



**Erika Sanchez** is owner/operator of MiKaSa Family Childcare and a registered family child care provider in Linden, New Jersey

# New Jersey Can't Work Without Her

*"Their parents are doctors and firefighters, some English speaking, some Spanish speaking, and some are single moms. The families are diverse, and my program is diverse, too. That is the beauty of family child care; we have a mix of ages, so kids can interact and learn from each other. They get lots of one-on-one attention because they have the same caregiver from morning to evening, from month to month and year to year. They become part of our family, and we are part of their family. We are all one family."*

I grew up in Colombia, where my mother was a family child care provider for 30 years. My sister and I helped her when we came home from school. I pursued a master's degree in journalism and graduated in my home country, Colombia.

Nevertheless, as a young entrepreneur, I had big dreams and eventually migrated to the United States. I worked hard, building a foundation for myself and my family. In 2018, I decided to open [MiKasa Family Childcare](https://www.homegrownchildcare.org) in New Jersey. After my husband and I suffered the personal loss of

our baby, we knew we wanted to give back to the community and take care of children whose families came to the U.S. without any support, with language barriers, but who needed to go to work. We opened our program with just one child, and we have never closed our doors since. I have provided child care to babies as young as 3 weeks and up to 5 or 6 years old when they're ready for school. They call me Mommy and my husband, Dada.

Today, I care for five children, which is what my license allows. Their parents are doctors and firefighters; some speak English, some speak Spanish, and some are single moms. The families are diverse, and my program is diverse, too. That is the beauty of family child care: We have a mix of ages, so kids can interact and learn from each other. They get lots of one-on-one attention because they have the same caregiver from morning to evening, month to month and year to year. They become part of our family, and we are their family. We are all one family.

My program opens at 7 a.m. because that is what parents need. I care for children until 6 p.m. because that is what parents need. Even though I work 11 hours a day, the state doesn't fully include me in the child care workforce. For example, when they give grants, the [applications are open to centers first](#), and home-based providers can only apply in the following year if there is leftover funding. Another issue in New Jersey is the cost of renewing our license every three years: a new background check, a new medical exam, and a tuberculosis test. The TB test costs \$250 per person and is required for everyone in the house: my husband, my mother, and me. I can't afford private health insurance, so that is \$750 that comes out of my pocket.

The bottom line is that expenses for my business have increased, but families cannot afford to pay more, and the government has cut back on support. For example, I participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), but the rates for reimbursement have gone back to what they were in 2019, and they

have returned to a [tiering system](#). So now I am waiting for them to check my income and the incomes of the families I serve to see if I still qualify for Tier One. Even before this, I got less from the reimbursements than I spent on healthy food for the kids I serve. I have to ask parents to chip in and bring fruit, milk or healthy snack donations.

The government wants more providers to participate in CACFP, but many providers have been waiting months for approval. Even if approved, the [money may not be worth the paperwork process](#), inspections, etc. Similarly, I know providers waiting to join New Jersey's QRIS program, but there aren't enough Spanish-speaking trainers to offer the required information and training in their home language. They cannot get stars and demonstrate the quality of their program without more support. That's why I help many Spanish-speaking providers with translation and direct them to resources they can use. The state network doesn't compensate me for this work, but we Latinos work just as hard as anybody else to maintain our business and help our communities, so we need to be fully included. We need more training in Spanish and more translated information because it is essential for our Hispanic community to run our business.

Despite all these challenges, I love my work and being part of children's lives. I am so happy to see these children flourish in preschool. Because of my program, they know how to sit at the table, put on their shoes, and interact with other kids. They know their shapes, numbers, and letters, how to control their emotions, and how to ask for things appropriately. Even though it is hard to make ends meet on my income, I don't have the heart to close my doors knowing that these children and their moms need me so they can go to work and build a better future for their children.