

Noreen Fitzgerald

Marlhill Open Farm



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With four children under the age of five, Noreen Fitzgerald often found herself searching for stimulating entertainment within driving distance of their home in Cashel, Co. Tipperary.

Her efforts coming to nought, she set about creating such a place on the grounds of her home. The result is Marlhill Open Farm, a family-focused facility featuring a café, small animal petting, go-cart track, and indoor and outdoor play centres.

Noreen took a career break from nursing to pursue the project. And while the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic delayed its opening by almost 10 months, operations have been at full tilt since they welcomed their the first visitors on October 19, 2021.

“There’s a lot of work involved in maintaining the farm. It’s been 24/7 since we opened,” says Noreen, whose farm boasts an array of wildlife, from alpaca, lamb, hamsters, rabbits, guinea pigs and even a red deer.

Aside from Noreen and husband Patrick, Marlhill Open Farm has 10 temporary employees and one full-time employee. Recent staff shortages have seen the farm reduce its opening to exclude Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, but visitor numbers continue to exceed expectations.

“We were booked out for school tours last year, and we also had Santa’s Grotto, which worked really well around Christmas time,” she says, adding that there are plans in place to extend the farm’s offering to glamping, as well as building a bigger go-cart track.

Noreen hails her fellow female entrepreneurs for setting an example of what she could achieve in business.

“When we met, I found a lot of positivity in the room. It was such a boost to be around my peers. They made me feel like I could do it. The support network is ongoing, I’m still on the phone to them now, getting answers to my questions,” she adds.

Providing early stage female entrepreneurs, living in rural Ireland, with the knowledge, support and networking opportunities to meet and even exceed their current aspirations.



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