

Continuing to Grow

Working with young children reminds us that *every* day and moment is filled with possibility, even in a pandemic. We applaud our Educators for opening their homes each day to a world of creativity and learning for children of all backgrounds and abilities across our community. We are so privileged to have a strong and devoted group of staff, Educators, Board Members, and supporters to keep us moving forward – thank you for making this work possible.

In 2021 we accomplished more than we could have imagined. We welcomed 7 new Educators, working with more Educators this year than any other year in our history. Our Benchmark Training program – a thorough examination of topics related to operating a successful child care business – is actively meeting and strengthening developing child care programs. Two Educators became first-time home buyers, allowing them to invest in their businesses in new ways. We welcomed three new staff members to help keep the buses running and the training & professional development needs of the Educators addressed.

September marked a *significant* milestone for us as an agency – we became first-time home buyers. Our new building is at 327 Gorham Street, the former St. Peter's Rectory. We truly couldn't let the opportunity pass us by when we saw the four floors, expansive green space, and parking. This will provide us the space to better welcome families, support more Educators, and grow as an agency. We hope to officially move our office in late fall.

The pandemic continues to shine a spotlight on why our work is so critical: the importance of in-person learning, the need for reliable care for working parents, and the challenge of and need for recruiting and retaining talented early childhood educators. As hard as the future is to see someday, here is what we know: we are ready to support women opening and running family child care businesses, ready to welcome families and provide access to loving and caring child care, and ready to help Lowell thrive as a community. This is what keeps us moving forward, knowing this great potential and need for our continued work. We wish you a very happy and healthy 2022 and thank you for your support.



Zelma Khadar
Co-Executive Director



Lucas Skorczeski
Co-Executive Director

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Introducing Carolina



Carolina and her son Victor

Carolina Montero joined the Acre Family team in late October as the Training Coordinator. Carolina's first exposure to family child care was through her mom, Ludys Mota, who owned Sunshine Daycare, part of the Community Group network of educators in Lawrence. Carolina first worked as her mother's assistant and then, when her mom was nearing

retirement, Carolina took over the business.

Carolina had a license for 10 children and ran her program for four years. She worked hard to build strong relationships with her families, recognizing that children thrive when the Educator and parents work together. She also pursued her Child Development Associate certification at Northern Essex Community College and then she transferred to Cambridge College.

In 2019, after graduating with a degree in Early Education, she closed her program, relocated to Pennsylvania, and began a position as a preschool teacher in a Head Start classroom. And then came the shutdown...when she persevered and moved online. Throughout the months she connected with families singing, reading, coordinating activities, and offering other support.

But she missed Massachusetts and her family. The job opening and then the job offer from Acre Family captured her attention. Her previous experience, firsthand knowledge, and upbeat personality certainly grabbed our attention.

Since starting in the fall, Carolina has been spending time getting to know the educators one on one. She's visiting their programs, observing their classrooms, discussing goals, getting feedback about training needs, and more. She's passionate about family engagement and working together. She is also focused on curriculum development so that each child can grow, develop, and thrive no matter what age. Carolina is also working with 12 of Acre Family's newest educators via Benchmark Training, our intensive 12-session proprietary training. Welcome Carolina!



New Educators learn about successful business ownership in our award-winning Benchmark Training program. Educators include: Juana Batista, Gloria Chaverra, Valdirene De Carvalho, Corpa Mejia, Adaiana Morillo, Mariel Pichardo, Aliceida Quezada, Mauris Rios, Wanda Santos, Yuri Christina Serna, Yesenia Velez, Mayerling Ventura, Gloria Zuluaga, and Jenifer Alvarez (Assistant)



A New City, A New Business

Nancy Hernandez lived in New York City and worked caring for children for a year and then the elderly for five years. She was looking for more job security and a better education for her daughter when she relocated to Lowell in 2006.

Since she had prior experience with childcare and felt a true calling, she decided to pursue opening her own child care business. She contacted Child Care Circuit to learn about the requirements for licensing in Massachusetts. She moved forward with the necessary steps and received her license. At the same time, she researched family child care systems and came across Acre Family Child Care.

Nancy shared, “I wanted to select a system that would send me referrals, including children with special needs and low-income parents, update me with training, and support me and the children who attend my program. That's why I decided on Acre Family Child Care.” In May 2007 Nancy joined Acre Family. She began taking the college classes in early education to help her achieve her Child Development Associate certification and started Acre's Benchmark Training.

Now 15 years later, Nancy is still welcoming children in her program. What's her secret to success? “Love for the children comes first. It's a job where you have to be very patient, responsible, and consistent.”

Nancy recalled a child in her program who was struggling with math. She spent additional time helping the child, finding materials like letters and stories that were of interest and incorporated math concepts. She also worked together with the mother to help the child overcome the challenges with math. In the end, the child became more comfortable doing math activities. Nancy adjusts her activities as she learns more about an individual child's needs and interests, a skill she's built over time through her college classes, Benchmark Training, and ongoing professional development workshops.

Angela, Child Care Specialist, notes that Nancy has great empathy, patience, and understanding for the families and children. Nancy shares her knowledge with other Acre Family educators too – especially on the administrative side of keeping papers and records very well organized.



Congratulations to Nancy for Celebrating 15 years as an Educator!

Nancy says “Running a family child care business has helped me have a stable income and the economic security I wanted as a single mother.” Beyond her successful child care business, Nancy is also proud of her daughter, Scarlett, who has her Bachelors Degree and now works for Jeanne D'Arc Credit Union.



Nancy shares a story in her program.

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Nancy Hernandez

A Pocket Dial I'll Never Forget — Remembering Rick Rosa

by Sheila Primeau, Transportation Manager

The evening of Saturday, September 11th will be seared in my brain for a long time. My co-worker, Alcinda, called me after seeing a news report online. I read the words but really didn't want to believe what they said. "Richard Rosa was ejected from the SUV during the crash, causing life-threatening injuries, police said. He was taken to Speare Memorial Hospital where he died."

This wasn't possible. I had just seen Rick on Friday in the office. I worked with Rick for ten years. The loss numbed the team at Acre Family. How could this happen? Over the past few months, we have gathered as a group – sometimes just the transportation team and other times the full staff. We laughed and cried together – taking turns sharing our interactions and conversations with Rick.

My favorite memory of Rick is from one afternoon a few years ago. I had a ton of work to do. My phone rang, and of course it was Rick. Rick was sometimes, well, let's just say he tested my patience. I answered the phone a bit hurriedly and said gruffly "What Rick?" And then I heard him, he was singing. That's when I realized he had pocket dialed me. He was singing the song to help calm down one of the children on his bus. I put him on speaker phone and shared this with a coworker. We laughed and she commented on how nice it was to hear this side of Rick. The call lasted close to 4 minutes. This was the Rick I knew. He loved the kids on his bus routes, and he enjoyed the time with them. He was, as always, the big kid on the bus.

We love and miss you, Rick. May you be reunited with Anne-Marie and enjoying a motorcycle ride through colorful leaves!



*Rick and Anne-Marie at an
Acre Family Holiday Party - 2018*

A Message from Our Board Chair Strengthening Our Foundation



Bethany Watson

The dream of having our own home has been a discussion topic at Acre Family much longer than the seven years that I have served on the Board. Each day, we proudly support small women-owned businesses and celebrate our educators when they purchase a home (two in 2021!). So, we patiently waited for our turn to come.

We dove into 2021 with a focus on finding the right location for us. It seemed ambitious wanting to stay in the downtown area, and have dedicated parking, green space, and room to grow. It feels like we manifested the perfect space into reality because, in September of 2021, our dream came true. Building on a strong foundation, we now have a permanent home to invest in for our staff, the educators, and the families we welcome each day. We have a place to gather, host summer activities, grow our Acre family, and deepen our roots in the city that we love.



327 Gorham Street

The Board of Directors and I acknowledge that this collective effort was achieved because of the dedicated staff and a great team behind us with tremendous knowledge and skill. But the real joy of this project is knowing the impact it will have on the critical programs and supports Acre Family Child Care offers in this great community; this isn't just a home, this is our future. We are thrilled to be part of this exciting chapter and look forward to sharing the journey with you as we navigate through the renovation phase of the project.

	FISCAL YEAR	
	2021*	2020
Revenue & Support		
Program Service Revenue	\$5,911	\$5,286
Other Revenues	\$101	\$135
Grants & Contributions:		
Grants – Government	\$435	\$374
Grants – Foundations	\$166	\$133
Individuals & Businesses	\$38	\$52
Grants & Contributions	\$639	\$559
Gross Support & Revenue	\$6,651	\$5,980
Expenses		
Direct Service Subcontractors	\$3,993	\$3,921
Other Program Services	\$1,144	\$1,106
Management & General	\$515	\$531
Total Expenses	\$5,652	\$5,558
Operating (Loss) Income	\$999	\$422

Thank you to all who support the educators, families, and children.

An Anonymous Friend
City of Lowell – Community Development Block Grant
Cummings Foundation
Demoulas Foundation
Aubert J. Fay Charitable Fund
Linde Family Foundation
MA Department of Early Education & Care
Nordson Foundation
People's United Community Foundation
The Trustees of the Ayer Home
UKG
We Share a Common Thread Foundation/Jeanne D'Arc Credit Union

Building/Capital Campaign

Nancy L. Donahue
Faith Home, Inc.
Theodore Edson Parker Foundation

Kathy Reticker Forum for Children and Families

The pandemic has brought many issues into stark relief, none more so than the need for high-quality and affordable early childhood care and education. At the Kathy Reticker Forum for Children and Families we are delighted to see this increased attention, but we recognize there is still more to do. We are more committed than ever to our mission and the people who dedicate themselves and their careers to the youngest members of our community.

Our focus moving forward is to provide scholarships to talented students pursuing degrees in early education, and we are embarking on an exciting initiative: creating a \$100,000+ endowment starting in 2022 that will permanently fund scholarships for such students.

In fall 2021, two inspiring women, Cassandra Harmon and Ella Wang, were awarded scholarships at Middlesex Community College. For Cassandra, who was also a Kathy Reticker Scholar in 2020, this past year was a big one: She completed her associate degree in Early Childhood Education with High Honors and is on her way to completing her bachelor's degree through a joint program between MCC and Lesley University.

Cassandra reports, “Since the beginning of the pandemic I have returned to the classroom and have been working as a Pre-K teacher, which has strengthened my resolve to make a difference in the lives of these little humans who

are our future...I hope that one day I will also be able to help a student achieve their goals, like you have helped me.”

Ella Wang, an immigrant from China, is also busy balancing work in an afterschool program, caring for her own family, and her studies at MCC toward a degree in Early Childhood Education. Her enthusiasm for working with children and for the opportunities she has had at MCC and in the United States more broadly abounds. She shared, “Being a teacher is my dream career since I was a child and I am realizing it in America. . . going to school again gives me the opportunity to enrich myself, realize my dream, and understand America better.”



Marybeth Barker, Jack Flynn, and Cassandra Harmon

In addition to the scholarships at MCC, the Kathy Reticker Forum awarded scholarships to two Lowell High School 2021 graduates, Kaysha Perez and Imalay Figueroa, who intend to pursue degrees in early childhood education in college.

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.



2 Educators as first-time homebuyers



7 New Educators



5 Educators celebrating 15 years in business



3 Educators receiving their Child Development Associate Certification



12 Educators in 12 sessions of Benchmark Training

