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📍 WASHINGTON, D.C.

Finding My True Calling In Life

In my late 30s, I worked at a little bit of everything, and I was raising four children. I was a licensed CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant) for a while, caring for sick people. I cared for my own children. I volunteered. One of my jobs was working at a bank, and I noticed that when customers came in with small children, I could always make them feel welcome. Finally, I asked myself and even prayed about the question: What is my true calling in life?

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I realized that every time I've really made a difference for people, I was caregiving. So, I began working at a preschool, where I realized that in order to make this my profession, I would need credentials. So I worked hard to get my Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, specializing in infants and toddlers.

In 2015, I purchased my own home and started looking into the licensing process to open my own family child care home. I had a lot of support to get started, particularly from [Mary's Center](#), which provided training, supplies, and guidance for the licensing process. In spring 2016, I opened my program and started caring for infants and toddlers.

It took me a few years to progress up D.C.'s [Quality Rating and Improvement System](#), which measures a lot of things including my training, my curriculum, family engagement, whether my teaching is appropriate for the children I serve, etc. I'm proud of the fact that since 2023, I have the highest quality rating, and a big part of it is observations of how I, and my staff, interact with the children. In the old days, they wanted to see that you had circle time, play time, cleaning time. But now, they are really looking at how we invite children into activities and how we respond to children's interests and encourage them to lead their own learning. Sometimes, children don't want to sit down for circle time, but if I start singing, the children will lean in and start singing, too or come over to read the story with me. If a child asks me a big question, I turn that back and ask them, "What do you think?" That gets them to using their own brain – wondering and being imaginative. This is how little ones learn by leading.

I am licensed for nine children, and I typically have mostly infants and toddlers. I also have three staff assistants who come at different parts of the day. Every day, I open up at 7 a.m. and we are busy and engaged until 5 p.m. I believe that home-based care is where young children really thrive because the consistency of our routines and having the same caregiver for three or four years in a row creates a family atmosphere. In the old days, it was grandmothers, aunts, uncles taking care of kids at home. For some, that's still the way, and when kids come to my home, even though we're not related, we can create the same feeling of family that makes them feel secure and happy.

I live in a predominantly low-income area, so most of the families I serve use the subsidy. I'm also enrolled in the federal food program (CACFP), which helps, but it doesn't totally cover the cost of food for feeding nine kids. [D.C.'s Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund](#) is a blessing. It really helps, but making ends meet as a child care provider is still hard. The cost of supplies keeps going up, but the subsidy stays low, and parents can't afford to pay more.

In addition to being a caregiver, I am also a business owner and an employer. Most of my staff qualify for medicaid or Affordable Care Act health insurance, so instead of traditional health insurance benefits, I contribute to a 401K for them. Together, we make it possible for parents to work, my staff to work, and myself to earn a living.