



Carmela Enriquez is a License-Exempt Child Care Provider in Greeley, Colorado

Image courtesy of Yes! Magazine

Colorado Can't Work Without Her

"I am doing everything possible to offer high-quality care and to be fair to the immigrant families I serve who cannot afford expensive child care. But we providers also need support. We are growing the future, and it just makes sense to invest a little bit of money in children when they are young to make sure they are healthy, strong and ready for school."

Like many immigrants, I started my work life in a restaurant. That was 18 years ago. But then I got pregnant and I knew I couldn't keep working there. I was taking care of my own baby at home, but then my sisters and brothers started asking me to take care of their kids, too. At first I didn't know how many children I was allowed to take care of, but the parents could only pay \$10 per child per day.

In 2013, I found out about some child care classes that were available from the United Way [PASO](#) program. I learned so much about how to provide quality child care and appropriate snacks and so many other things. I joined a child care provider network and also started referring parents to other providers so I had fewer children in my care. But I didn't really think of my work as a business yet.

The families that come to me are immigrant families. They are not earning much. I cannot tell them I can't take care of their children because they can't pay me or they can only pay me \$15 per child for a full day.

Right now I am in a personal debate about whether I should get my license or not. None of the providers in my group are licensed, but they are very committed to their jobs. They take all the trainings on CPR, mental health and even reading. We promote safe care and our community depends on us. So I worry that people will look at me differently if I get a license and turn this into a business instead of a service.

For Spanish-speaking providers like me, there are three huge barriers to getting licensed. One is just getting information in our home language: The majority of materials are only available in English, so we don't even know what supports are available or what we need to do next. The second one is that a lot of trainings are in the daytime. If I am home with babies, I can't attend that. And the third one is fear: A lot of providers are fearful of sharing their addresses or numbers on forms or applications. We need someone who speaks Spanish and who has that human trusting connection to explain that when you join these programs, you are not in danger.

When we learn about getting licensed, we always learn first about all the requirements you need to meet, how your home has to be, how many square feet per child, and all the steps you have to take to get licensed. These are the hard parts, and then we start to see obstacles everywhere. Providers need motivation and a connection to each other and real support from someone who can guide us around all those obstacles.

We also need programs that support both the provider and the family. Many parents can only pay \$25 a day, or even \$15 a day, so they are calling one provider after another looking for the cheapest place. It's really sad for me to say no because I know they can't afford it, and yet I am learning to value my work. I used to be embarrassed about staying home and taking care of children, but now I am proud. It's one of the most important things to do. I am a child care provider, doing essential work, and I deserve to earn a little bit more.

Right now, the program that is helping me the most is the [Thriving Providers Project](#) [funded through Home Grown], which pays me a little cash supplement each month. I used to say, if I buy snacks this month, then I can't buy any new learning materials. But with this supplement, now I can buy both, and the tools and materials are expensive! The children I have right now are between 3 and 12 years old, so they need different things. And sometimes I have them for 12 hours a day, so I feed them multiple times, and food is expensive.

The money I earn from child care pays for my gas, my car insurance, a little bit extra, but it does not pay all of my bills, even my basic needs. I don't know how single FFN providers do it. We don't have health care. We don't have retirement accounts. But we are doing important work for our communities.

That's why we providers need support. We are growing the future, and it just makes sense to invest a little bit of money in children when they are young to make sure they are healthy, strong and ready for school.