

Building Blocks Early Learning Center, Inc.

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My Story:

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Reasons they need to support schools like mine first:

I began dating my high school sweetheart at 16 years old at an Oregon City High School football game in 1983. We dated 5 1/2 years before I became pregnant with my first son, James Hieb. My boyfriend at the time had a lot of growing up to do, so I decided I would raise my son on my own. I decided I was going to raise my child in a healthy home.

I was determined but needed help. I applied for welfare, food stamps, and HUD housing. I qualified for all these programs, plus I did a little childcare in my home. Just enough to keep state benefits yet also stay off the streets. I was 21 years old when I started doing home childcare.

After James was almost a year, my boyfriend decided it was time to make some grown-up decisions. He registered for full time Army and proposed. I accepted, and we proceeded to make a life. I soon had our second, third and fourth son. While John was serving active-duty Army. I again did childcare in my home. We quickly realized that we could not make a good life on a soldier and in-home childcare providers income. I started my formal education at Pierce College, WA. I graduated with my associate degree in early childhood education with honors. My in-home childcare quickly grew quickly. I was honored with the governor's award for on-base in-home childcare.

After the war, we decided we wanted our children to grow up around family, so we moved home to Oregon. I registered at Warner Pacific College, and finished my bachelor's degree in human development, my teaching license, as well as a second endorsement in Early Childhood Education. Again, I graduated with honors. I taught in cooperative preschools, public schools and at the Warner Pacific Colleges Early Learning Center.

I never left my sons in childcare until I began student teaching. They became latchkey kids for the first couple years while I worked outside the home. It was during that time that one of my four sons was introduced to drugs and alcohol while only 13 years old. Once I realized what was happening, I resigned from my dream position as head teacher and assistant director at Warner Pacific college under the leadership of Katie Sandy. This broke my heart, but my sons were my top priority. My husband was continuing his education as well as serving in the National guard. He soon finished his bachelor's degree in business as well as seminary at George Fox University. I opened another in home childcare. This time I went big and moved into a large historical home, and I began to grow the school I now own, Building Blocks Early Learning Center. I started in 2004 and put every extra dime into my program for seven years. In 2012 I started making a teacher's wage. My school and

children were doing well. I went back to finish my master's degree at George Fox University later to transferred mid-way through and finished with honors at Portland State University with a Masters in Curriculum and Instruction and a 3rd Early Childhood Education endorsement.

My business was growing, and so was my husband's. We felt we had worked our way-out of poverty as well as poverty level thinking. It was two years later that our youngest son relapsed and overdosed on heroin. His last words to me were, "mom, I did it! I passed all my classes and paid my own rent. I'm so happy, but I'm so tired." ~Joseph Paul Hieb
It was four months after Joey's death that my husband, who was now a Chaplain and high-ranking officer in the US Army, took his own life due to the heart break of losing our son. Shortly after, my second son, Daniel, was hospitalized from a mental health breakdown. He died four months after his father. I lost half my family in less than a year.

I am telling you this story for a reason. I was a mother in grief, but the mother in me took top priority over my grief. I turned to my books. I read every book on death, suicide, and grief I could get my hands on. I quickly recognized a familiar pattern that scared the grief out of me. There was a common thread of continued suicide with the suicide in siblings; This was especially common in families with all boys. I knew I needed to do the impossible if I was going to keep my two surviving sons alive. One of my surviving sons was attending Oregon State University in the engineering program. The other had just returned from war.

I spent 2014 to 2016 burying half my family, caring for the other half and holding onto my childcare program. I kept it going with the help of two teachers and the parents in my program. I showered and went down to the children every morning despite my suffering. I had some hard decisions to make, and I was feeling extremely vulnerable. The question was, do I keep my program going or do I shut it down?

I did not feel comfortable going to work anywhere else. How do you explain the loss of half your family in one year to strangers? I decided that my strength was the families in my program. They were always the backbone of my school. I took the small amount of money I had in savings and began looking for a facility that I could "go big". I knew I could not retire on the income of my "in home childcare" without the second income of my husband. Plus, my sons needed me to pick up the slack for them while they were also going through the grief process.

I found a building in old town Wilsonville and began moving from a 5000 square foot home on the river, serving the capacity limits for in home childcare, into a trailer and a new school with half the space. My school thrived in the new facility; I lived in the trailer for 6 months before I moved into a small apartment and left my belongings in storage. This enabled me to put all my time into the transition. I moved my school in 2016 & 17. It

doubled in size in 1 year. My manager helped me blow out the back facility and expand it into another large classroom giving us 3 large classrooms at this point. We were now serving 120 children and families.

Our reputation proceeded us; I had grown very quickly once we settled. Then COVID hit. I went from what was supposed to be a very successful year to losing all my enrollment in one week except 20. I had 20 children out of 120 left. I refused to close my doors; I was scared that my life's work would be gone overnight if I did. I stayed open and applied to do emergency childcare. I served Doctors, nurses, and other emergency personnel. My school started to fill back up slowly. Half my teachers stayed; I continued to pay those that stay. I kept them working on projects regardless of our numbers. We continued to grow slowly with stable grouping in place. Once we were at capacity with stable grouping, I opened another 3 classrooms in the facility across the street, which was a preschool that closed during COVID. My children and families continued to come back slowly. We were doing ok, but we were not making enough to stay open. I had built my school on \$3,000 dollars, craigslist, and goodwill. I created no debt from 2004 to 2020. I remained debt free until covid. Once covid hit, I applied for every grant and eventually the SBA loan. These dollars came to us in small amounts over those few years, but it was not nearly enough to keep us in the positive. My family and our highly committed staff begin working 12 to 14 hour days to continue. It was exhausting!

The last big hurdle was our huge exodus of elementary aged children this last September. We served a large elementary class with 1/3 online public-school children, 1/3 in home-school online and 1/3 doing our in house curriculum. These children began going back to public school slowly; however, 50 of them went back at once last September. Twenty were typical kindergarten transitioned, but 30 were elementary children whose parents' faith in the system had begun to soften.

My school is an amazing place. We serve children and their families, birth to 13 years. We have full day childcare, preschool, afterschool care and a baby school. We have a lot to offer our community. We need your help to keep going. It takes 95 to 100 percent enrollment to stay afloat in childcare. I'm getting too tired to continue this level of competition. My children and families need your financial assistance. We are almost back to pre-COVID numbers. Our staffing is close to stable, and our families are happy; however, I need help paying off the debt I endured to stay open.

Your current childcare providers have carried the wight of our communities throughout Covid. It has caused many to close due to lack of funds, courage, fear and sometimes no way out of an almost impossible situation. We need you to serve those of us who remained open before you begin serving new programs. It is not only the righteous thing to do; it is also the healthiest way to continue serving young children and their families.

Thank you for reading my story. I know many others have deep and long stories as well, but maybe mine will touch your heart enough to get you to look a little deeper than the politics you see before you today. There is a good way to overcome the childcare cliff that we are currently approaching. It's an amazing plan that serves the needs of all people, but it especially serves children, families, and the generations to come.

Sincerely yours,

~Gina

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The Facts:

- The prediction is that 7 out of 10 new programs will fail in the next 3 years.
- The training and experience a person need to properly care for young children will cost far more than funding those of us who are already serve children and families.
- Growing already successful programs will save large amounts of money.
- Most in-home childcare will not be capable of serving more than 10 children without putting children's emotional and physical safety at risk.
- We need teachers who are educated in ECE to work with young children.
- We are tapping out parents financially.
- Childcare providers cannot continue to raise teacher's rates to keep up with our recent inflation without support.
- If our current childcare facilities continue to close their doors, we will be in a state of emergency economically.
- Providers barely make enough money to keep their doors open.
- Childcare is more expensive than in-state College tuition in 28 states.
- The average cost of care in centers, home based, churches or nannies is somewhere around \$9,500 a year.
- For infants, because the adult-to-child ratio is so much lower is \$15,000 more.
- These cost averages do not consider quality, nor do they lead to fiscal sustainability on the part of the childcare providers.
- The first five years of life hold a breathtaking amount of brain growth. These are literally the building blocks of intelligence, compassion, and creativity, which are the foundational features of future workers, citizens, and inventors. ~Haspel, Elliot

Please read: *Crawling Behind, America's Childcare Crisis and How to Fix It* by Elliot Haspel