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in Pennsauken

📍 NEW JERSEY

Amplifying the Voices of Children With Disabilities

I opened my business, A to Z Family Daycare, in February 2002. Before that, I worked 9 to 5 as an investment officer. Then my husband and I decided to have kids. That was my opportunity to do what I love and take care of my own child. Then I had a second child and he was born deaf. Trying to find child care for a deaf child is impossible, and it just didn't sit right with my heart. So, we renovated our house to accommodate a child care business, and

Over the years I have cared for many children who were eventually diagnosed with disabilities. Parents aren't always the first ones to see it, but as a caregiver, I notice when a child is not developing in a typical way...My goal is to advocate for the child with disabilities and be their voice because if we adults don't speak up for them, no one will.

I've been open ever since, even now when my three boys are grown.

Over those decades, the neighborhood has become more diverse, so now I have children from all kinds of backgrounds. For the first 15 years I was open, I also did before- and after-school care. I transported children back and forth from school, and many of my clients were teachers, so they really liked that.

After the pandemic, I took on a new cohort of younger kids, so I stopped doing the school drive.

The five kids I have now are mostly toddlers. Because I'm only licensed for five, it is hard to make the bottom line. I'm open from 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., so I'm working 10 hours a day. If I have a baby in care, I also need to have an assistant. That makes it really impossible to pay her wages and meet all my expenses on the income from just five children. Once I figured out that if I paid my assistant \$20 an hour, I was making only \$2 an hour. Now I think I'm up to about \$14 an hour, but it's still ridiculous. I show up every day for that because I love the kids.

Teaching young children really is my passion and has been since I was 9 years old taking care of my younger siblings. I love watching kids learn something for the first time, watching them discover how something works and watching that light bulb come on. If they get the proper foundation when they're

developing, their minds are like a sponge and they will do well in their later school years.

Although I don't have a specific certification for children with disabilities, I have taken a lot of training in child development and I have become an expert through experience. Over the years, I have cared for many children who were eventually diagnosed with disabilities. Parents aren't always the first ones to see it, but as a caregiver, I notice when a child is not developing in a typical way. I'm often the one who recommends a parent take the child to a doctor for an assessment. I tell them early intervention is definitely the way to go because the earlier you start, the better opportunities your child will have. And the more information they have, the more prepared they will be for what's to come, and the more strategies I can add to best help their child. Oftentimes, parents of older children will ask me to sit in on IEP meetings and to help them understand the [Americans with Disabilities Act](#). It really helps to have another parent who knows the school system like I do and knows kids with disabilities. My goal is to advocate for the child with disabilities and be their voice, because if we adults don't speak up for them, no one will.

Two of the children I care for receive the New Jersey child care subsidy, but it doesn't cover the cost of care. What's challenging for providers is that you don't get paid until a month after you take care of that child. Honestly, the financial aspect of home-based care is really difficult. I couldn't do this work if my husband, who is also a teacher, didn't also have an income.

In order to keep my license in compliance—and I've *never* been out of compliance—I take all the training I can. I keep my CPR certification up. I keep my home safe and in good repair. Knowing that I'm licensed and governed through the State of New Jersey makes parents feel safer and it's something that I'm proud of because this is my professional job. I mean, at my age, I'm serious about what I do. I'm always going to be in compliance because I want to make sure that I can continue to open my doors and provide my families with quality care.