



TRANSCRIPT

Educated, powerful women.

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GUEST

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Kate: Before we get into your thoughts on professionalization and family child care, I was hoping if you could tell me a little bit about how you got into family child care and how long you've done this work?

Abby: Yeah, that is really interesting. It was really a good destiny I would call it because I've been in education. My background in education was for a teacher. And I was a teacher in a high school, middle school, elementary school. And then I've been drawn to younger and younger ages. I thought I am more effective with elementary than middle school, I am more effective so I said, how about younger? I was drawn to early childhood when I learned so much about what really happens with these studies and research, how important the early years are. So much learning happens in the first years of childhood. I started as a preschool teacher and soon in four months became the director. I became familiar somehow, heard first, about family child care that way. I found it wonderful that they are mixed grades, one person is taking all of them and so much individual attention. I just loved it but didn't know much about what family child care was about until I became familiar with Satellite. I was employed by Satellite to set up a center for Satellite in the Eastside of Madison. Then through Satellite, I became familiar with family child care and looked at it as a very professional setting. That was my introduction to family child care, I walked in professional settings and I saw educated, powerful women running this business, and I just fell in love. I said, this is what I want to do and I started my day care at home. The family day care business is such a relationship, it's so intimate. You have families coming and you share everything, you raise this child together. It's that togetherness, that connection, that relationship, and all the studies show that it is so important for the child's future relationship as a co-worker, as a team, as a partner, as a parent, is so important. Building that relationship and consistency of it, the child learns about it. And then the other thing about family child care that was fascinating to me was that not only you're working with children, but you're also working with parents, you learn from each other. So much I am in the field of early childhood, everything I read, research, and study, books, and I can share that with them. Isn't that wonderful? I can share with them as it happens in communication, as a daily event, which at the center you could just send a newsletter or highlight something they know, but this is different. You have this relationship and your interest is mutual and the parents are ready to know more about this. When you tell them and bring the research to support that idea and tell them why I am doing this with a child, why the day is going this way, and that relationship is wonderful. That was how I was drawn to family child care, since 1994.

Kate: You've been through everything, you started with being a high school teacher and then middle school, then elementary, and then preschool. Then you finally found out about family child care and was so excited about this different forum, where you could be the director and teacher and provider in your own home. Did you say you started in 1994 as a family child care provider?

Abby: As a family child care provider. The good thing was that I started with Satellite.

Kate : Can you clarify what Satellite is? Because not everyone knows what Satellite is.

Abby: Satellite is a system for accreditation from the city of Madison. Child care providers who reside in Madison have the opportunity to become a member of Satellite. It's another set of regulations and just like a license, but more based on relationships. The standards of Satellite has been a model in the nation, and it's been used by NAEYC, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and the National Association of Family Child care [NAFCC]. It's been used by them as their standards of Satellite. You become accredited, you have to meet some guidelines and you get a visit from your consultant. You have to assess every year and renew by looking at your program and goals and discuss them with your consultant. It's a wonderful organization, relation-based and they provide not only the accreditation but also the consultant. They can support you in many ways, they're providing resources and being just professional support for you as well. If you have issues with parents or children, and you need someone to talk to, of course it's based on the individual relationship, you can do that with Satellite as a consultant.

Kate: Thank you for clarifying that. It brings up the topic of professionalism and I was wondering, do you consider yourself a professional? When did you see this happen? What happened to make you feel like a professional and why do you think that was?

Abby: It depends on how you define professional. In any field you think about it, one is professional in what they do when they have the knowledge, they have the training, they have the skills, and they have motivation to learn. They are devoted, committed to what they do. That's what I call professional. Whoever has these skills is professional in that early childhood education is so vast. It's so vast that it's not like computer programming that you learn a set of things and then you're done. You constantly learn just by observing children, how they learn: you learn. And then more and more, NAEYC was so active in getting all the subjects, all the areas of early childhood resources and books available, and magazines, and other early childhood organizations. That, you never say I know it all. A

professional is being always up-to-date, staying on time, being willing to know more, and being self-motivated in this field, as an early childhood educator in a residential setting. It takes more to be motivated and stay on top of it. An immediate thing that I learned about family child care when I started my business after a couple of months working, it was exciting setting up and having children. Then I said, Oh my God, I'm so isolated, there is nobody to talk to. That encouraged me more that you got to do it yourself, nobody else is going to connect to you, you have to connect to find your way. My immediate group that was in my field was Satellite, early childhood educators. I connected with them. I found out there are clusters that each geographic location of Madison has their own cluster and they had their own support group. So I joined them. I joined other organizations NAEYC, NAFCC, WECA, and became connected to the early childhood community, not to become isolated. Because that is one of the reasons that we need to pay attention to this profession and reach out to those who do not really take the initiation, to come and become part of this. It is very important to connect to them. That's one of the things that I'm doing right now. I'm attempting to bring more providers, especially in this climate right now to meetings and make a group so that they can share their daily issues and become part of the school. They become connected and their voice can be heard and they can feel support and provide support to others and empower each other.

Kate: Why do you feel it's so important that people in the public listening to this podcast, for example, understand that this is a profession, that this is a career? Why is it so important for them to understand that?

Abby: The ability and acknowledgment of the field, in general, it is important. If we want to only focus on early childhood educators in residential, is that they are even, I don't know, 10 times more professional. I'll tell you why. As someone who has my own business, you have to be an administrator. That is one of the skills. You have to be able to set up a business. In a day care center setting, we have an administrator, an accountant, a program director, outreach, we have janitors, we have a cook, we have "you name it", someone who takes care of the regulatory agencies. As a family day care provider, you have all of these roles, you are a leader, the true leader. Then you have to keep up to date with all your regulators, certifications, and children's portfolios. Juggling all of these, doing these, only those who are really professional can do it. In a home setting, there are challenges between the family and business and time management, and problem-solving. They are really professional and they are leaders. That's how I look at them at whatever experience of the years they have because they have to be all of these at the same time. Some providers have advantages of family members who are willing to help them and they do take some parts, but a family day care provider is a devoted person. A devoted and committed and reliable

person who families can count on them. They consider child nutrition, child safety, child education, parents relationship, all the regulations, paperwork, everything. Beyond that, the quality doesn't have an end, there is no end in quality care. You cannot say, okay, I'm done, I provided quality care up to this point. It's ongoing, keeping up with the quality and bringing it up to date with the research and studies and training and participation. That's how I see a family day care as a very professional job. They are leaders. I call them problem solvers.

Kate: Thank you. It's so wonderful to hear you talk about that. When you talk about you mention a little bit how you are mentoring I think another group of providers in helping support them with all of those different roles that you were talking about and helping them understand that that's part of this, there's a lot of tall orders with this profession in terms of all the roles that you take on. I'm so excited to hear you talk about all of that because it perfectly fits our topic for the day.

Abby: You were talking about mentoring and that's the next step of professionalism. As a professional, for years you learn, you develop skills, you gain experiences and you participate in trainings and you learn. And then you see. OK, I am at a level that I can share with others and be more. It's time for giving back. So I started giving back to the community. It is important that we do that. It was helping me, myself, to feel more professional, sharing this with others. As a result, I learned from others as well, when a subject comes up, you discuss it with the group, and then you learn through that. So this is actually empowering each other and if we give each other support, it opens the door for others to think about "oh I can do it too, we can do it too," and you encourage others also " you are very good in this subject, you should do a training about that. So this way, we really give each other encouragement and create this community of providers who are strong leaders and, and are role models for the new ones that are coming. Also, for other ECE organizations to the point that they can think about the system and become critical about the system. Looking through the lenses of quality, to regulatory agencies, to ECE agencies and, and bringing ideas to them. Being someone who really does the quality control on each other. It's a mutual thing. It's not just the agencies that go to family day cares and oversee them. It is also providers to oversee the agencies and how they are functioning. So that is professionalism to me.

Kate: It is a perfect segue into this next question, which is, tell me about your experience with the YoungStar QRIS. Has it helped you become more professional? What about accreditation? You've talked about it a little bit. Has it helped you become more professional?

Abby: Yes, yes, yes, yes. All of them, all of them all. I am very much supportive of any organization who is trying to support quality early childhood education, and take steps. When the first Registry came, I joined. I was one of the first people who joined the Registry. When YoungStar came, I first joined it. YoungStar and the Registry, they are like a periodic reminder to you, every term of the YoungStar application process. Every step of it is another reminder for you to reflect and assess and look at your goals and long term, short term and see where you are, where you were and where you want to go to. You focus on the child and the relationship and environment. I was willing to go through that, but I know many of the early childhood educators were not open to the idea of the Registry and are still not. About YoungStar, they might look at it as a rating system that is not meeting their needs. They don't need it, so they don't want to join. But I am always in support of those organizations because, first of all, they connect the community and acknowledge excellence, reward excellence, and rate great things. Of course, micro-grants help too because some providers might get encouraged with the grant that they receive, \$500 a year or \$1,000 a year that is going to help them with some materials for them. But they have to back it up with what they are going to do, and that's what I like about it. Because the provider has to think about it deeply, this item that I want to purchase, really what areas is it gonna help with the child's learning and development. They might rethink it and come up with another idea that is related to what they are writing about in their YoungStar process evaluation papers.

Kate: I have two or so more questions and I'm a little conscious of our time because I only wanted to keep you for an hour or less. I know time is valuable as a family child care provider. Another question is, in what way does COVID and this pandemic and the various racial justice incidents make you think differently about your profession, and/or YoungStar and/or accreditation?

Abby: COVID and racial justice. Let's focus on one because they're two separate things. As far as COVID, it has its own challenges, for the whole field of early childhood education. It created a lot more work and it really is a weight on the whole field, from organization to workers, and to everybody in how to deal with safety and health issues and all the extra miles we have to go. And not to forget about the emotional effect of COVID. One good thing from COVID is that it for sure has proved that early childhood education and early childhood educators are essential workers and how important it is to a working family. That is a major economic issue for the whole nation that they have to go to work and children have to go to day care and how essential it is. Now they can see it. There is nothing more visible than this. For years and years, we wanted early childhood education to become visible, to be seen as important. This is the time. Never forget, use all this evidence and use it for visibility of early childhood education

and for more funding. But let's not forget where the money should go. I see a lot of attention is paid to materials and buildings and things, instead of considering a raise for early childhood educators, considering a benefit for early childhood educators, and considering more training for them. Unfortunately, when you look at the percentage, a lot of money might go to administrators like a grant concept, a big chunk of it goes to the grant writer. That needs to change. We need this money to go directly to children, families, and teachers, and then to materials. If you provide good care for children, pay a good salary, you will have teachers, you attract more clients, more families come to your day care. When they come and enroll, your enrollment is full, you're getting paid. The other way is that they pay tuition for families to help because it's difficult for families to find child care that they can afford, if they are interested in a certain program, but they cannot enroll because of their income level. Because they have to pay twice as much as their mortgage for their child care. That's an issue throughout the country and that's something else all the policymakers need to change their focus. In any developed country, the first thing they do, with any budget or any economy, or any social benefit decisions, the first thing developed countries do is focus on families, and family is tied to education. Therefore their budget goes to education as well. That's how the focus and the countries develop because families are not under pressure to pay tuition and many-many workers can afford to send a child to day care. If they don't have any free child care around the areas, a child is left alone. So hopefully COVID is gonna help that policymaker to find the balance and put the money where the values are, invest in values. If families are important in any society, that's where the money goes to. So they need to spend money where their values are. That's how I look at it.

Kate: Thank you for that because I should have made those two separate questions, cause they're both really huge and COVID has impacted us massively and is still continuing to impact us, but also these racial incidents. If you want to talk a little bit about that, if you have any thoughts on how that's impacted your work as a family child care provider? If you have any feelings or thoughts on how it's impacted you in your profession, in your relationship with the different regulations, with accreditation or with YoungStar?

Abby: Well, racial justice is not a new issue. This is an old issue for centuries. It is built-in there, in society. This is not just an issue today. It's just now, with unfortunate incidents, we see it and we talk about it right now. Again, I said investing for your values, that's where the money goes. They want the funding not to go to some areas or and go more for families and education, then for example for the police department. So that's where I say invest where the values are. Diversity is focused on where the money goes. Equity is about power and power is measured by money. When the policy is going to the businesses that are of a

certain race and they have more power. When you look at, you look at the numbers and compare in federal money or state money and you can see, all those numbers are out there. They can see and see what percentage of it went to African-American, what percentage were to women-owned business. That is the issue. That is racial justice. It's been a struggle to have the diversity in my program as far as different levels of income, because they could not afford their share. It didn't make it easy for them to do. Even some scholarships, when being offered, parents might not feel comfortable to have some handout, they want to be equally treated with other families. They don't want to be looked at like that. If you're able to help families with tuition and we value that and just don't give them some child care vouchers and that is not enough, then you need to give it more. Tuition assistance for the families. When families are under pressure when it comes to monthly tuition and they have to give this big check, it affects them. But if they had some help from the government, some funding, that makes it easier for families. Where does the money go? We have to focus on that. Again, like a broken record, invest in your values and values are families and put the money where it is going to families. And make sure that you are providing wages that they can pay for the food they can afford. We have so many child care providers throughout the country that are on food stamps, food aids, and that's wrong. That's wrong. This is a very important job that they are doing in this country. They are essential workers and they need to be more acknowledged and paid higher wages. That's something that ECE organizations owe to people because for years and years, I believe that NAEYC was not doing it. That's my personal belief. NAEYC has not been doing a good job in that way. I think NAEYC had a big role to make this field visible and their membership is not cheap either and us teachers were paying high fees to become a member. This is totally my own opinion that I think they have not done enough. In recent years they're coming along and they're doing much better. Even in their national annual conference that I participated in through the years, I see a lot of improvements that they are really getting passionate about it and focusing on raising the wage for the workers and making the field more visible to the policymakers, but they could have done a better job on that. I take part myself. I'm not going to sit there and wait for an organization to come to me to make it easier for me. I take steps, myself. I become critical of that organization and I raise my voice. We have to all do that, and we have to join so our voice can be heard, when we join together. We need to organize and empower each other, connect to each other and raise our voices, let them hear us. We take part in, and be effective in things, like volunteer yourself, become a board member. I do myself because decision-making comes when you're effective. Then you become a voice of early childhood education, in residential settings, or in day care center director or a parent. We need to take part in these and become part of it and make the difference. I expect all the early childhood education organizations to join forces and become collaborative. Stop just playing their own drums, get all together, play drums together and beat it harder

and harder and harder until your voice is heard. One organization just goes and another goes for this. We have to join. It's good things that I've been observing throughout the years. I see in the past couple of years that our state and local organizations are doing more collaborative work, writing grants and getting money and spending, like WEESN (Wisconsin Early Education Shared Services Network) so that is good. When we join together, we have a stronger voice instead of competing with each other. We should not be facing each other. We should be side by side and go together and make this field visible to the society and get the funding, becoming more successful in that area. That's where I would say it goes that I see they joined forces.

Kate: Those are powerful words, Abby, thank you for sharing those and your passion and all of the experience that you bring to the children and the families that you work with. The privilege of having you care for their children and have these amazing conversations on a daily basis at drop-off and at pick up, to have their child loved and cared for by a professional like you, it's such a gift and everything that you bring to the field, it's a gift and we're really, really fortunate to have you in Madison. Thank you for everything that you bring. All I have left is just to ask you if there's anything else that you'd like to share, or is there anything that I didn't ask before we close?

Abby: Thank you for focusing on this subject on family day care providers. I hope that this information will be used to get more support for them and just stay connected and do the good work that you guys are doing. We can get there, you know, together we have a stronger voice.

Kate: That's a wonderful note to end on. Together we have a stronger voice. I couldn't agree more. So thank you so much, Abby. What a wonderful, wonderful time to be able to chat with you.

Abby: Thank you very much. Yes.

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