



Story time with Little Wonderland owner and nursery manager Stacey Sneddon

A place to grow

Stacey Sneddon is one of many entrepreneurs Business Gateway Dumfries & Galloway works with to help them realise their business vision. Here we look at how she launched her enterprise, Little Wonderland Nursery in Heathhall

WORDS CAROL HOGARTH | PHOTOGRAPHY JENNY WOOLGAR

For years Stacey Sneddon had dreamed of, and worked towards, setting up her own nursery, but finding the perfect premises in the Dumfries area was proving difficult. So, when a unit within Lochar House came up for rent last summer, she believes it was meant to be.

"I grew up in Locharbriggs, so this was back in my home patch," she says. "It became available not long after my grandpa, Hector Mackay, passed away. When the building was a pub, he and my grandmother Evelyn used to run it, so I definitely think it was fate."

After taking on the tenancy last June, Stacey, 35, who has studied and worked in childcare for the past 17 years, quickly set about converting the space into a welcoming nursery with two spacious playrooms and a large fenced-off outdoor space.

She says: "There is a new social housing development just across the road and I knew nurseries in the area were full, so I thought a new nursery would work here and I immediately loved the homely feel of this building."

Two large, high-ceilinged rooms were perfect for the main nursery spaces, but

Stacey had to create new toilets, a nappy changing room, and a garden space with ramped access at the back of the building.

"My partner, Robert Rae, is a contracts manager for a local construction firm so he helped me out, and my brother Scott Sneddon is a plumber so that was a great help with putting in sinks and toilets. It was a real team effort." Stacey recruited Early Years Practitioner Lauren Peat, and Early Years Apprentice Scarlette Richardson, to work alongside her, and opened Little Wonderland Nursery on August 21, 2024.

"I think the three of us have the same vision, so we make a great wee team." Little Wonderland has a family feel and Stacey says she wants parents and carers to feel like a large part of what the nursery offers.

"We have 'stay and play' sessions with the families and I make a point of having in-depth conversations with them when they bring the children in."

She is inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach to early years education, which focusses on children's interests and learning through experiences, emphasising collaboration between children, teachers, and parents.

"We like to take the children on nature walks and would love to create a forest-school space in the future. We do a lot of messy-play, wood working, and offer sensory experiences." The nursery follows the Curriculum for Excellence for children from the age of three and, aims to "create a stimulating and engaging environment, fostering a love of learning from an early age."

The main room has an atmospheric, natural feel with fairy lights and wooden furniture and toys and the "little room," used for break-out space and quiet time, has a large bay window and cornicing which gives the feel of an elegant living room.

"We created homely spaces so that if a child gets tired, they can find somewhere to go and relax," says Stacey. "The children



Lauren and Koko

are so happy to come in and we have a really good relationship with families." Little Wonderland can cater for up to 24 children and currently has 18 on the books.

Stacey, who went to Locharbriggs Primary School and Dumfries High School, always wanted to work with children and gained a

BA in Childhood Studies from the University of the West of Scotland. She followed this up with a professional development award in Childhood Practice and a management qualification.

Over the years she has worked in the public sector – in roles including nursery manager



Early Years apprentice Scarlette Richardson, Early Years practitioner Lauren Peat, and owner and nursery manager Stacey Sneddon, with Ruben Harkness, aged three, and Koko Rae, aged two



Stacey and Koko

‘The children are so happy to come in and we have a really good relationship with families’

at the North West Campus and at Lochside – and in private nurseries.

When it came to setting up her own business, she says: “I was an area manager for a private nursery at one point, so I had some knowledge, but I also like to learn. Anything I need to know, I’ll find out.”

Stacey made contact with Business Gateway last June to get help and support in setting up the nursery. Business Gateway Adviser Amanda Beattie supported Stacey in creating her business plan and financial plans to prove viability, and to complete an application for the Enterprise Seed Fund Start-Up grant (funded by the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund), to help with set-up costs. Amanda also gave Stacey a year’s membership to Dumfries & Galloway Chamber of Commerce.



Scarlette and Koko



Stacey Sneddon

YOUR GATEWAY TO BUSINESS SUCCESS

Business Gateway Dumfries and Galloway is your gateway to expert local assistance and advice. Whatever stage your business is at, its online support, local advisers, webinars, and events are here to help with any business situation. Call 01387 808 647 and see www.bgatewaydumgal.com

