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Dundee childminders explain the importance of child-led play in their settings - and the need for more childminders

With over 40 years of childcare experience between them, Elaine Bruce and Robyn Gaughan from Dundee have seen the value and difference that childminding brings to their community.

Elaine received one-to-one support, training and funding to help get started in childminding through a unique recruitment pilot. This work was scaled up and has now developed into the [Programme for Scotland's Childminding Future](#), which means a business start-up grant, one-to-one support from a dedicated Workforce Officer, as well as training is available in 26 local authority areas in Scotland, including Dundee City, to help others start their new career too. While Elaine is fairly new to childminding, Robyn's setting - 'Robyn's Nest Childminding' - is going into its sixth year. Both Elaine and Robyn previously worked in the education sector - and both are passionate about their childminding careers. Here, they tell us why there is definitely room for more childminders in Dundee.

Background

Robyn said: "I was previously a primary teacher before I started childminding, mostly in early years, so I knew I loved that age group but childminding also provides the opportunity to work with a mix of ages of children, not just wee ones, which is fantastic. I also know how fast kids grow up! I wanted a job that I loved and one that meant I could be around my kids and watch them grow because you can't get that time back. Childminding fits around my family life, and I'll be eternally grateful for that." Elaine worked in child education for 38 years and previously worked in a senior position in a nursery. Whilst working in a small rural nursery as a senior, she realised she could be a professional childminder, working from home with small numbers of children.

Childminding is a flexible, rewarding career which provides the benefit of working from home!

Childminders provide high-quality childcare from their home that is nurturing and safe, and also provides the flexibility for childminders and their 'mindees' to 'get out and about'! Children have the opportunity to learn from real-life experiences. Everyday activities like going to the shops, learning and playing outside, being part of school pick-ups with the childminder for school age children, visits to the shops and to the park all teach children valuable life skills. As with other childcare providers such as nurseries, childminders are guided by the Curriculum for Excellence, and are required to follow the values and principles of the 'Getting It Right For Every Child' ([GIRFEC](#)) framework, which supports the health and wellbeing of children. Elaine and Robyn both know this home-from-home environment contributes greatly to a child's development, learning and wellbeing.

Elaine explains; "I think lots of people still hold outdated perceptions of what childminders do. Because of the small numbers I care for, it's a homely environment and children can learn so much because of the one-to-one childcare I provide, but there's also so many opportunities for children of a range of ages to come together. They learn and play together and it's such a supportive environment."

Robyn agrees; "I love being able to update parents on their child's progress and about what we've been doing that day. I childmind for eight children at various times across the week and they're all younger siblings of previous 'mindees' – I've had so much opportunity to get to know them and their families throughout the years and we've created a really special bond."

Childminding and child-led play

The flexibility that child-led play provides is something both Elaine and Robyn see as vital in the children's progression and in providing the most stimulating experiences.

Elaine explains: "By following the child's interest in play, this can help them focus their attention for longer and I believe that children will learn more when they are genuinely fascinated by what they're doing. If they want to play outdoors, we'll do that, or we can focus on arts and crafts, or use our imaginations – the list is endless and means a wide variety of experiences."

Robyn says, "Child-led play doesn't mean no structure at all – I present ideas or show them activities, but they go between spaces and explore. It also means that the activities we do and even the places we go is informed and led by what the children are interested in exploring or doing that day – we work together to tailor our days to what interests. It allows us to have a lot of fun! To be able to plan activities and days around genuine interests is great and I love seeing the pure joy on their faces."

Elaine explains, "With smaller numbers involved in childminding, there's lots of opportunity for the younger ones to learn together to share and play in wee groups. It's an important part of learning – things like waiting their turn – and I believe being around children that aren't their siblings is important."

Robyn adds, "I adore being part of their journey. To be trusted to nurture the children and shape them is such a privilege."

Becoming a childminder

Both childminders have felt greatly supported by the Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA) throughout the process of setting up their businesses, from the start of their journey, to any on-going support required. Elaine said: "I felt really supported by SCMA, particularly throughout the process of registration. I thought the one-to-one support available from SCMA was invaluable. Any problem or question, no matter how small, I received help so quickly. It's really reassuring to have experts in childminding to refer to."

Enquiries from parents in Dundee for childminder spaces has intensified - Robyn has seen the demand for childminders increase hugely. "The need is huge and there's absolutely room for more childminders in Dundee. The flexible childcare we provide suits working families and I'm always receiving calls looking for spaces."

It's important to Elaine and Robyn that anyone thinking of becoming a childminder knows the childminding community in Dundee is friendly and approachable and can provide a great support network!

Robyn says, "Knowing there is a network of other childminders is really important I think as we're all essentially lone workers but because the childminding community is really friendly, it feels like we're part of a wider team, it's lovely!"

Elaine adds, "I'd thoroughly recommend childminding as a career. If you've got a passion for working with children, the opportunity is there to make a really great business."

To find out more about funding, training and one-to-one support available to become a childminder in Dundee City, please visit www.childminding.org/getstarted



Elaine's Amazing Spaces