

SHARA SMILE

A STROLL BELLE MEADE INTERVIEW WITH SHARA CARTER



A UNIQUE APPROACH TO COUNSELING

We sat down with Shara Carter of Shara Smile as she told us the story of how she went from special education teacher to licensed counselor. Her story is full of trials and triumphs as she found her purpose in life, which includes her career, her family, and an interest in the arts!

Where did you grow up?

I grew up all over but landed in Morristown, TN, in 8th grade, where I stayed until I graduated

high school. The year prior, I lived in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia!

I attended College at MTSU where I earned my bachelor's degree in special education and minored in Elementary Ed. I moved to Annapolis, MD, then Fairfax, VA, in 1998 and stayed in the NOVA area until 2021, when I returned to live in Franklin and start my Private Practice. I've lived in Franklin now for 2.25 years.

Tell us about your family.

My dad died of Pancreatic cancer in 2013. My mom lives in Dandridge on

Douglas Lake. Being closer to her as she got older was important to me.

We've developed our mother-daughter relationship, and she was one of the reasons I moved back to this area!

My older brother and his wife live in Lenoir City, and my younger brother and his family recently moved from Kingsport to Hendersonville. I'm thrilled that they moved closer, I really wanted to be more involved in their children's lives as they grew up.

My cousin, her husband and their two teens live in Franklin as well. It's been wonderful to

reconnect and continue to grow our family bond since moving here. I really enjoy spending time with my "teen" family members and being a support system to my family.

As I always wanted a family of my own, and this hasn't happened for me yet, I am thrilled to be pouring into the lives of my family members and being available to support, encourage, and grow our relationships!

What is your business, and how did you start it?

I am all about helping people change their lives for the better. Ultimately, this helps build stronger communities, and with stronger communities, our country and our world are impacted for the better. I like to say that I'm in the business of making the world a better place one person, one couple, one family at a time.

I started my career as a Special Education teacher. I taught in Rutherford County from 1994-1998 at Smyrna Elementary School. After that, I took a break and worked with Dan Miller, Career Counselor, here in Nashville to find a new career path.

I moved to Maryland and then Virginia, where I worked for McLean Bible Church in McLean in their Creative Arts Dept/ Production team. I then worked for several years for a government contracting agency, SAIC, in Event Management. As I worked, I always found time to volunteer with teens at my church and stay involved with the arts, as I am passionate about theater arts, singing, and dancing!

I took six years away from teaching, and I found that I missed the work that helped others grow and learn. I missed my students and their families. I knew I needed to be working in a field that allowed me to help others. Eventually, I worked myself back into the classroom teaching, but I knew I needed something beyond the classroom for myself professionally. Being a wife and mother was also my hope, and with each end of a relationship, I found myself in a counselor's office sorting my heart out along with sorting my future career path



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out. While I worked through my personal relationships, I found that finding my professional path was a very important part of my own healing journey. One day it hit me that I wanted to get my master's in counseling to help people with their challenges as I had been helped.

I earned my master's at Virginia Tech while working full-time as a teacher. With each class I took and each test I took, I knew I had finally found my dream job! After that, I spent six years as a high school counselor in the same school system I had taught for so many years.

What is unique about your business?

I have extensive experience with life change, grief and loss, depression, anxiety, learning issues, the education system, young people, their families, teens, and life in general. I understand grief and loss, not only from losing my father and other family members but also from losing the hopes and dreams of having my own children.

I love using experiential and creative therapies when appropriate with my clients, and while I am a Christian, I value and respect each person's stage and faith in their own life.

Given your business expertise and the nature of what you do, what advice can you offer to the residents?

If you are struggling, don't be afraid to start the process of looking for help. I understand it's sometimes difficult to find the "right" counselor, but know that there is tremendous growth and healing on the other side once you find the right fit. Don't give up looking for help, and be open to the process.

What else should we know about you, your family, or your business?

I love living this life! My hope is that as I continue to grow and learn, my practice in counseling will grow and become better. I want to be my best so that I can help my clients become their best.

My most recent enthusiasm is for the aerial arts, aerial silks! I have spent the last 5 years working on this art form, and it teaches me how to push through challenges, negative self-talk, and physical boundaries.

At this point, I am a one-person practice. I want to be plugged into the community, grow roots here, and be a resource. My creativity is flowing, and I have ideas to expand as the timing is right! Please keep me in mind for you, a family member, or a friend that you know may need a hand during a difficult time!

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