

My name is Stephanie Krause. I live and work in Bend, Oregon. I'm so grateful for the opportunity to be able to share about the impact of COVID-19 from the perspective of a child care provider. My experience as a provider is a little unique, given the opportunity I had to work as a peer-coach with Oregon Provider Relief Guide (OPRG) during the months of April and May. I'll share just a bit of that perspective as well.

I have worked in child care in Oregon, in a variety of capacities, for over twenty-five years. In December of 2008 I opened my own Certified Family Child Care Home, Bloom Children's Center. For eleven years we served sixteen children and families daily through our program in my home. In February we signed a lease to move and open our program in a new facility for a greater number of families, something we'd been working to do for six years. Our new lease began on March 1st. The plan was for Bloom to remain open in my home during renovation, but that did not happen.

On March 17th, our program closed as a result of Coronavirus. I and my teachers worked hard to maintain connections and relationships with our children and families. I and my family spent our time for the next three months renovating the new facility to get it ready for opening. Also during this time, I was fortunate to be able to work as a peer-coach to providers around the state through OPRG.

I worked alongside three other coaches through OPRG and responded, throughout April and May, with support to providers who were both open and closed during those first couple months of the pandemic. Providers were struggling to navigate frequently changing licensing restrictions. They were scrambling to access necessary child care supplies. They were scraping by on drastically reduced revenue. They were spending incredible amounts of time on increased sanitizing and disinfecting within their programs. They were applying for every possible funding opportunity that came along. All of these actions were necessary and demanding of both time and energy.

Unfortunately, with May came the anticipated announcements by some programs of permanent closure. It felt truly awful to see quality child care providers closing their doors and leaving the already short-handed field of child care. My work with OPRG concluded in May, but some of the relationships developed in that time remain.

On June 11, my own program was approved to operate as Bloom Children's Center at our new facility with a licensed capacity of forty children. We immediately applied for approval as an Emergency Child Care, and were approved (due to the layout of our space being one large room) to serve only twenty children and families.

We opened on June 15, and are able to serve two groups of ten children within our new space. Given the limit of one large room, other current licensing restrictions, and the current cleaning and sanitizing requirements I would say that providing pandemic child care is extremely challenging at the very least. Unfortunately given all of these restrictions, our cost of operations exceeds the revenue we can bring in at this time. This is simply unsustainable.

I've been in conversation with friends in the child care profession in other states and other countries. Restrictions exist everywhere. I am grateful for Oregon's approach to limit potential spread of Coronavirus through maintaining small group size and stable grouping. Unfortunately, even in Oregon, child care providers are going to need more.

I reached out to the coaches I worked with in OPRG to discuss what the task force needs to know from the perspective of us as coaches. I loved what Shawn C Reynolds, Executive Director of Giggles & Grace Early Learning Center, Inc. in Ontario Oregon responded:

...what providers have known for some time, that the child care industry is fragile and needs more infrastructure funding. In addition, it is now evident that child care is a must to have a strong workforce. We do not always see value in quality child care services until it is needed during a difficult time. I hope that the general population now values our services as essential as medical care or things of that nature.

Shawn is right. The child care industry was vulnerable even before pandemic. We need funding. We need to be valued. I am absolutely committed to this field, and have zero intention of closing permanently. However, I can absolutely understand why quality providers would consider doing so. Our field simply must retain all of its dedicated professionals. We absolutely need additional funding to help sustain us until restrictions are safely able to be lifted.

For further conversation or any questions you may have, you are welcome to contact me by email or phone. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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