

Childcare Worker Career Path Exploration

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Introduction

This article provides factual information for those interested in a career as a childcare worker. The given information about the job specifications, such as duties and benefits, may prove beneficial in helping those interested decide if this career is right for them. The following information about the childcare worker career will be presented in the following order: responsibilities, how to become one, pay and benefits, job outlook, and an interview with someone currently working in this field

Responsibilities of Childcare Workers

According to the U.S. Department of Labor (2019), childcare workers take care of children. This includes ensuring the children's safety, preparing food for them, and making sure the children have good hygiene such as changing infants and toddlers' diapers (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019). Additionally, they must create routines and schedules for the children and coordinate activities that involve learning and exploration (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019). For children who have not begun elementary school, childcare workers will prepare them for kindergarten through guided educational activities (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019). Childcare workers may help children who are in school with homework and transport them to and from their activities. They record the children's routines, interests, and progress (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019). As stated by the U.S. Department of Labor (2019), those in the profession must also be aware of any emotional or developmental problems they notice in the children and notify their parents or guardians upon discovering a problem.

The U.S. Department of Labor (2019) says there are three types of childcare workers: childcare center workers, family childcare providers, and nannies. Childcare center workers work at childcare centers where they collaborate with other childcare workers as well as preschool teachers and teacher assistants and educate child through a structured curriculum (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019). As stated by the U.S. Department of Labor (2019), childcare centers tend to offer part-time and full-time shifts throughout the day, but Alice Fothergill's (2013, p. 435) study on mothers' and childcare workers' experiences with childcare states that even some full-time employees may work a second job. Family childcare providers take care of children in their own home, so because of this, they must market their business and perform other business management tasks, including writing contracts (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019). Additionally, they may work long hours to accommodate parents or guardians who work early or late and occasionally allow children to spend the night (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019). Nannies work at families' homes to take care of their children, so they often work for just one family at a time and sometimes even live in the family's home (McKay, 2019; U.S. Department of Labor, 2019). In some cases, usually with more affluent families, nannies' duties may expand to assisting the parents or guardians with their work and managing the entire household which could include supervising renovations or landscaping (Gardner, 2005, p. F1). Sometimes, they work over 40 hours a week (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019).

How to Become a Childcare Worker

The educational requirements to become a childcare worker vary by state (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019). Those with a high school diploma have an increased chance of employment, but it is not a requirement (U.S. Department of Labor). Some choose to obtain a postsecondary degree in early childhood education, and those with a degree will be qualified for working in higher level positions and can work in Head Start programs. In addition, those with previous experience and a bachelor's degree can advance to become a preschool or childcare center director (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019). Especially for those with little to no professional experience in childcare, education and child development courses can be used as experience says Kristina Ericksen (2018), a digital writer for Rasmussen College. She also says even courses in various areas such as psychology, sociology, and interpersonal communications can be used as experience because those courses could help provide them with a greater understanding of children (Ericksen, 2018). Nannies are not required to obtain an education, but it may prove beneficial to obtain some type of education in childhood education or another relevant field and get a CPR certification (McKay, 2019; U.S. Department of Labor, 2019).

The U.S. Department of Labor (2019) explains that childcare centers are often required to have a license in a majority of states, so to obtain a license, the childcare center's employees must have a record of their completed immunizations, have at least a minimum amount of training, and complete a background check. Even if they do not work in a childcare center, they will usually need to pass a background check and will need to make sure they have various vaccinations which may include varicella; measles, mumps, and rubella; tetanus and diphtheria; influenza; and hepatitis (Davila, 2017; Magnesi, 2018). States and employers may require credentials, such as the Child Development Association (CDA) credential which is the credential most often required (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019). As for training, those in the childcare field are often required to complete training before beginning a position as well as further training each year (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019).

As for preferred qualities, communication skills are essential for speaking to parents or guardians about their children's progress, listening to parents or guardians' guidelines concerning the care of their child, and instructing children (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019). They also need to have good decision-making, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills to respond to difficult situations, emergencies, or other problems (McKay, 2019; U.S. Department of Labor, 2019). Patience and physical stamina are needed to work with frustrating and energetic children (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019). Organizational and time management skills prove beneficial in managing a schedule for the children, and lastly, creativity helps those in the profession create entertaining activities for children (McKay, 2019).

Pay and Benefits

According to the U.S. Department of Labor (2019), in May 2018, childcare workers earned a median hourly wage of \$11.17. An hourly wage of less than \$8.53 was earned by the lowest 10 percent, as opposed to more than \$16.55 which was earned by the highest 10 percent (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019). The U.S. Department of Labor (2019) shows that elementary and secondary schools, with a median hourly wage of \$12.39, was the top industry for childcare workers.

According to Fothergill (2013, p. 437), one main benefit is that childcare workers often enjoy working with children because they have a passion for giving them proper care. Additionally, as found in Amy Armenia's (2009, p. 570) study on the family childcare providers motivation for employment, if family childcare providers have their own children, they have the opportunity to stay at home with their own children during the day while also working.

Job Outlook

The U.S. Department of Labor (2019) states that from 2018-2028, childcare worker employment is expected to increase 2 percent. This is slower than the average projected employment for other occupations likely because the number of parents and guardians working at home and childcare costs have increased (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019). However, the U.S. Department of Labor (2019) explains that childcare workers will continue to be in demand for working parents and guardians because it is important for children to receive early childhood education. Because of the need to replace those who have left the field, there should be sufficient job openings each year (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019).

Interview with Denise Allen at Wee Wisdom Nursery School in Muncie, Indiana

Denise Allen is the director at Wee Wisdom Nursery School. Denise was interviewed by Edward Lazaros on November 20, 2019. The interview questions along with Denise's responses are listed in the following sections:

1. What is your favorite part about your job?

"My favorite part of the job is working with children and watching them grow and develop. Being a part of that is a privilege that everyone who works here shares. We are a close group of employees, and we do in-services together, and we grow together as a team. I like the team work that we have here as we are able to be a part of the lives of children as they develop" (D. Allen, personal communication, November 20, 2019).

2. What are the main challenges you have in your daily work?

"We are a pretty well-oiled wheel, so we run pretty smoothly. Getting career-oriented parents on board with developing a well-balanced life for the students at school and home takes a considerable amount of effort sometimes, but it is well worth the effort that we put into it. We want to make sure parents are a part of our team because it helps the child's development work" (D. Allen, personal communication, November 20, 2019).

3. What previous experience prepared you for this job?

"I have a master's degree in special education, and I feel that was a big asset for me. I taught at Ball State University in the Department of Special Education as an instructor years ago. Being in special education and learning how to divide a simple task into small steps and teaching the child these small steps to achieve the main goal is what special education was all about. Our writing, reading, and math programs that we have focus on different stages of development. We focus on small steps so students can master a skill and have success. I was previously a special education

administrator in a school district. This helped me learn how to train teachers and create individualized education for our students” (D. Allen, personal communication, November 20, 2019).

4. What advice would you give someone interested in pursuing a career in childcare?

“They need to spend as much time as possible with children through volunteer work, babysitting, and trying to expand babysitting to see if they enjoy it. They need to move up from just one child to multiple children because this career operates in classrooms. They need to be able to work with groups of children but still be able to help students with individual needs. Teaching methods need to be practiced. Volunteer work at a daycare center is only allowed if the applicant is out of high school or going through a vocational program and their supervising teacher has placed them. They need to be very organized and goal-oriented and have good people skills and be able to communicate well with everyone (colleagues and parents). They have to be honest and look for positives in everything. If a problem arises, they need to be a part of the solution. They need to be creative in their thought process, be able to follow protocol, and deal with problems. They also need to be able to be respectful of confidential information on a daily basis” (D. Allen, personal communication, November 20, 2019).

5. What kinds of technology do you use during your daily work?

“In the office, the main system we use is ProCare. This is our database that tracks parents, emergency contacts, people who can pick up, and billing. This is the heart of our organization when it comes to technology. Student profiles also are stored in this system. The system is very helpful because after the initial intake with parents, we can document a one page summary that teachers and staff can use before students start” (D. Allen, personal communication, November 20, 2019).

“We also use a system called SeeSaw. If students create something in class, students can send it to their parents through the SeeSaw software on iPads that the students use” (D. Allen, personal communication, November 20, 2019).

“Students also get to utilize a printer,” which is displayed in Figure 1, “to export short stories that can be posted, so students can share them with their parents” (D. Allen, personal communication, November 20, 2019).

Figure 1: The children can use this printer.



“Light tables are used, so students can build three dimensional objects that are lit up” (D. Allen, personal communication, November 20, 2019). Figures 2 and 3 show the light tables.

Figure 2: Students can build objects using this light table.



Figure 3: The light on this light table is turned on.



In Figure 4, “there is a special room in the facility that relates to STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math]” (D. Allen, personal communication, November 20, 2019).

Figure 4: Students do STEM activities in this room.



“We have a parent resource room where educational videos can be displayed for parents” (D. Allen, personal communication, November 20, 2019). Figures 5 and 6 show this room.

Figure 5: In this room, parents can access various resources.



Figure 6: Parents can watch educational videos on the TV, and from the papers along the right edge of the photo, they can read about parenting tips, such as dealing with poor behavior.



“We also have a parent portal where parents have links to different websites that are highly respected for children to use on a basis deemed appropriate for the child” (D. Allen, personal communication, November 20, 2019).

Conclusions

Childcare workers impact children’s development and education, so this career is best for those who can effectively communicate with parents or guardians and children, have strong organizational skills, and a passion for children. Despite the slow projected employment for childcare workers, parents and guardians who work will continue to need childcare services. Those who would like to increase their chances of employment should consider obtaining the CDA credential.

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