



Allison Burns

Owner-director of Health Start Child Care
in Traverse City, Michigan

Michigan Can't Work Without Her

I began my business, Healthy Start Child Care, after my second child was born. I wanted to stay home with my kids, and it made more financial sense for me to earn income by caring for other children along with my own. My husband and I were living in Tacoma, Washington, where he served in the U.S. Air Force, at the time. Home-based child care providers are well-organized in Washington. I was fortunate to find the Family Child Care Association in Tacoma, which provided training on child development and business practices and a mentor to get me off to a great start.

A year later, we moved to Traverse City, Michigan, and bought a house where I became a family child care provider, able to care for up to six children in our home. My business transitioned in 2017 to a group child care

Home-based providers themselves are the best advocates for changes in government policies that they need to stay in business. ... Business owners and employers who depend on child care need a thriving mixed-delivery system that allows families to choose the best situation for their children whether that's home-based child care, center-based child care, or school-based programs. We need to include and plan for home-based child care across all early child care education offerings.

home. I hired additional teachers to care for up to 12 children, and in 2022, my licensed capacity increased to 14.

An upside to my career is the opportunity to work with amazing families! In my 29 years in the business, I've cared for about 150 children, ages 4 weeks to 12 years old; a few in short-term drop-in arrangements, but most in long-term relationships with families. These long-term relationships are one of the most valuable aspects of home-based child care. Children learn social-emotional and cognitive skills through consistent relationships, and we are quite capable of preparing them for kindergarten and beyond.

Learning about young children and best practices keeps me motivated. Over the years, I have taken many hours of training beyond licensing requirements. What started as an interest in taking a college class about children with autism ended up with me earning a Child Development Associates credential and a certificate in child development. I recently completed my master's degree in early childhood education and I also have a degree in hospitality management, which has been so helpful to me as a child care business owner.

Caring for young children in a home-based program can be a difficult, isolating job. Children need our full attention to guide their growth and development, and sometimes there can be challenging behavior that requires more from us. The pandemic brought these realities to life for parents who were suddenly home with their children full time. But it's important to recognize that child care also impacts employers and the wider community because people need to work, children need to learn, and one day these children will go to school and become working adults.

Home-based providers themselves are the best advocates for changes in government policies that they need to stay in business. We need to have a seat at the table when regulations that impact our businesses are formulated or changed. Among our priorities in Michigan right now are decisions about increasing our subsidy rates to equal the rates that centers receive, changing ratios so we can accommodate more infants, and establishing a pool of trained substitutes that home-based providers can call on when they have an appointment that requires taking time off.

And lastly, business owners and employers who depend on child care need a thriving mixed-delivery system that allows families to choose the best situation for their children whether that's home-based child care, center-based child care, or school-based programs. We need to include and plan for home-based child care across all early child care education offerings. Many parents would prefer to keep their 4-year-olds in preschool at my home-based program rather than transition them to a larger, more "institutional" center. For those who have a preschooler and a younger child, taking both kids to a single place that also provides all-day child care (rather than transporting kids to two different schools) adds precious minutes to a parent's busy day. Children in my program have become confident learners with close relationships to friends and caregivers, and many parents feel the home-based

environment is also ideal for preparing them for kindergarten. One parent of a current kindergartener and a 3-year-old put it this way:

"My two children have thrived in the learning environment you've so thoughtfully developed along with your skilled team of teachers. They enjoy and look forward to their days with you, and are curious and excited to learn and participate in the world around them. The attachments they've formed with different ages of children (rather than interacting only with other children their age) also provide a basis for caring relationships throughout their lives. We are supportive and would participate in any UPK program at Healthy Start that could help more home-based providers have access to the resources needed to create care programs that support all early childhood learning levels."