

PROVIDER SPOTLIGHT

Sharon McPhatter Happyland Childcare



“Don’t give up. I say that in two ways—don’t give up on your passion, and don’t give up on your kids, because they need us.”

*Written by Stephanie Thompson/DIEEC
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Sharon McPhatter's journey in early childhood education is one that exemplifies dedication and growth.

Sharon initially started a small program in response to her own children's needs, but what began as a solution for her family blossomed into a lifelong career. "I ended up adoring it," Sharon recalls. Over 25 years, she's transformed her passion for nurturing children into a thriving large family child care program, Happyland Childcare. "I'm really proud of the growth," Sharon says. "To stand back and see where I came from- from a Level 1 to a Level 2 to a large family child care with a building outside of my home."

At Happyland Childcare, Sharon and teacher Mary Matthews care for children ages 2 to 12. "Every day I just look forward to just having fun," Sharon shares. "That's why it's Happyland Childcare. I want the kids to be able to live and be kids. We want the parents to be able to go to work or school and know that their children are being taught, being nurtured, and having fun."

Sharon is deeply committed to professional growth. She recently earned a bachelor's degree in behavioral science, demonstrating to both children and parents that lifelong learning is achievable. "I wanted to be an example for the children here, and the parents. It doesn't have to be on anyone's time but yours—you can reach the finish line." This commitment to growth is also reflected in her program's library. To foster a sense of belonging and potential, Sharon curates a library with books that ensure children see themselves reflected and feel encouraged.



When asked what challenges her in her role, Sharon thinks back several years. “It was awareness of what, actually, a family child care provider does. The sweat I poured into it, and then being perceived as a babysitter.” She has since come to the conclusion that showing is better than explaining- now, she tries to schedule interviews with new families while the program is open, so that they can see for themselves what she does and how children are loved and supported.

Throughout the day, Sharon takes advantage of small moments to recharge. During naptime, the program plays soothing music as the children sleep. Sharon and Miss Mary allow themselves to be soothed too, as they quietly work on lesson plans. “Inhale, exhale...then we’re ready to go back for the next three hours.” On Saturday mornings, she takes “me time” on her own, and throughout the week she takes walks, reads, and keeps up with the news.

Her advice to fellow family child care educators is both simple and powerful: "Don't give up. I say that in two ways—don't give up on your passion, and don't give up on your kids, because they need us. They're literally our future, and without a foundation, they're lost."

Resource notes:

Interested in the [Physical Activity Learning Sessions \(PALS\)](#) mentioned above?

A new cohort is forming now!

Sharon McPhatter, right, meets fellow FCC educator Marlette Lofland at the First State Family Child Care Conference in 2024. The two first met while participating in a DIEEC Physical Activity Learning Sessions cohort. (Photos by Stephanie Thompson)