

**Sprouts** from 1A

When asked about the social media post, Aaron said she felt it embellished the details of the incident and made it seem worse than it was.

“There was an incident, I’m not denying that at all, but it’s not nearly as dramatic as it’s been made to be on Facebook,” she said. According to Aaron, the child was only out of the yard for a brief moment before the teacher noticed he had gotten out.

“The aide had taken a kiddo inside to go potty and the other seven kids were all around the sandbox,” Aaron said. “One little guy was screaming because he had sand in his eyes, and one of the other little boys was able to push the gate open and walk out into the parking lot. The teacher looked up, saw him, ran out and grabbed him. There was a lady who had stopped the car on the side of the road, I guess. That’s when the teacher scooped him up and brought him back inside.”

Aaron said that she immediately went to check the gate, at which point she noticed the latched was broken. Because the gate is rarely used except to take garbage out once a week, Aaron and her staff didn’t notice the broken latch before then. Once she found it, Aaron said she did everything possible to remedy the problem.

“I immediately called the state and reported it to my licensing officer. I called the parents of the kiddo who got out and explained



LENA FELT/SIUSLAW NEWS

**The back fence gate (above), where the playground is located, is where the toddler reportedly managed to get out, crossing the parking lot onto 17th street just north of the lot.**

to them what happened,” said Aaron. “I called my landlord and said I need this fixed immediately. I called a contractor to have them come out and give me a quote for additional fencing and different kinds of locks on the gate. I wrote a letter to notify the parents of every kiddo involved and gave them the letter upon pickup.”

Aaron also explained that she closed the playground down and was not going to allow children back into the area until it was fixed. “I did everything I was supposed to do and followed all the rules, and then I thought it was over,” Aaron said.

But it wasn’t. The Facebook post gained immediate atten-

tion, garnishing more than 150 comments and reactions from upset community members, including several former employees and concerned parents of children who attended Little Sprouts.

One parent, Amber Harris, said she found out about the incident through Facebook and never heard anything from Little Sprouts, even after it was closed on July 15. Upset by what she said felt like a lack of communication and negligence by Little Sprout’s, Harris said she wouldn’t take her son back to the center even if it reopened after 90 days.

When asked why some parents hadn’t been contacted, Aaron said she planned to notify each

parent when they came into the daycare as she preferred to answer any question or concern immediately. “That was the choice I made, not knowing it was going to end up on social media before I had a chance to talk to them.”

Shelby Clark’s 15-month-old daughter attended Little Sprouts part-time and wasn’t there the day the incident occurred. However, Clark said she was notified by Aaron the day it happened via text.

“Tracy reached out to me and indicated there was an incident with a child getting out of a back gate, no one was injured and exaggerations were being posted on social media,” said Clark.

When she heard the news, Clark said she was upset but felt reassured that Aaron was taking the proper steps to address the incident.

“I have seen the way Tracy cares about the children, her business and constantly updating things to make for a great facility to take your children to,” she said. “I also saw how quickly she already had a contractor coming the next day to not only fix the gate but to get a bid on building an extra outer fence.”

However, not everyone held the same sentiment as Clark. Several former employees made comments under the Facebook post alleging that this was not an isolated event and that the daycare has a history of not following state regulations.

But, according to OCC, it had not received any prior reports of violations or any record of violations identified by the state.

Though many of the former employees who commented did not get into details about their allega-

tions against Aaron, one of them, Cheyenne Harris, commented “there are no excuses for the things that happened while we worked there. There is no ‘other side of the story.’ It was neglect not to follow the basic rules set out by the department of early childhood education. I quit because I feared I would get in trouble for the things I was forced to do which I knew were against the law. And I tried to go to the licensing lady and it was brushed under the rug even though I had strong evidence — texts, sign-in sheets, pictures, etc.”

*Siuslaw News* reached out to the former employees for additional comments, but none wished to make any further public statements.

In the meantime, the Office of Child Care is conducting an ongoing investigation about the incident and other allegations former employees have made.

Amber Harris said that she hopes the business will not open again unless it takes the proper measures to assure a safer environment for the children. Clark echoed the need for more protective measures.

“Having the gate fixed and working towards an extra outer gate would ease any type of worry I may have,” Clark said. “But again, I feel they were en route to get the situation addressed before being shut down.”

Aaron said she had made plans to add an additional fence around the property for a while, but because of COVID-19 she was not able to afford to hire a contractor sooner. If Little Sprouts does reopen, Aaron said significant changes will be made to improve the security of the building.

“We would add additional staffing for all outdoor play so that way there is a third person out there,” Aaron said. “We were going to add magnetic locks to all the gates as well as alarms, so that if a gate was opened an alarm would sound.”

“We were also going to install an additional round of four-foot fencing that went all the whole length of the parking lot to the corner and then ran up to the ramps.”

Yet, Aaron isn’t sure any of that will happen because she may not be able to afford an attorney to fight for her operating license back.

“I don’t know that I’ll be able to reopen after this,” she said. “I’m not in any mind to totally make that decision at this moment.”

“But realistically, I’m a single mom with four kids I have to take care of and I can’t bankrupt us to try to save this either.”

# Siuslaw News



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