



Valeria Holloway, Licensed Family Group Child Care Home Provider in Las Cruces, New Mexico

New Mexico Can't Work Without Her

"The child care crisis is just like cancer. You can't wait. If you treat it early, you might be able to beat it and live a long, successful life. But if you just ignore it – if federal leaders just keep sitting and not doing anything, it will hurt our families and it will kill our economy."

I started my child care business in September 2001 in Virginia. My husband and I had five children between us, and then I had two more children back to back. I planned to go back to work, but the cost of child care was astronomical. It was basically my paycheck. Then, I met a woman who was doing child care in her home, and she suggested I could do the same thing. She was such a fabulous mentor. She told me who I needed to contact and set me up with all the paperwork so I could get licensed. I started with just \$5,000.

In 2006, Virginia changed how child care would be done. The state wanted all child care providers to become teachers, so we had to return to school. In the span of six years, I obtained the Child Development Associate degree, a paraprofessional teaching degree, a certificate in early childhood education, and an associate's degree. And before you know it, I was caring for my two little ones and another child from the neighborhood.

In 2014, my husband was working for Raytheon, and they transferred us to New Mexico. It was a good job, and we thought that after we moved, I wouldn't have to work. But my biggest supporter—my husband—shared my experience with friends, and I took care of a few kids informally because those friends needed child care. I charged them \$50 a week because my husband had a good job and I didn't need to take money out of peoples' pockets.

But a year later, he lost his job, so I got my license and returned to taking care of the kids full-time as a business. I even helped the state of New Mexico improve its licensing regulations based on many changes I'd seen in Virginia. Soon after that, we moved to a new rental, and my phone started blowing up with people needing child care. This really is a word-of-mouth business, and parents are always looking for someone with a good reputation.

I became a 5-star program under New Mexico's QRIS [FOCUS](#) program in 2017 and we moved to a new house that is our house upstairs and my child care business downstairs. It was ideal because I didn't have to do any major renovations to turn it into a daycare. Still, on my salary I needed to shop at thrift stores and Walmart to turn it into a classroom with seven different centers: books, blocks, dramatic play, math, etc. I have a big backyard so kids can get outside every day. I do circle time, meals, and literacy lessons and teach children the skills and behaviors that set them up for success in school.

Now I am licensed as a family group child care home, with 19 children enrolled. In the past three years, I've gotten licensed for pre-K and graduated with a bachelor's in early childhood education. Now, I am in graduate school to get a master's in early childhood education. I have an assistant who takes care of the infants and toddlers and I teach pre-K.

Initially, I set my hours to meet my parents' needs, which included weekends. At one time, I was open seven days a week. But now I've cut back so my hours are 6 a.m. to 8 p.m., five days a week. That gives me time to catch my breath, reset, and finish school.

Most of my families are middle class. They work for the city as firefighters or police officers or for the hospital as doctors and nurses. Before [New Mexico's constitutional amendment](#) in 2022, most of them were really scraping to afford child care because they didn't have any subsidy. But now, all copays have been waived, even for middle-class families, and everyone can get the child care they need.

The state initiatives, which the majority of people in New Mexico voted for, have also created pay parity for child care providers. Because of my pre-K certification, I am now making about \$32 an hour, and I've been able to raise salaries for my staff by \$3 an hour over the minimum wage, too. Now, I can hire a team that I can keep. Now, they see a financial future for themselves in child care. The centers with 800 kids can pay staff \$18, even \$20 an hour. I have 12 infants and toddlers, so I don't bring in enough to pay that much, but I hope we're headed in that direction.

Suppose this state continues to do better and be better every year, funding early education generously. In that case, we will eventually move up the ranks in education, and our kids will go to college and then stay in the state and work here instead of moving away.

Now, I am collaborating with several agencies to make a wage and career lattice to keep educators in early childhood education. The Secretary of New Mexico's Early Childhood Education and Care Department wants to put that in place by 2025; by then, all educators will be where they need to be to receive the wages they deserve. So, it seems to me that New Mexico is really leading the way and showing the rest of the country how critical child care is. We're investing in the people and the families who are the foundation of our economy. That's the lesson for the federal government because the child care crisis is just like cancer. You can't wait. If you treat it early, you might be able to beat it and live a long, prosperous life. But if you just ignore it, if federal leaders just keep sitting and not doing anything, it will hurt American families and kill our economy.