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VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Bayhealth Child Care & Early Learning Center



Elevating Child Care: Mission Possible!



Interview by Lin Nordmeyer

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Brenda Kibler, Bayhealth Child Care & Early Learning Center director, and Laurie DeZao, curriculum coordinator, are creating a movement. "My mission is for child care providers to be considered as professional as any teacher," said Brenda. "I just need the world to know that we are critical and not a babysitter."

Their roadmap for this quest is to keep quality at the heart of everything they do at their center. Bayhealth Child Care & Early Learning Center serves 70 children in the Dover area. The center primarily serves Bayhealth hospital's employees' children and accepts non-employees' children if space permits.



Bayhealth staff engage with families to ensure consistency for the child's best interest.

Another example of exceeding expectations is what Bayhealth does to support positive behavior management through “teasing shields.” Teasing shields are used by the children to encourage positive problem-solving skills.

Like most early childhood professionals, what's clear is that they have a 'heart' for working with young children. Providing quality care begins with their passion. They have spent their careers working in early childhood - 43 years for Brenda and 18 for Laurie.

"It's a calling," said Brenda. "Our staff has a higher sense of purpose." She charges her staff to implement best practices and then go the extra mile.

"During COVID, we wanted our children to thrive, just not survive," added Brenda. "We are like extended family and provide families with a lot of stability. This was especially important at the height of COVID."

Another example of exceeding expectations is what Bayhealth does to support positive behavior management through “teasing shields.” Teasing shields are used by the children to encourage positive problem-solving skills.

“When a child's feelings are hurt they put up the shield. The shield protects the child from negative words and emotions by empowering the children to resolve conflicts. It's a win-win!



Look what the children created for the staff - a patchwork quilt with individual squares from each child!

"Children just don't deserve the minimum from us or the floor. They need us to break the ceiling - blow it out of the water for them," added Laurie.

To help pass on their passion and purpose, Bayhealth participates in Delaware's Project Search. This one-year transition program offers training and education leading to employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Bayhealth partners with the Capital School district to provide work experiences in the child care setting.

We serve as 'job coaches' to the individuals and give support and guidance," said Brenda.

"Great teachers aren't born and need others in the field to reach out."

The Bayhealth staff also participates in DIEEC's Community of Practice, regularly scheduled meetings for group sharing and support facilitated by a DIEEC Technical Assistant.



Professional development for staff is a priority at Bayhealth.

"Bayhealth staff wears their professions like a badge of honor," said Nancy Hoffman, DIEEC center-based technical assistant. "They can never do enough for the children they serve."



A glimpse of what an "extended family" looks like at Bayhealth Child Care.