

# VOICES FROM THE FIELD

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Shannon Moody, owner of A.S. Academy of Learning 2, and husband Dave Moody - images by Stephanie Thompson

## A. S. Academy of Learning 2: Centering Staff Builds a Stronger Program

*Written by Stephanie Thompson*

In the world of early childhood education, staffing challenges are nothing new, but at A. S. Academy of Learning 2, leadership is addressing recruitment and retention head-on. Owner Shannon Moody brings a deep understanding of the importance of supporting staff to create a thriving program. This year, she's using the Quality Improvement process to develop her "employer brand," marketing her center's dual emphasis on quality for both child and staff development to prospective staff members and families.

## Built on Experience, Designed for Success

Shannon began her journey as a family child care provider in 1999, with Aunt Shannon's Daycare. Later, she worked in center-based programs. "I've worn every hat," she says, including roles as teacher, assistant director, and director. When she had the opportunity to open a center, "Aunt Shannon" became the "A. S." in A. S. Academy of Learning, which opened in its current location as A. S. Academy of Learning 2 in 2017.

Walking into the program, visitors are greeted with thoughtfully designed spaces that reflect the center's emphasis on curiosity and independence. "We are intentionally building the environment. It's not just the curriculum—it's everything we do," Shannon says. One hallway features sensory walls with fidget toys and busy boards, while cozy corners and thoughtfully placed books invite children to explore.

Asked what she looks forward to each day, Shannon answers without hesitation: "It's the funny moments, the aha moments. Not just the kids...mine and the teachers, too. Spontaneous moments are so much fun...if you don't keep your sense of humor, you're going to burn out."

## The Heart of the Program: The Staff

Shannon offers her staff competitive wages, professional development opportunities, and fosters a workplace culture that prioritizes work-life balance and appreciation. Teachers are invited to participate in decision-making and are often surprised with small gestures like a "Funshine" cart stocked with snacks to brighten their day. "I'm always trying to make it fun for the teachers—anything to put a smile on their face and make it less stressful. The less stress you bring in, the more fun you can have with the children."



*Shannon Moody makes the rounds with the Funshine cart.*

For individual professional development, Shannon actively encourages staff to pursue credentials and degrees in the field. “I can provide opportunities and flexible schedules to an extent. I help them think through how to make it work.” She also ensures that staff are aware of the opportunities and scholarships offered through the Early Childhood Innovation Center (ECIC).

Inservice days for staff focus on both learning and team-building. In March of the coming year, DIEEC will facilitate an on-site professional learning experience, “Understanding Children’s Behavior as Communication,” for the program. The on-site professional development opportunity allows the whole staff to participate as a team, and allows the training content to be aligned with A. S. Academy of Learning’s unique needs.

## Building an Employer Brand

Recently, Shannon and her DIEEC Quality Improvement Specialist, Dena Nacci, collaborated on a plan to enhance her program’s recruitment and retention efforts. Dena says the program has “made significant investments...to attract qualified ECE professionals and families seeking quality childcare.” For example, the program’s website now includes a dedicated recruitment page for interested candidates, highlighting all of the benefits offered to team members. Showcasing the program’s commitment to maintaining a high-quality staff is designed to appeal not only to potential employees, but also to prospective families.



*Miss Kabree, one of A. S. Academy of Learning 2's newer teachers.*

While the program has always emphasized staff retention internally, marketing to potential employees is new territory. Shannon reflects, “I never looked at it from that perspective- I thought, that’s in-house, nobody needs to hear about it.” Now, she realizes the benefits of proactively sharing the ways that A. S. Academy of Learning 2 staff are valued and supported. “Working with Dena on this piece, I’ve grown so much...I’m seeing a difference in my employees. I involve them in everything, and that’s been really nice.”

## Advice for Other Programs

For early childhood educators looking to strengthen their own recruitment and retention practices, Shannon offers practical advice. “Broaden your channels,” she says, suggesting partnerships with job fairs, schools, and colleges, even if they don’t yield immediate results. “The recognition and connections are invaluable.” She also encourages programs to invest in social media and marketing to showcase what makes them unique. “Highlight what you offer that’s different,” she advises, noting that the visibility helps with both staff recruitment and parent engagement.

“Offer competitive wages as much as you can. If you can’t offer higher wages...[consider] what you CAN offer in terms of advancement or an expanded role.” She also emphasizes the importance of treating employees with respect and building trust. “Please and thank you go a long way,” she adds.

## Building for the Future

Shannon is beginning to see the fruits of her labor. She says that her efforts are resulting in improvements to her business, increased quality for children, and a better workflow. Recent open houses have drawn promising new families, and staff members are increasingly engaged in shaping the program’s direction. “Listening to them and taking their advice is so important,” she says. “If you don’t listen, they’re not going to stay.”

### Resources mentioned in this spotlight:

- [On-site professional learning experiences for programs](#)
- [Delaware’s Quality Improvement System](#)
- [Early Childhood Innovation Center](#)