



**Carime Ruvalcaba**

licensed provider in Grand Island

📍 NEBRASKA

## How I Became a Leader for Other Providers

I am originally from Chihuahua, Mexico, and life's paths led me to work in Nebraska's meat processing plants. It's backbreaking work that takes a toll on the body—you finish the day exhausted, with pain in your hands and back. That's how it was every day for 14 years. When my children were older, I told myself I wanted to change. But what to do? I thought, *well, my house is big, I'm a good mom, I think I could take care of children.*

It took me a year to get my Family Child Care Home license. I don't speak English, so

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completing the forms, requirements, training, and so on was a great challenge, which I faced with the help of my two children, who were 14 and 16 years old at the time; there was no one else to help me, no resources in Spanish. Today, nine years later, I operate Karime Child Care LLC, with a Family Child Care Home I license, and care for ten children in Grand Island, Nebraska. I was the first provider to obtain the national CDA (Child Development Associate) certification in Spanish in the state, and the first and only Hispanic provider to join the [Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Leadership Cadre](#) program of the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska, which brings together 25 leading early childhood education professionals to discuss topics and ideas that benefit the sector. From these meetings, my own project to support other providers was born, which I started with a colleague and is called Creciendo ("Growing"). From the beginning, my goal has been not only to operate my child care program but also to contribute to my community and offer other providers the guidance I didn't have when I started.

I organize monthly meetings with other providers, help them navigate the licensing process, and share resources and training with them. Providers need to understand the business side of childcare: taxes, finances, everything necessary to operate smoothly, and focus on what matters most, the education of children. That's why I created the "Professional Care Educator" notebook, a manual designed to help providers organize their financial and administrative information. It has been a success, and seeing how they use and benefit

from it fills me with pride. Now I am working on a new book that details the step-by-step process to obtain a license in Nebraska, hoping to simplify the process even further.

Working with Home Grown has been crucial; they have made me feel valued by providing support, resources, and professional growth opportunities. The national collaboration and information exchange they facilitate are incredibly valuable. I also participate in an initiative called 6 Regions, One Nebraska, which helps providers obtain licenses with the support of the Chamber of Commerce and the governor.

In addition to my work as an entrepreneur and mentor, I have returned to my university studies and am about to finish my associate's degree in early childhood education. Although my English is still not very good, technology helps me translate readings and maintain good grades. Being a student in English has made me think about bilingualism at an early age and its relationship with the educational experience; also, my internship in a public kindergarten made me see the importance of collaboration between providers and teachers, and the need to teach basic English to Spanish-speaking children to facilitate their school adaptation. I firmly believe that early childhood education is crucial for the comprehensive development of children, influencing their academic future, mental health, and ability to be good people.

All these obligations make for a fairly busy routine: I start early with the children, whose parents generally work in meat processing plants and start at five in the morning; I manage the business during the day, and then I study and do my student homework late into the night. But with my children already in college, I have more time to dedicate to what I love. I feel very connected to my rural community in Nebraska, and I am deeply motivated by my work's impact on it.

It is a critical moment for child care in our community. The reduction of aid and

programs, as well as the new immigration policies, have created a climate of uncertainty for many families and caregivers. The licensing process in Nebraska can be long and uneven, with waiting times of up to nine months. Although there are more resources in Spanish, the interpretation of rules varies between cities, and a better organization and distribution of resources for rural providers would be beneficial, as money is often allocated to bureaucratic expenses.

Despite these challenges, organizations like Home Grown, Buffet, and Six Regions have empowered me. They have given me the support and resources I need to grow professionally and empower others.

Helping providers means benefiting many families, and I believe that each of us must contribute in any way we can. I am very proud of all that has been achieved, but I am also aware that there is still much work to be done. My commitment is to continue supporting the community and providers, promoting early childhood education, and providing them with the tools to prosper, convinced that their success directly benefits many families.