



Kris Barbeau

Licensed Family Child Care Provider
Owner Operator of Kris's Child Care
Andale, Kansas

Kansas Can't Work Without Her

"Wichita is considered the Air Capital of the World, with several big aircraft plants so the parents of my kids work there or in healthcare or in teaching—all essential jobs. I've only taken three sick days in 27 years ... if I'm off, parents have to scramble to get something else lined up and it really puts them out."

– Kris Barbeau

I've been providing in-home child care for 27 years now. Andale is a rural area about 20 miles west of Wichita, with only about 1,000 people in town. We don't have any centers in my area, and I only know of three other licensed providers, so it's tough to find child care.

Some of the children I started with decades ago are married now and bring me their children. That makes me feel ancient, but it also makes me feel good because I've had a really positive impact on their lives—twice! People here want child care in a family environment close to home. Families really like that they see me and the children out in the community—at the park, at the pool, at the library. Everyone

knows me here and I love being of service to my community. I get bombarded with calls from parents needing child care, almost daily.

Right now I take care of eight children under 6. Three of them are 5, so they will go to kindergarten in the fall. And they are so ready. They have all of the knowledge, confidence, and social skills to do well with their peers in a new place. The youngest I have is 11 months old, and four more in between the infant and the 5-year-olds. They all started with me as babies, so as soon as word gets out that some are moving up to kindergarten, I start getting more calls to fill their slots. That means my household is as busy and full as it was when my own children were at

home. A lot of times I still cook for six people: meatloaf, spaghetti, casseroles. Then I use the leftovers the next day for child care lunches with healthy fruits and vegetables and milk.

Wichita is considered the Air Capital of the World, with several big aircraft plants so the parents of my kids work there or in healthcare or in teaching—all essential jobs. I've only taken three sick days in 27 years. I don't get paid for sick days, and if I'm off, parents have to scramble to get something else lined up and it really puts them out. Last year, when I had knee surgery, the doctor wanted me to wait two weeks before getting back to work after surgery because I was on crutches, but I asked my sister to come help me so that I could open back up after a week. I didn't want parents to have to miss work or find a sitter.

Luckily, I am able to get health insurance through my husband's work. If I were single, it would be a financial burden to buy health insurance on the market. Even though you don't do this work to make a fortune, I do have to be reminded that it is a business, not a charity. I figured out that for the infants, I make just \$3.27/hour. For each child over 18 months, I make just \$2.54/hour. When you add that up for six kids, it's not even \$20 an hour, which is pretty alarming.

That's certainly the reason why more people who love to raise kids don't go into this field. Even if they have the patience—it takes a lot of patience!—they realize that it won't pay. You're open at 6 a.m. and closed at 5 p.m. if you're lucky. That gives you a second to sit down before you start thinking about fixing dinner for your own family. And there's wear and tear on your home that you have to consider. Somehow you have to find a way to balance the expenses and the income. If we want to have a child care workforce, that's the first thing that needs to be fixed.

In addition, all the paperwork you have to do in order to get licensed and stay licensed, to prove that you offer quality child care, should be compensated in reasonable wages. One thing that would help is to continue the same supports we had during the COVID pandemic without having to go through another pandemic. During the pandemic, they waived our licensing fee, which is \$85 a year, and provided a lot of free cleaning supplies and free classes for things we're required to have like CPR certification. That made a world of difference, and I was so appreciative. Now everything's back to where we have to pay for all those things ourselves. To make up for inflation and the added costs, I've had to raise my rates, which, unfortunately, passes the hardship on to families.