

# Getting Through Together

2020 was defined by loss and uncertainty. We saw COVID-19 crash into our community, and we grieve for our friends and family not with us today. We saw heinous instances of racism and our streets filled with those looking for justice and demanding change. We saw political divisiveness expand through a consequential election cycle that far from ended on election day. Some days felt like months and some months felt like years, but through all of this, our work continued. Our work to foster hope, translate challenges into action, and collaboratively work towards a better tomorrow, was never shut down. It was this north star that kept us moving forward when we felt lost at sea.

Friday, March 20th, 2020, all child care programs across the state closed at the end of the day with uncertainty of when they would open again. What started as a two-week closure stretched into months, and then to a point that coming back at all felt impossible. Our work seemed to go against every COVID precaution: in-person home visiting, encouraging children to collaboratively explore and share, and let's not even begin with diapering and the needs of infants and toddlers. Making it through 2020 was not due to luck - rather it was unimaginable creativity, fierce determination, and inspirational compassion. And we must acknowledge that as child care programs began to reopen in June and July, every single Educator made a momentous commitment as they assumed the risk of opening their doors for business every morning.

Despite these challenges, it is amazing how much we have accomplished. Bus routes are once again crisscrossing the city making sure children get to care and parents can get to work. Child care programs are open each day welcoming in children. Six new Educators joined our network, each working tirelessly to meet new health and safety guidelines. Three Providers were able to purchase a home, a tremendous accomplishment and investment in their business and personal assets. Each day we do things that felt impossible only a short while ago.

And as alone as we felt some days, we have been – and continue to – get through this together. As much as this pandemic has highlighted our problems, it has also reminded us of what is truly special - each of you and the community we've created. 2021 has been quick to remind us that our challenges are far from over, but we have seen there is a lot we can do when we work together. Thank you for being part of our Acre family; we miss you, we wish you and your family health, and we can't wait until we are able to celebrate together once again.



*Zelma Khadar*  
Co-Executive Director



*Lucas Skorczeski*  
Co-Executive Director

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## A Bond of Love



*Isolda and Douglas*

Isolda joined Acre Family in 2007. Like many of our Educators she was recruited by another Educator, her sister Maria. At the time, her son, Neyder, was seven. “I wanted to open

my daycare because I wanted to share more time with my son, watch him grow and also be able to give care and love to children and families from different cultures.”

In August 2013, just a few weeks before his 3rd birthday, Douglas arrived in Isolda's program. Douglas' mom shared that he had attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Isolda noted that he did not look her in the eye and typically wanted to do the same thing. “Every day it was a challenge for me to find how to work with him. I always spoke to him with love and I was discovering what things he liked the most so I could include them in my curriculum (games, activities, toys, food, etc.)” Isolda and Douglas quickly built a strong connection.

Soon Douglas was headed off to kindergarten and only came to her program after school; however, his school life was chaotic. With permission, the social worker from the school contacted Isolda and came to visit. She was surprised how different his behavior was and asked

“How do you do it?” Isolda answered her, “I put all my love and patience into working with him. And he has taught me to see the world in his way.”

Isolda also shares that it has been critical to work together with his mother. They are a team, always working to help Douglas, offering him extra support and love. Douglas is now 10 and in fourth grade. He attends remote learning at home with his mom. But when he finishes his school day, or it's vacation time, he comes to Isolda's home. “I am very proud of the boy who is Douglas, with his 10 years he has taught me countless things. Definitely the most powerful tool for all children is LOVE.”



*Please note, all staff educators, & children (over age 2) are wearing masks per guide lines. Any photos without masks were taken safely and/or prior to the pandemic.*



*Several Educators' reimagined program space*



## Building Each Other Up – the Power of the Network



*Yuri Cristina in her program*

Yuri Cristina and her family arrived in the United States from Colombia in 2018 seeking better opportunities. They first lived in Florida and then moved to Lowell. During the summer of 2019, Yuri Cristina noticed a yellow school bus bringing children to one of her neighbor's homes. Being new to Lowell, she was still finding her way around and asked her landlord for advice about child care for her daughter, Maria José. The landlord shared that there was a child care program at the neighbor's home. So, Yuri Cristina decided to knock on her door and ask if she had space for her daughter. Grace, a 15-year educator with Acre Family, opened the door that day.

Over the next few months of caring for Yuri Cristina's daughter and interacting with Yuri Cristina, Grace started to speak to her about opening her own child care business. Angela, one of Acre Family's Child Care Specialists met Yuri Cristina and also started to coach her on the process of licensing and launching a family child care program. "I was looking for opportunities beyond my job at a restaurant. My background,

education, and prior experience as a teacher in Colombia helped me decide to open my own child care. I wanted to teach children to create, and to fly with their imaginations."

The first hurdle to overcome was her space. As Yuri Cristina rents, she needed permission from her landlord to have a business at her home. Her landlord unfortunately, did not agree. With Grace's assistance, she found another apartment and her new landlord agreed. Things seemed to be progressing well at the beginning of 2020.

When the pandemic stay at home order came, Yuri Cristina did not give up on her goal to launch her business. She spent those months focused on family. She dedicated her time to learning, keeping fit, and healthy cooking. She read books on child development and care as well as building a practice of positivity and discipline.

Yuri Cristina credits Grace's daughter, Jarolin, for helping her stay motivated too. Jarolin assisted with phone calls to the Department of Early Education

and Care (EEC), the state agency who oversees the licensing, to make sure the process of opening moved along. Opening and reopening during a pandemic also requires submitting a written plan to detail how new state requirements for cleaning and safety are addressed. Jarolin helped her work on the plan. While child care programs began to reopen at the end of June, the licensing of new programs slowed due to the need of the licensing staff to oversee the implementation of the revised guidelines and heightened protocols due to COVID-19.

Beyond the paperwork of setting up a new family child care program, lots of energy needs to go into creating a beautiful and welcoming space with furniture, toys, and more. Other Acre Family Educators, like Maria Pilar and Amanda provided encouragement and support here, sharing unused items from their program with Yuri Cristina.

Finally in November, Yuri Cristina had her inspection and received her license to open Pasitos Firmes (Firm Little Steps). "I am proud that I fought for a year to be able to have my own child care program. Today, I am happy that my daughter shares time with her friends. I am able to offer a smile every morning to the children who come to my space, to tell stories with love, to take children to magical worlds, and to put smiles on their faces."

2021 offers many opportunities for Yuri Cristina. She is focused on learning more through Acre Family's Benchmark Training and professional development days, welcoming more children to her program, and improving her English skills. And, she's started to save money to buy a home. Welcome Yuri Cristina!

## Positive Mindset and Trust

Prior to joining the Acre Family Child Care network in February 2018, Cronnys worked two jobs, one during the day and another part-time in the evening. Her sister, Leyda had been an Educator with Acre Family since 2014 and encouraged her to open her own family child care business.

With her business open in the apartment she rented, Cronnys set a goal for herself of owning her own home as there were limitations to the space and no yard for the children. When she had saved enough for a down payment, she began looking in March 2020. It didn't take long, just two short weeks, to find the house of her dreams. She says "It was pretty, with a lot of patio, in a nice neighborhood, and within my budget." It was also close to her sister's – another great benefit. She

quickly made an offer. Unfortunately, it was not accepted by the seller. While she was sad, she also has great faith and prayed. The next day the phone rang, it was the seller. Was she still interested? YES!

Luckily, the pandemic did not delay the process and Cronnys and her family closed on the house in May. Once in the house, she immediately accomplished a few projects: updating the windows, securing the foundation, and painting. Inside, she also began preparations for her child care space. She also felt a new confidence about her business. Owning her home means she has full control over the property and improvements that can be made. She shared, "Changes are now completely in my hands which gives me great pride."



*Cronnys on the steps of her new home*

When asked if she had any advice for other educators looking to buy a home, she recommends "That they work well and hard, always with an end in mind, and focused on what they want. If they don't have good credit, work on it, and the main thing is to put their plans in the hands of God."

## A Message from our Board Chair

As the Board of Directors, we are so proud of the Staff and Educators in how they continued to find solutions and provide supports throughout the past year. We're truly inspired by their commitment to making a difference in these unprecedented times. Whether you look at the relationship between the Educators and the families they support, the Staff and Educators, or the Board and the Staff, we are a family. We support each other in times of need, we raise each other up, and we work together to overcome challenges.

As in-person meetings became impossible, we found ways to provide new iPads to every single Educator for connecting virtually. As families shared their challenges with food, diapers, and more, we were able to provide gift cards and supplies. As schools went to full remote, Educators rearranged space, bought desks, and learned class schedules. As revenue of Educators' programs was uncertain, multiple grants were secured to keep businesses from closing permanently.



*Bethany Watson*

We are thankful for our strong community of supporters who believe in our work and have helped make a difference over the past year. Out of the chaos came generosity, determination, and community; time and again we saw 2020 bring out the best in people.

Finally, I would be remiss if I didn't recognize Zelma and Lucas. As guidelines were changing by the day, they didn't miss a beat staying true to our mission. They showed so much grace even on the most difficult days and we are blessed to have them as leaders.

Thank you to the Staff, Educators, and Board, it truly takes a village and we are lucky to have such an amazing one.

	FISCAL YEAR	
	2020	2019
<b>Revenue &amp; Support</b>		
Program Service Revenue	\$5,286	\$5,231
Other Revenues	\$131	\$74
Grants & Contributions:		
Grants – Government	\$374	—
Grants – Foundations	\$115	\$123
Individuals & Businesses	\$61	\$37
Grants & Contributions	\$550	\$160
Gross Support & Revenue	\$5,967	\$5,465
<b>Expenses</b>		
Direct Service Subcontractors	\$3,921	\$3,521
Other Program Services	\$1,106	\$1,031
Management & General	\$539	\$547
Total Expenses	\$5,566	\$5,099
Operating (Loss) Income	\$401	\$366

In 2020, 90% of all expenditures were used to support our child care service programs, while general management and fundraising expenditures required only 10 cents of each dollar spent.

In 2020, our work was supported by many community members, friends, and family – both new and long-time. We were glad to receive personal protective equipment (PPE) – masks, including handmade; protective shields including 3D printed ones; gloves; hand sanitizer; hand soap; and disinfecting products to distribute to the Educators.

**Many thanks to all who advocate for women business owners, families, and children.**

An Anonymous Friend  
 BNY Mellon  
 City of Lowell – Community Development Block Grant & COVID19  
 City of Lowell Mayor's Office  
 Commonwealth Children's Fund  
 Cummings Foundation  
 DCU  
 Demoulas Foundation  
 Eastern Bank Charitable Foundation  
 Enterprise Bank  
 Aubert J. Fay Charitable Fund  
 Forest Foundation  
 Greater Lowell Health Alliance through GLCF grant  
 Linde Family Foundation  
 MA Department of Early Education & Care  
 MA Executive Office of Education  
 Middlesex Community College/Community Teamwork – Career Pathways  
 Monogram Loves Kids Foundation  
 Newburyport High School  
 Nordson Foundation  
 The Trustees of the Ayer Home  
 We Share a Common Thread Foundation/Jeanne D'Arc Credit Union

## Kathy Reticker Forum for Children and Families

The Forum started the year 2020 planning an event to screen the movie, “No Small Matter” on June 11, 2020 at the new Umbrella Community Art Center Theatre in Concord. Like so many plans for 2020, our event was cancelled due to the pandemic.

Our focus in 2020 has been to provide scholarships to talented students pursuing degrees in early childhood education. We increased our scholarship awards to \$2,000 per student at Middlesex Community College and \$1,000 per student at Lowell High School. On November 18, 2020, we awarded Kathy Reticker Scholarships to two inspiring women studying at Middlesex Community College to become early childhood educators, Shauna Ehr Gott and Cassandra Harmon. Both expressed their enthusiastic thanks for the honor and for the tangible assistance toward their education.

“You have lightened my financial burden, which allows me to focus on the most important aspect of school, learning,” said Shauna. “I hope that one day I will be able to help students achieve their goals just as you have helped me.”

Cassandra maintains an A average in the full course load she takes each semester, all while working full-time as a nanny, running a photography business, and raising her son. She

spoke of the difference the scholarship will make in her life: “Thanks to you, I will be able to continue on with my education with some financial peace of mind since there will be two members in my family simultaneously seeking higher education. Continuing my studies would not be possible without generous support from scholarship sponsors like yourself.”

In addition to the scholarships at Middlesex Community College, the Kathy Reticker Forum also awarded a scholarship to a Lowell High School 2020 graduate, Nyckole Lazaro, who intends to pursue a degree in early childhood education in college.

We plan to continue honoring Kathy's legacy and striving to realize her vision of high-quality early childhood care and education for all through supporting deserving students with Kathy Reticker Scholarships. We also hope to sponsor a “live” event later in 2021.



Kathy Reticker

# IMPACT 2020

## OUR MISSION

Acre Family Child Care provides a pathway for women to achieve economic independence by operating high quality child care businesses in their homes.



**3** Educators as first time homebuyers



**65** iPads for Educators



**10,000 +** of PPE distributed



**44%** of children receiving transportation to program



**60%** of Educators have school age children in remote learning



**23%** of children in programs are school age



**95%** of Educators reopened after spring closure

Even in the midst of a year of uncertainty, pandemic, and upheaval, six women joined the Acre Family Child Care network of Educators: Juana Capellan de Batista, Gloria Chaverra, Adaiana Goulart Morillo, Corpa Mejia De Medrano, Marysol Escobar, and Yuri Cristina Serna. We are thrilled to have them as part of the Acre Family.



Juana Capellan de Batista



Gloria Chaverra



Adaiana Goulart Morillo



Marysol Escobar



Yuri Cristina Serna



Corpa Mejia De Medrano