

Thrings meets...

Freya Derrick, founder of Hopscotch Day Nurseries



Thrings partner Sally Pike speaks to Freya Derrick, founder of Hampshire-based Hopscotch Day Nurseries, which has been providing quality childcare to babies, waddlers, toddlers and preschool children for the past 14 years.

Where did the idea to open a nursery come from?

I had two young children at nursery and I wasn't happy with the service or care we were receiving. I also needed a childcare provider which offered me the flexibility to help me progress my own career. Something had to give, so I began looking into the possibility of starting my own nursery. That was in 2005; we now employ 220 staff across our five nurseries in Gosport, Botley, Lee-on-the-Solent, Titchfield and Fareham.

What are the main challenges of running a business like Hopscotch?

When we opened in 2005 we had five staff. Back then, Ofsted had 14 standards that we needed to adhere to. Since then legislation and compliance requirements have increased, so we now spend far more time focusing on this area of the business. To support our growth, we have invested

significantly in our Early Years teams, who work tirelessly to provide the best possible care, environment and early years education, as well as supporting those families who are experiencing the challenges of modern family life.

Do you identify with parents who try to juggle careers with raising a family?

As a mum and a stepmum, I know that finding the right work-life balance is difficult. Many parents feel like they've done a few hours' work even before they start their day job (reversing into the garage door while preparing my kids for World Book Day, or going to work with baby sick on my shirt are reminders of this!). I think we can be guilty of making our lives harder by not cutting out the things we don't need to do. Our aim has always been to provide parents with a childcare service they can rely on.

In your view, what is Hopscotch's finest achievement?

The excellent relationships we have built. Two of our nurseries are located near naval bases. Over the past 14 years, both have helped numerous families deal with deployment-related issues. To know our teams have made a difference to the lives of parents

and children, some of whom have had challenging times in their lives, is enormously pleasing.

What advice would you offer budding entrepreneurs?

Surround yourself with a support network and people you can trust. I was undoubtedly risk averse when I started and people tried to talk me down, particularly as I had a young family. But I was hell-bent on doing it. In my mind you either jump in, give it everything and decide it's going to work, or you accept you aren't ready.

What about life outside work?

I used to work at home a lot, and would often find myself on my laptop when my children wanted my attention. But I soon realised that if you try to do too many things at once you invariably end up doing them all badly. I'm now far more disciplined when it comes to switching off. ♦



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