



CASE STUDY

Kyra's Place

Durham, North Carolina

Karen Washington has operated Kyra's Place, her four-star family child care home in Durham for 22 years, and has always offered 1st, 2nd and 3rd shift care around the clock for babies six weeks of age through school-age children. She has a separate room for babies and another for school-age children and is currently serving five children on the 1st shift plus school-agers and three younger children on the second shift. Her typical day is from 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. When the children go to bed Washington turns her attention to paperwork and getting ready for the next day. She has never had a regular assistant and cannot afford to pay one who meets the qualifications. Instead, she relies on her large family, including her sister, daughter and niece, who have always stepped in to help when needed.

When COVID-19 hit, Washington closed for only a few weeks in the beginning to reset her facility as a safe environment for the children, families, and herself and her own family. She put new practices in place, like having the children wear masks, additional cleaning and only greeting parents at the door when the children arrive. She continues to maintain these practices, and as COVID-19 continues, "it's still up in the air, so I am walking slow," she said. She was eager to remain open for her families, all of whom were working as essential workers in grocery stores, hospitals and other services. Although some could work remotely, they

could not do their jobs with the children at home, so Washington continued providing services. "We did it for the parents who needed us. It was hard, but that kept us going," she said.

The most challenging time during the pandemic was serving the school-age children who were suddenly with her all day doing their school work when schools were operating remotely. She literally could not be in two rooms at once, and she received no additional funding for the school-age children. Instead, she paid for extra help for the school-agers out of her own pocket, which further increased her expenses and cut into her income.

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In all of her years in business, although she is the sole qualified employee, Washington has never paid herself a salary. "If I could, I would," she said, "but the business expenses don't leave anything for salary." Washington uses the income to pay her bills first and then takes care of herself with whatever amount is left. However, she does cover some benefits for

herself as a business expense - "all the insurances" - including health, dental, accident, life and car insurance.

When the first round of the Stabilization Grant arrived, Washington used the allotted bonuses to compensate herself for the first time. With the second round of grant funds, she plans to add to her retirement fund. "I realized it's really important being self-employed to have some retirement. I'm getting older and my retirement will happen in the



next six or seven years. I need to make sure I'm more ready for it, as I've been doing this my whole life," she added.

With the grant funds, Washington can now pay her daughter, who is certified to work with children in the afternoon and provide some assistance. She is also looking forward to attending a week-long training later in the year. "I love training and workshops, because there's always more to learn," she said.

After that, Washington plans to invest all of the Stabilization Grant funds into several facility upgrades such as an enlarged driveway to provide closer parking for parents, replacing a heating and cooling system that died during COVID-19, refreshing the children's playroom with fresh paint, toys, and equipment and better windows that can be opened to let in the fresh air. "This will improve the children's education, we can sit by the open windows and talk about what's going on outside, with the cars and trucks going by, and listen to the birds singing in the morning," said Washington. Next up is the playground area, where she wants to add a garden, a new border and mulch, and upgrade the riding toys and playhouse, which the children love. She also wants to purchase car seats for the children so that they can go on field trips.

Washington is also focused on helping the parents she serves. "It's my soft spot," she said. "I know what it's like to be a working mom and struggle to afford child care. I started this business as a single parent with three children. It can be really hard out there." She has always kept her fees

affordable, and she does not anticipate raising her fees in the future, which she said would only hurt parents and grandparents, some of whom are working at low-wage jobs themselves. Thanks to the grant funds, she has been able to cover tuition fees when parents were facing hard times and could not afford to pay, using the grant funds to recoup those costs.

When asked how she plans to continue these changes when the grant funds end, Washington said she is not thinking about what will happen when the grant funds end. "These grant funds are truly benefitting me and my program so much right now. If I knew there would be more money coming in, I could afford to take care of myself financially and pay myself. But for now, I'm focused on doing what I need to do to get my building to excellence and reach another level of quality in my business," she said. Her biggest worry is for her families. "I don't know how I will be able to continue to assist parents when they have hardships after the grant funds end," she added.

Washington believes that providing high-quality is critically important, and she believes that state policymakers should invest in it instead of asking providers to sacrifice to make it happen. "They want us (family child care homes) to have the same qualifications as a child care center and provide the same level of quality services. We are doing the same things as a center, if not more, because we have just one person doing it all—the teaching, the cooking, the cleaning, and the accounting. It's like having three or four jobs," she said, sounding frustrated. She believes the state should continue providing stabilization funds, which would result in more quality child care programs and happier and healthier providers.

Looking back on the past two years, Washington exclaimed, "It took COVID to realize that all providers really needed help, especially family child care homes who were in a lot of trouble." She hopes the funding will continue, and she believes the funds are most needed in family child care homes. "Now, the funds we get have to take care of the basics because we are in a home – like our mortgage, lights, water, cleaning supplies, and the food the kids eat, along with other things. More funding in the future will give us the opportunity to assist us like we assist others," she concluded.