

PROVIDER SPOTLIGHT

KENA TRADER

Bizzy Bee's Child Care



Dedication, Community, and Continuous Learning

Written by Stephanie Thompson/DIEEC
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Like many other family child care educators, Kena Trader got her start in the field when she experienced difficulty finding high-quality care for her own children. She left her job in a medical facility and began providing child care through Delaware's Relative Care program. Now, 10 years later, her "Bizzy Bee's Child Care" program in New Castle serves 9 children.

A Foundation Built on Families and Community

Kena is incredibly proud of the community she's built with the children and families in her program, saying, "Their commitment and passion and the way they support me is something I never would have imagined. They take care of me so I can take the best care of their children." Families in Kena's program share activities and materials, volunteer their time, and take summer field trips together. These solid relationships played a key role in Kena's successful enrollment in an associate's degree program at Delaware Technical and Community College (Del Tech).

Overcoming Financial and Scheduling Hurdles

The decision to pursue a degree was easy- early childhood education is Kena's passion. The logistics proved to be a bit more challenging. Kena was nervously planning to take on the financial burden of her continuing education, even if it meant taking on loans. Then her DIEEC Quality Improvement Specialist (QISp), Meghan Pallante, pointed Kena toward the DE RISE scholarship opportunities through the Early Childhood Innovation Center (ECIC). In Kena's case, the scholarship included tuition, a laptop, a support stipend each semester, and a completion stipend. (More information about DE RISE scholarships is included at the end of the article.)

With the financial aspect covered, Kena could focus on another challenge: time away from her beloved Bizzy Bee's program. Making arrangements to spend time on her courses and fieldwork meant that Kena needed a reliable substitute teacher. For this role, she turned to her mother, Rhonda Trader, who had already been an occasional substitute in the past. When Kena told her program families that she had decided to go back to school, she says they met her news with "nothing but cheers." Along the way, she often heard "Miss Kena, what do you need?" from parents eager to offer support.



Kena, with the support of her mother and the families in her program, was met with "nothing but cheers" as she pursued her education. (Image by Stephanie Thompson/DIEEC)

The strong relationships with her families meant that they, too, were invested in Kena's goals and understood that the short-term sacrifices would benefit their children in the long run. As a result, Kena became a proud model of lifelong learning for her children and families.

From Anxiety to Academic Success

Going back to school stirred up some anxiety. Kena worried about things like being able to handle the coursework and being older than the other students. She knew she'd miss some time with her own children, and that taking a vacation wouldn't be in the cards anytime soon. But her initial concerns soon made way for confidence. When she arrived on campus, she found that the other students were "a diverse group of people, different ages." While there were ups and downs- as Kena says, "life is still happening while you're in school"- she found her way to success. She received awards for academic excellence and was invited to join an honor society. Last December, in addition to earning her Associate in Applied Science in Early Childhood Development, she was named the Outstanding Graduate in her program!

A Network of Support

What made the difference for Kena, in addition to her own hard work? She cites the support of her mentor at Del Tech, Jennifer Roll: "She has been my rock. She is my role model for early childhood education." She also shared that her DIEEC QISp, Meghan, "...knows my goals, and she funnels info to me that helps me meet them." On campus, Kena joined the Black Student Alliance, of which she later became the two-time president. Finally, she notes the support of her mother and the families in her program. Kena's advice for educators considering a return to school? "There are so many resources out there. Use them. Find a club to be part of, a person, an instructor. College is not as scary as we all think it is. We need to leave the age notion behind. If I can do it, anybody else can do it."

Kena's story thus far demonstrates the twin powers of individual perseverance and community support. She's well-positioned to achieve her next goal: moving the program out of her home and into a larger space that provides more options and opportunities for educational activities. She's currently taking steps toward bringing her vision to reality: applying for her director's certificate, lining up a teacher, and looking at potential spaces. With a clear goal and the right supports in place, Kena's continuous learning journey is the foundation for transforming her career and elevating her community.



"The decision to pursue a degree was easy- early childhood education is Kena's passion" - (Images by Stephanie Thompson/DIEEC)

DE RISE Scholarships support eligible Delaware early childhood educators working at least 20 hours per week in an OCCL-licensed early learning program. Educators can choose to pursue a Quorum scholarship, Child Development Associate® (CDA) credential, or an associate/bachelor's degree at a partnering Institution of Higher Education. Supports may include tuition, a laptop, coaching, support stipends, and completion stipends. Learn more at ecic.desu.edu or contact ecic@desu.edu.