

Caoimhe Dougan

The Sensory Play Studio



CONTACT DETAILS

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Having trained in early years education, Caoimhe Dougan has always shown a keen interest in working with children. Upon graduating from college, she began working in a creche in Cork and it was here that she took her first steps into management, an experience that would later help her in starting her own business.

In 2020, Caoimhe emigrated to Abu Dhabi, where she lived and worked for three years. While there, she was inspired by the quality of children's play centres and sensory programmes – including outdoor sessions where children could explore the nature around them.

She returned home in 2023 and soon realised that there were limited options for children in Clonmel under the age of five. With that, she started running pop-up sensory play classes by renting rooms and bringing activities with her, leaning particularly on her experiences abroad.

Before long, demand grew and Caoimhe signed a lease on her first premises – opening its doors to the public just six weeks later.

Two-and-a-half years on from opening, the business has developed into a dedicated play studio with permanent features, including an eight-foot sandpit and a sensory room. Mobile sessions are still provided for libraries and local schools, enabling her to bring her services to children across Tipperary and the surrounding counties.

A significant milestone for the business was hiring two part-time staff after two years of working alone. The business was also rewarded at the Family Edge Awards, receiving the award for Best Indoor Activity Centre in Ireland – an award which was decided by a public vote.

Caoimhe says ACORNS opened up a new world of support from women in business. She valued the monthly meetings, accountability and the connections she made through the programme.

Looking ahead, Caoimhe's long-term goal is to open more centres and bring sensory play to more families across Ireland.

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



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine