

Family Child Care

by Bonnie Neugebauer



The intimate nature of family child care envelops you as you walk through the doorway. There is no need for a center tour as you are welcomed into a small, nurturing environment where you immediately become part of the action.

I spent a day visiting three family child care programs in the Boston area, managed by three very different women. Their programs varied widely because their personalities, talents, and priorities are such a strong influence. But they shared these important and striking similarities:

- determination to make a difference for children and families
- understanding of the systems and how to obtain resources and support for their programs
- involvement in advocacy for children and families
- skill in verbalizing goals and expertise
- a strong sense of professionalism

Andrea D. Cox

The Learning Tree Experience Dorchester, Massachusetts

The Learning Tree Experience occupies the ground floor of a two family house in a Dorchester neighborhood. The environment makes a strong first impression. The equipment is beautiful and plentiful, rich with multicultural materials. Each room is a learning center decorated around a colorful theme — the crayola room is for the fish tank and manipulatives, the library is filled with African-American art, the bathroom is filled with dalmatians.

“Money really makes a difference; I just started adding manipulatives as resources were available. When money is tight, you just have to go slow,” shares Andrea. She has learned to apply for grants and state and community funding to enable her to fill her program with beautiful things for the children. “If children are exposed to a lot now — play opportunities, people experiences,

field trips — they will be ready no matter where they go next, whether it’s Head Start or school.”

Thirteen years ago, Andrea was working in Head Start but decided to come



home when her daughter was born (she is now the mother of four boys as well). She opened her program upstairs, moving it downstairs three years ago when the tenants vacated to make the space available. “It took two years to get it ready. I had a lot of support from family and friends, finding things for the program and then helping prepare the space for the children.” Her program is licensed for ten children with a full-time assistant, her husband Eddie, and accredited by the National Association for Family Child Care.

Andrea sought first accreditation, then her CDA. She will earn her associate degree this year, even though this means ten-hour days. “So much has changed in 13 years. All this discussion of brain research, for example. What did they think children were needing years ago?”

As chairperson of the Family Child Care Committee of the Dorchester Cluster (0-8) of the Department of Education, Andrea is constantly talking to other child care providers. She is involved in public advocacy, including trips to the State House to make her voice heard. “We are the voice of the children.”

Why family child care? “This is a very personal business. I know each child here very well. They call me ‘Auntie.’ They know all my family and I use that as a learning experience. My parents are my committee; I include them in every-

thing and keep them informed about educational opportunities. Their children are my success."



Zovic Majarian
Petit Pas Family
Child Care
Watertown,
Massachusetts

"When I started my program, I lived in a two-family house, Philadelphia style. I had three children of my own and worked outside as lead teacher in a preschool. I wanted to be at home more of the time to take care of my own children — and support my family with an earning. Since I enjoy working with children, I decided to start my own home school. Now we live upstairs and the program is downstairs. It's working well. We have a big backyard, even parking. The parents are

happy; the children are happy," says Zovic Marjarian about her beginnings.

The number of adults providing care in her program is striking. The day I visited, four caregivers were interacting with the children. "When I decided to take infants, which I have been doing for four years, I needed enough teachers so that I wouldn't have to worry, so that I could take good care of the babies and the other children, too."

"I love family child care because of the relationships. I work so closely with the parents and the children. I am happy that I can give each child so much attention. Most parents like the small group and get very attached to the children. They also value the home environment, home-cooked meals, the homey structure."

On the day I visited, I was surprised to learn that Zovic, who is from Lebanon, was serving corned beef and cabbage in celebration of St. Patrick's Day. She obviously loves music and led the children in an eager search for the leprechaun's gold.

The program is licensed for ten children and serves 17 families. "In a mixed-age group, children learn to share and to care for

each other. It feels like a big family. Everyone knows each other. Children hug other parents and siblings; we are a small group of diverse, connected families."

Petit Pas is accredited by NAFCC. Zovic is a NAFCC accredited provider who went through the process in the pilot year. She was part of the development team for Watertown's accreditation support, mentoring new family child care providers and helping others to work through the accreditation process. "It's important that everyone feels supported and appreciated and that no provider is left out."

Zovic is an active member on the Watertown Community Partnership for Children Council (CPC). CPC is funding programs and offering scholarships to support families and providers. The focus of the CPC grant is quality and comprehensive programming for preschool-aged children, families, and early care educators.

"Parents are more educated about family child care. They understand that this is a small school structure, not like babysitting. I work long days, nights, weekends to do as much as I can for them. The attention and support family child care receives now is great. It gives you more enthusiasm and encourages you to give as much as you can."

Joan M. Matsalia
Funtimes Family
Child Care
Watertown
Massachusetts

"We have a great community here. This is an intergenerational, multiracial, and multicultural program, and it is truly a family project."

Every morning, Joan and her team of daughters convert their home into a child care program and every evening it returns to being the home of three generations — Joan's three children and both of her parents and parents of her husband



Update on Family Child Care

by Deborah Eaton

In the past, family child care was largely invisible, woven in the fabric of every community. While most providers begin this work somewhat casually as an extension of their own parenting, those who choose to make an intentional career choice tend to offer higher quality care. Today, a professional development movement has emerged across the county as many family child care providers reject the role of an unprofessional and instead embrace the role of an intentional caregiver. Approximately 1,000,000 family child care providers in the United States care for and educate about 4,000,000 children.

Confusion still exists about what family child care is and is not, and this confusion perpetuates myths and misinformation about this profession. One such myth concerns the offering of quality care. Children can and do experience desirable outcomes in family child care as well as center-based environments.

It was not so long ago that the profession of early care and education was reluctant to define quality. This is no longer the case. We are at a juncture in our profession where we know more about best practice as it relates to brain development,

developmentally appropriate practice, and being socially competent than ever before. We have systems of accreditation that not only define quality care but ones that do so in homes as well as centers.

Program accreditation is a relatively new aspect in early childhood programs, compared with public education, higher education, and health care, with only a small percentage of family child care homes accredited at this time. Homes are accredited by the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC). There are currently 1,000 nationally accredited providers with 850 in the process. However, many state policy makers are promoting child care accreditation as one strategy to improve the level of learning for children of all ages and to hold agencies and providers accountable for providing quality care.

NAFCC accreditation was designed to promote and recognize high quality, professional practice in this special form of child care. Accreditation standards cover the following areas: Relationships, Environment, Activities, Developmental Learning Goals, Safety and Health, and Professional and Business Practices. A 1995 study of accredited providers by the Families and Work Institute confirmed that accreditation increases providers' professionalism and self-esteem, improved quality of care, and facilitated the development of leadership skills.

Family child care is an integral part of the early care and education system in the United States. Issues such as quality care, inclusion, equity, compensation, retention, and training continued to be discussed and researched. I look forward to working with parents, researchers, community leaders, and administrators at all levels of government in order to facilitate growth in this profession and increase the demand for quality care.

For more information on NAFCC accreditation, please call (515) 282-8192.

Frank. Frank, originally from Kenya, came to the U.S. in 1977 to attend college. His parents arrived in late 1999 for an extended visit. The feeling is one of warmth and family. Frank, who works in the program in the afternoon, stops at the water table to chat before heading out. Joan's father asks if there is anything she needs while he is out running errands. The stories of this particular family, as well as the stories of the children's families, surround you through photos and artwork, textures, objects.

"I've always been involved in family child care. Years ago, with my first two children, we all loved doing family child care; what I didn't like was how as a provider I was perceived in the community. I needed respect. So for a while I worked in the health community and did some family child care on the side. Then I met a number of family child care providers and realized that things were happening in the field that I had wished for 20 years ago. I visited these providers and decided to open my own program, vowing that I would never be driven out of the field again. That was ten years ago." Joan is joined each day by Katrina, her assistant of three years, who is an integral part of Fun-times. In addition, two other women, Rosana and Judith, work part time.

"I worked many years in isolation from others in the field. I was looking for professional growth. Three years ago, I was one of three family child care providers involved in an American Business Collaboration Family Friendly Child Care course.

Work/Family Directions managed the project and made it possible, along with Mills and Pardee. WFD was also involved in the national accreditation pilot project.

"I was given the opportunity to share

as a FCC provider within the ECE community what I wanted. I believe that family child care is the ideal environment for working with children and families. It offers consistency, low ratios, and year after year continuity; and it enables you to really get to know the children.

“When I learned about the national pilot project, I begged to be part of the project. It gave me the opportunity I had longed for to increase professionalism and to network. It was a privilege to be involved.”

Joan is on the board of the Boston Association for the Education of Young Children. She is working on her master’s degree at Cambridge College. She is also interested in adult education and learning how to work with adults who are returning to school and with providers who speak languages other than English.

“Parents have formed their own support network and they give me great support. I am really concerned about high quality care across the board and the recognition of providers. I plan to stay in the field forever, I can’t imagine doing something different.”