



**Xochil Cáliz**

Family, friend and neighbor  
caregiver in Santa Fe

📍 NEW MEXICO

## Professionalizing My Calling

I am from a small city in northern Honduras called La Ceiba. I met my husband in the United States, and shortly after we got married, we had a baby. In my country, I studied to be a computer engineer, but once in Santa Fe, New Mexico, we found it very difficult and expensive to have someone care for our baby. It was 2016, and there were no child care subsidies, no help of any kind. We concluded that I would have to stay home with our daughter while my husband worked. A short time later, a neighbor asked if I could care for her baby, and then another neighbor did, too; word began to spread through the neighborhood, and I

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ended that year with five children in my care. That's how I became an FFN (Family, Friend and Neighbor) provider.

My story begins like many others, but for that very reason, it can also serve as inspiration for someone who finds themselves in the same situation my family was in back in 2016. Mine has been a long journey, but also a very satisfying one: Today, I have a degree in early childhood education, I have started caring for children with special needs, I collaborate with Home Grown, and I am preparing to get my child care provider license.

Discovering my passion as a provider has led me to professionalize my calling. This is a critical step in the career of every provider: deciding which path to follow to grow and to offer a quality of service that increasingly benefits children and parents. That's why I decided to go back to school, and this year I managed to obtain my associate's degree in early childhood education after receiving a scholarship from the New Mexico Higher Education Department. It was a great challenge, taking classes in English and Spanish while keeping my responsibilities with the children and with my own family. I value this degree much more than my first in engineering, because it cost me more. This time, my daughter, who is almost 9 years old, was at my graduation ceremony, witnessing my achievement and the result of my hard work. That is priceless.

A professional degree also allows me to improve the service I provide to families and justify my fees. Parents appreciate having a qualified person caring for their children,

which adds value to the inherent advantages of home-based child care: flexible hours, personalized attention, family environment, and language. Most parents are immigrants who work in the city, have unconventional work schedules, and appreciate being able to communicate in Spanish with me and share the same culture. I work hard to maintain open communication with them to coordinate schedules and establish routines, even ensuring that children's naps are respected. And children who don't speak Spanish also learn. I also teach all children American Sign Language, a fun and helpful communication method.

There is an enormous demand for child care in New Mexico. The state has done a very good job creating subsidies and programs that benefit parents and providers, but most programs are aimed at licensed providers or those with registered homes. For a long time, I have been working on the project of being able to register my house, which is a lengthy and costly process, involving renovations and restorations according to the specifications required by the state; these guidelines are sometimes confusing or contradictory when we also consider county, city, and fire department regulations. Licensed providers can access subsidies to make these home improvements, but that is not my case. There is still much work to be done for FFN providers, and I have learned a lot about all these things thanks to Home Grown.

My work with Home Grown began 1 year ago, and it not only gave me resources and knowledge to improve my performance; it also made me aware of my limitations of how much knowledge I still don't have. Meetings with other caregivers allow me to share what I know, especially what I have learned in my studies on child development and managing challenging behaviors. They also motivate me to always keep learning about our profession and the challenges and solutions happening in other states in the country.

I am very committed to the idea that my colleagues continue to study and prepare themselves. I tell them that more training not only brings a better quality of service, but also better economic opportunities. I hope my experience inspires more people to dedicate themselves to child care because it is an enormous need in our community. As for my own learning, I have a growing interest in caring for children with special needs, which I have started doing this year, and I want to deepen my studies and perhaps pursue a new specialization. There are not enough resources in Spanish in this area, and it is something I could contribute to as a caregiver.

I know this is a demanding profession, but the personal satisfaction it gives me is immense. Working with children rejuvenates me and, honestly, it's even therapeutic. They make me laugh every day. What other job is like that?