



Gemmarose O'Brien

Adam and Friends

GOING FOR GROWTH PROFILE

NAME:
Gemmarose O'Brien

BUSINESS
Adam and Friends

POSITION
Managing Director

WHAT WE DO
Specialist learning and development toys
Design, manufacture and installation of sensory and soft play rooms.
Training services in learning development and special needs

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Gemmarose O'Brien is a Behaviour Analyst by profession. Growing up with a family member with special needs and with her first hand experience from working in special needs schools, she was keenly aware of the types of toys and services that were needed in the sector, but were just not available in Ireland. She also came from a family steeped in entrepreneurial activity. All this meant that when she encountered a difficulty in finding certain products, her response was – *"if no one else can give me the solution, I will just have to do it myself"*.

In 2011 she set up her business Adam and Friends, selling specialist learning and development toys online. Demand for the range took off, and within a year she had left her regular job to dedicate herself full time to running the company. Since then, she has grown the business year on year. As well as the e-store, the company has expanded into the design, manufacture and installation of sensory and soft play rooms, and provides training services for practitioners in learning development and special needs. The client base has grown to include hospitals, schools and clinical centres as well as parents and teachers, and employment and turnover have continued to grow. All this culminated in her success being recognised by Fingal Local Enterprise Organisation awarding Adam and Friends the Best Established Business Award for 2015.

As with many young entrepreneurs starting out, Gemmarose highlights the support of family in the early days. *"We started small, taking no wages and ploughing everything back into the business. Every spare room in my parent's home was commandeered into use as a workshop, and my parents and other family members were all hugely involved in designing, producing and selling the range. I just could not have done it without them"*.

Growing the business presented a whole new set of challenges. Gemmarose describes it as *"a time to never say no, grab the opportunity and jump and learn how to fly on the way down"*! She explains how being on the Going for Growth programme was a tremendous support during this growth phase. *"Expanding the business threw up many unimagined challenges. You need a calm head, and the support of the Lead Entrepreneur and the other women in my Going for Growth group really helped me focus on what needed to be done now rather than being overwhelmed by everything"*.

According to Gemmarose, a key factor that has fuelled company growth has been the priority they have placed on developing something truly different from what is offered by competitors elsewhere in the market. What makes Adam and Friends unique is that they provide a fully integrated, all encompassing service. The make-up of the multidisciplinary team is critical here, including Occupational Therapy and Behaviour Analysis as well as design, production and sales expertise. *"When customers come to Adam and Friends, they get much, much more than the product they buy. With our personal and professional experience we know and understand the issues clients are facing. We can relate to them, act as a sounding board, and provide informed advice on what solutions might work best for their particular needs. This is what they really value about Adam and Friends"*.

Since being on the Going for Growth Programme, company sales have tripled and they have moved to a new larger premises in Dublin to meet increased demand and to allow them expand the range of products and services that they can offer. Looking to the future, the priority is to continue to grow employment and sales, and in particular to build on growing interest in export markets, particularly with US clients. Once again, Gemmarose cites the importance of what she has learned on Going for Growth as the company pursues these exciting new opportunities. *"Increasing our export presence is hugely exciting for us and while you definitely need to have an open and creative response to new opportunities, it needs to be tempered with a strong dose of reality. You need to carefully manage the growth process. This is one of the key things I learned from Going for Growth"*.

