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📍 NEW MEXICO

## Choosing to Be Part of the Solution

I live in Santa Fe, New Mexico, a state that has been a pioneer in the work of supporting child care providers. I'm the mother of two beautiful girls, and when I was taking care of my children at home during the pandemic, I was, without even knowing it, discovering the world of family, friend and neighbor care. During that time when so many child care providers closed, there was a real need for child care because parents needed to go back to work.

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*For me, child care is a labor of love. It is how I help the families, how I help children, and how I help my community. When you teach children, you share the essence of who you are. When you are a provider at home, you don't just open your doors to families, you also open your heart.*

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I just couldn't stand by and do nothing, so I started taking care of kids in the church where my husband is the associate pastor, and now sometimes I also take care of them in my home.

I discovered that I enjoy being with and taking care of children so much, so I started going to trainings and educating myself. I learned how to create a good space for children, how to keep them safe, how to teach them. Then more families called me and they wanted to bring their kids because they said, "We trust you and we like that you are at home, and we know that when you're with them, you talk to them and play with them and help them." We do healthy things together. I read books with them, play with toys, and listen to music. We go outside to a park in the neighborhood and make crafts. These are things that make the children feel close and loved and make the parents feel comfortable because they are like the things they would do in their own home.

Sometimes I take care of three or four toddlers and my own child at the same time. Sometimes I take care of a child after school or on a day when there is no school. Some parents work in restaurants, or cleaning, or take care of elderly people at home. Sometimes they work at night or on Saturdays when child care centers are not open. Sometimes they can pay me and sometimes they cannot. But I can take care of children during those odd times at my home in a space that is for kids but also for families.

For me, child care is a labor of love. It is how I help the families, how I help children, and how I help my community. When you teach children, you share the essence of who you are. When you are a provider at home, you don't just open your doors to families, you also open your heart.

Many of the families I serve speak very little English. They may even qualify for New Mexico's child care subsidy based on their income, but the process of applying is long, confusing, and sometimes scary for them, especially for those with uncertain immigration status. They don't want to write down personal information that could be used against them or other family members. And sometimes preschools don't have the resources to take all of the kids who need them.

There is one little girl who I cared for from the time she was a newborn until she was 3 years old. Her mother used drugs when she was in utero, so the baby had a lot of emotional problems. I loved that little girl so much, and eventually she became more confident and less anxious. Her grandmother, who was caring for her, really wanted me to continue to be her caregiver because we had a bond, but she couldn't use the New Mexico subsidy to pay me, so instead she sent her to a public preschool.

Sometimes families decide to leave their children with an older sibling where they don't get enough supervision or they might be exposed to drugs or media that is not good for them. They have to go to work, so they don't really have a choice. They are contributing to the economy, but the child care system isn't really available to them because it's hard for them to navigate or because of their immigration status. That's why home-based FFN caregivers are so important in New Mexico, and we need changes to the system to support those of us who want to be registered and educated and licensed to be the best caretakers we can be. ([New Mexico regulations](#) designate multiple tiers of child care homes

including "license exempt," "registered," and "licensed.")

For example, it was very challenging for me to get registered because even though the forms I had to fill out are also in Spanish, there was very little guidance about how to go through the process. The fine print is very confusing, and some of my forms were rejected without any clear explanation. Eventually, with help from [Growing Up New Mexico](#), I was able to get my application accepted. But then, I had to go to the police station and give my fingerprints for the background check, and no one there at the time could explain in Spanish.

Now that I am registered, I have access to more training and financial support. I am working on getting my university degree from Mexico validated in the United States. And I hope to transfer some credits toward a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential so that I can continue to work in the child care profession.

Until then, I will continue to help families who don't have access to formal child care and work toward my dream of opening my own family child care home. Because I rent, I will have to have permission from the landlord, get insurance, and pass all the safety and fire inspections in my home. It's really hard for people who live in small apartments to meet the [state's requirement](#) of 35 square feet per child! There will be more forms and fees and approvals. It is a long and daunting process, but I am grateful that I have the opportunity to take care of my children at home. Many women have to go to work and they worry about their children the same as me. I am part of the solution for them.