rolled out fully by 2020 it will prove challenging for private providers who offer 600 free hours in the interim, as parents and staff are being tempted to move to public care services, allured by the prospect of free childcare and higher wages respectively. This is affecting childcare organisations across Scotland, and soon many will be unable to compete.

In our view, a more prudent approach would be for all sectors to be working together for the best interest of Scottish families and their children where the main aim is to provide a variety of affordable quality care
and foster an environment where all providers are to prosper to suit families’ individual needs, as one size does not fit all. The potential disruption to the care of young people that could follow an exodus to publicly funded providers could be vast, and despite the cost advantages to parents, the loss of continuity of care, could impact on the child’s emotional wellbeing due to disruptions in attachments.

We aim to continue providing our service for many years to come and we have seen the benefit we have brought to a number of stakeholders in our community. If this is to continue to be possible, we need to be offered support during this delicate and potentially damaging transition.

Fact Box

* Managing Director: Tamara Marashi
* Founded in 2010
* Based in Ibrox and Mansewood, Glasgow
* No. of employees: 24
* Services: Homely and personal childcare for children aged six weeks to five years old
* Age range: Six weeks to five years old
* www.smileystarsnursery.co.uk