

PROVIDER SPOTLIGHT

JAMIE BOWDEN, LIL RASCALS LEARNING CENTER



Journey to an Early Childhood Career

Written by Stephanie Thompson/DIEEC
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Before starting Lil Rascals Learning Center, her small early childhood education center in Millsboro, Jamie Bowden wore many different hats. After working at the casino in Harrington and owning a cleaning business, she decided to return to school. She earned an associate's degree in education and worked toward a bachelor's degree, but as she neared completion, she realized that a K-12 school was not where she wanted to be. Then, COVID hit and schools closed. During that time, Jamie came across the small center that would become Lil Rascals; the opportunity to pursue her interest in education and to be her own boss again led her to take the step of opening her own early childhood education center.

Building a "Home Away From Home"

Jamie shares that finding staff for her new program involved a learning curve. Her goal was to create a home away from home and a sense of family- not just for the children, but for the staff. Hiring staff who shared that philosophy was key. "I wanted to make a difference for the kids, but also in the work environment for my staff. I found that when the atmosphere changed for the staff, it changed for the kids, too. It was amazing." Part of that approach includes setting high expectations for staff- and ensuring they have the tools and support to meet those expectations.



Photo by Stephanie Thompson/DIEEC

Jamie and her staff work hard to create a welcoming environment, so when it comes to sharing a challenging part of the day, Jamie doesn't hesitate. "When a child's upset," she says, noting that one child's distress can have a ripple effect in the classroom. She wanted to equip her staff with tools and strategies to handle those difficult situations. "Understanding means patience, and patience- over time- can actually yield a faster result," in terms of resolving a challenging situation, she says. "You have to know your kids." With this need in mind, Jamie scheduled a Professional



*For Jamie, the formula was simple: a better atmosphere for staff equals a better environment for the kids.
Photo by Stephanie Thompson/DIEEC*

Learning Experience (PLE), Understanding Children's Behavior as Communication, to be delivered by DIEEC staff on-site at Lil Rascals, for all of her staff.

Lasting Impact of a Team Learning Opportunity

Reflecting on her staff's experience with the on-site PLE, Jamie says "When someone comes in, you're listening AND participating. It's going to last with them- they're seeing, they're hearing." She emphasizes that the face-to-face interaction and having all staff work through the activities together were key to retaining the knowledge they gained. The on-site format ensured that everyone received the same message and worked from the same framework. Following the PLE, Jamie shares that her staff are "doing well, they're trying." Together, they're implementing the GLASS model that was introduced during the training: "They get down to talk to them [the children] on their level. They're labeling what they notice, they stick with it." This immediate application and uniform language across the center means Jamie can confidently delegate behavior support, knowing her staff have the tools and are learning to apply them consistently.

Coffee, Conversation, and Confident Parents

The PLE is also designed to empower educators to work with families in understanding how each child uniquely communicates their needs and wants. Jamie notes that, even before the PLE, it was “really important to me to have a good relationship with my parents,” and says that her favorite part of the day is morning drop-off. A coffee station is available to parents, and they often make a cup and stop to chat and joke with Jamie as they- and their children- begin the day. Jamie emphasizes that she wants parents to walk out the door confident that their child is content and well-cared for. This confidence will be even greater as parents see staff consistently and calmly using the newly learned strategies to meet their child's needs.

Small and Personable- Just the Way She Likes It

“These kids,” Jamie says, gesturing around the center, “the majority I’ve had since they were in diapers. You spend that much time with them, it’s like you’re almost a second parent.” She finds satisfaction knowing that parents and families stay with her program. Those relationships also directly inform Jamie’s future plans. “I’d like to get a tad bigger,” she confides, so that she can provide before-and-after care once her students enter kindergarten. Lil Rascals is “small and personable” and she wants to retain that feeling. “I still want to be in every aspect of every class- with kids and teachers. Right now I can do that- it’s special.”



Photo by Stephanie Thompson/DIEEC

Jamie's dedication to creating a small, personable, and high-quality environment is evident not only in her future plans, but in the daily bond she shares with the Lil Rascals community. She moves confidently through the small building, lending a hand here, scooping up a toy there, greeting children and conversing with her staff. On a recent morning, her two-year-olds gathered around her, each proudly presenting a handprint birthday card to their “Nana J.” This is the atmosphere that Jamie set out to create—a true home away from home.



*Jamie of Lil Rascals treasures the special, long-lasting relationships she has with families.
Photo by Stephanie Thompson/DIEEC*

Resources

- Interested in scheduling an on-site learning experience for your staff? Learn more about the available options on [DIEEC's on-site learning page](#).
- For more information on the topic of understanding children's behavior as communication, you can visit this page on the [Head Start website](#).
- [The GLASS model mentioned in the article is summarized in this poster](#) and is also referenced on the Head Start page above.