



Tammie Hazlett is a Registered Family Child Care Provider and Owner/Operator of Tammie's Day Care in Thetford, Vermont

Vermont Can't Work Without Her

A mother, grandmother, and "adopted mom" to dozens of children she's cared for over 21 years in the child care business, Tammie Hazlett is an institution in the small rural town of Thetford, Vermont. She's also a member of the [Vital Communities Work Group for the Upper Valley](#) (situated between New Hampshire and Vermont) where she focuses on child care as a key component of a healthy economy in rural

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communities. "One of our local restaurants has closed because it can't get staff," she explains. "How can they if their employees can't get child care? It's a complex issue, but we have to keep folks working to keep businesses open, and that means there has to be a place where their kids can be safe and learn."

Most of the families Tammie serves work about 30 miles away, many of them at Dartmouth Hitchcock Hospital in Hanover, New Hampshire. Their children, ranging in age from 6 months to 4 years old, spend up to 10 hours a day with Tammie playing, reading, cultivating vegetables, and cooking. "Cooking with kids is math, chemistry, nutrition, and really delicious fun that brings everyone together," she says. "The youngest can dump the cup into the bowl, and the oldest can figure out that two half-cups is the same as one whole cup. A 3-year-old might come in as a picky eater, but when she grows something in the garden and then gets to cook it and serve it, curiosity gets the best of her and she wants to try whatever we've made."

Parents love Tammie's emphasis on growing and cooking food, but doing these activities with six children each day doesn't come cheap. Tammie participates in the federal CACFP program, which covers perhaps 30% of her food costs. "The subsidy is paid based on my report of actual attendance," she explains. "I shop every Sunday and buy fresh, healthy ingredients based upon my expectations of who will attend that week, but when kids are out sick or parents keep them home, that's food wasted and I can't request a reimbursement."

CACFP is just one of the systems designed to supplement child care affordability and accessibility that undercompensate and overregulate providers. Utilities, equipment upgrades, paid holidays, health insurance and business insurance add up to a lot of overhead for running a business. "I just live on what's leftover at the end of each month," Tammie says. "And that's both unpredictable and miniscule." Tammie is a registered provider (Vermont has three categories of home-based care: unregistered, registered, and licensed). Over the years, she's taken dozens of trainings in everything from safety to child development. Her program is rated as four-star in the Child Care Quality Rating System, and her program is consistently fully enrolled. "Getting licensed would just be jumping through a lot more hoops without any real benefit to me or the children," she says. The requirements for licensure include expensive facility and infrastructure upgrades that wouldn't be compensated for in increased income.

Instead of stratifying the categories of home-based providers, she says a better approach would be to better subsidize all child care providers, teach them the "business" of running a business, and provide incentives for young people to train as early childhood educators. She points to programs run by [First Children's Finance](#) that help child care providers establish sustainable business practices and calls for more training in using the technology required for all the reporting that providers must do in order to get grants or subsidies.

As a member of the Vermont Early Childhood Network, she sometimes mentors high school students who are interested in early childhood education. But, she notes, many [colleges have dropped that major because of the low earning trajectory](#). "You can't even get the degree that would recognize what we do as a profession. So we also need ways to acknowledge and compensate for the decades of experience and training so many home-based providers already have." The shrinking pipeline into the early child care workforce also means that as current providers age out and retire, the child care staff shortage is likely to worsen—making it even harder for families to find quality care for their children.

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