



Jacqueline Chávez

licensed home-based child care
provider in Pasco

📍 WASHINGTON

A Provider and Mentor

I am Jaqueline Chávez, a licensed child care provider in the state of Washington. I have 25 years of experience caring for children and have had thousands of experiences, good and bad, but my favorite memories are all with the children I have been lucky enough to care for.

I come from Mexico, from the state of Colima, and I arrived in the United States in 1992. At first, I dedicated myself to my home and my children, but then I worked in a warehouse for five years. It was a hard time, as my husband worked during the day, and I worked at night so we could be present to take care of our children.

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I always wanted to be a teacher for young children, but in Mexico, I could not pursue that career for family reasons. In the U.S., with how difficult it was to work and take care of my children, and with the need that my coworkers had to find adequate child care, I began to think about caring for children as an option to work and at the same time be close to my children. It was also a way to realize my passion for teaching and children. So, little by little, I began to learn and consider the idea of becoming a child care provider. I started doing it in my house without a license, but after taking classes and training, I got licensed. Fortunately, Washington provides many opportunities for obtaining a license.

The first children were from my coworkers. After that, and to this day, the families who have come to my door have been referred by other families. I have never needed to advertise or go looking for “clients.” Parents understand the value of child care, especially when most of them are immigrants who work in the fields and have to follow schedules that vary according to the season and the harvest. This is something a child care center can’t offer. During asparagus season, which is very common in Washington State, parents come to drop off their children at 3 a.m. and pick them up at 3 or 4 p.m. During apple season, work starts at 4:30 a.m.; during potato season, at 6 p.m. I’m always ready. I extend my hours as parents need, and I provide the children with care that is as similar as possible to what they receive at home. I think that if this option didn’t exist for parents, they simply wouldn’t be able to work, or they would be forced to seek less ideal solutions, which would be detrimental to the children. I am also a migrant, who came to

this country in search of a future for my family. This is my way of supporting the community. It is a wonderful job but also exhausting. I not only take care of children, I also help to shape them. I feel like a teacher. If the child is going to enter kindergarten, I want them to go with everything they need to learn and, if possible, more.

We have many advantages regarding the child care industry in Washington. The state helps many parents pay for care, which benefits us providers. Many parents receive state assistance, which also means that we, as providers, have a stable income.

However, there are also challenges. The state is stringent in its controls and regulations and continually adds more requirements. We have to take classes and receive visits; what was previously a 74-page instruction manual is now 300 pages of everything we must comply with. The visits of the licensors to our homes can also be a significant challenge. I would like them to be more understanding, to see that we have a common goal, which is the well-being of the children, and that, from that point of view, we should be a team. I would also like to see more up-to-date benefits and programs that cover more low-income and middle-class families and better management of state resources.

Another major challenge is the fear migrant parents feel about the federal government's current immigration policies. Thinking that they might not be able to return to pick up their children. It's a constant fear, and it also affects the children, who tell me they see their parents worried. I try to hold small meetings with parents, explaining how to talk about these issues at home, because children hear everything and end up terrified at the thought of returning home and not finding their parents. It's a fear that doesn't just impact grown-ups.

Regarding Home Grown, I like to meet with other providers to share experiences and

resources. I also like to integrate providers without a license so that they know both sides of the coin and can decide whether to obtain their license.

I believe that all providers, with or without a license, should have the same rights and benefits. That is a challenge we face at the national level. In the end, we are all taking care of children and providing an important service. I am always willing to help other providers because I believe in equality and mutual support.

I have more than 600 hours of training in child care, 25 years of experience in this work, and countless stories—so many things that the children tell you, so many great memories. I always say that when I am no longer in this job, I think I am going to write a book. I've followed the lives of many families and children in my care. Once, as I was leaving a party, I ran into one I had cared for 10 years earlier, now a young man. He stopped to say hello and told his friends, "She's like my mom. She taught me how to eat, how to walk, so many things that made me the person I am." That's a moment I'll remember until the last day my eyes are open in this world.