

Change of career translates into real job satisfaction

Bea Sullivan got into the early childhood profession by happy accident. While on maternity leave 11 years ago from her job as an executive bilingual secretary, she volunteered at La Petite, where one of her children attended.

The director joked that since she spent so much time there, Bea should consider joining the staff, so she gave up her old profession and did just that.

Bea says that when she first entered the field, child development wasn't the priority here in America that it was in her native Germany. She felt she could make a difference, enjoyed what she was doing, and stuck with it.

Eleven years later, Bea has no regrets. In fact, she's so dedicated to her new career that she's gone back to school at Greenville Tech to gain the credentials to do her job even better.

One of the techniques she's learned that's been especially helpful in the classroom is conflict resolution.

Teaching in a 4K classroom, she says,

conflicts inevitably arise of the "he did this to me" "she did this to me" variety.

"Instead of me approaching the child and saying, 'let's not do this,' I sit down with the two children, and we talk about it, and

then the children find a solution to the problem," Bea says.

"After two or three months of doing this, the children will not come to you anymore. They take care of the problem."

In the Early Care and Education

program, Bea has encountered students of all ages, many like herself with experience in the field.

She enjoys sharing experiences and comparing notes with others who've worked through many of the same issues.

Though Bea's career change meant a lower salary, it allowed her to follow her heart. To people who consider their jobs work, she offers this advice: "It is never too late to change."

But, she cautions, don't jump into child care without testing the waters. "Go out in a center, look around, attend once a day, stay



Helping children learn drives director back to school

For Debbie Jennings, an associate degree from Greenville Tech isn't going to allow her to pursue a dream job or move up to a better position. She's already reached many of her goals as director of the Life Child Development Center in Piedmont. She's pursuing an Early Care and Education degree so that she can take teaching and directing to a higher level, bettering herself and the center in the process.

Debbie started working at Life Child Development Center, which serves 65 two, three and four-year-olds, when her youngest child, now 10, was a baby.

She chose the field after stints in retail work and as a stay-at-home Mom because she enjoys loving and nurturing children when their parents have to be away. "I just love being around kids," she says. "It keeps me young."

To Debbie, a good day on the job is one in which the children ask her to read a book or sing a song. In her Greenville Tech classes, she's learned skills for circle time using objects to introduce books.

These skills, she says, have helped her become a better teacher and director, making her job not only easier but more fun.

"Everything I learn I bring back here," she says. "I go into the classrooms and talk to the teachers, give them examples, and show them different ways to approach the children and approach teaching."



Debbie fights the common misconception that the field of child development is really just glorified babysitting.

In fact, she says, it's much more. Child development involves helping children learn, develop and grow by being creative, helpful, and nourishing.

Debbie says someone in her field should be patient, able to listen, flexible, and willing to learn. Clearly Debbie, who does her job better than ever as she adds to her skill set through Greenville Tech, has the right stuff to succeed.

with it, and see if it truly is something you would like to do every day."

Taking care of business means adding degree to impressive resume

Wanda Larke has extensive experience in caring for young children, having spent over 25 years in children's ministry.

Yet the Early Care and Development program at Greenville Tech has been an eye opening experience, giving her not just a credential but useful information she can put to work every day on the job.

Wanda didn't have to enroll; it was something she chose to do. "In anything I do, I want to be the best that I can possibly be and give as

much as I possibly can," she says. "Even with all the experience I have working with children, I've still learned so much. It's just opened up a whole new world for me."

Wanda serves as administrator of Life Child Development Center, where she and director Debbie Jennings are classmates as well as co-workers. Wanda's husband, pastor of Just Life Church, urged her for years to pursue further education, but with a busy schedule and family commitments, Wanda put her plans on hold.

When she enrolled, it was a process of overcoming fear. "In the back of my mind, I kept thinking: I don't know if I can do this," she says. "When I actually made the step, I felt so good about it. When we took the first class, I felt like, I can do this. I am going to do this." To anyone who's considering a return to school but feels too old, Wanda says, "No, you're not. You can do it."

Wanda started out by earning a nine-course certificate. Those courses have now been applied toward an associate degree.

"From the very beginning, I wanted to do the associate degree. The first few classes I took were just so great. I knew then that I was going to do it," she says.

Succeeding as a student after so many years away was a matter of making time for the many things that were important to her.

"Of course, it was a challenge having a family and a full-time job. It was very much a challenge," Wanda says. "But I committed myself to it and tried to section my time during the week to where I had a time for everything. That was a big thing for me: getting an organizational plan in place so I could do everything I needed to do."



Points of Interest

• Hit The Books

Some employers prefer to hire child care teachers with a nationally recognized child care development credential, secondary or postsecondary courses in child development and early childhood education, or work experience in a child care setting.

An increasing number of employers require an associate degree in early childhood education. New requirements for Head Start teachers mandate that half of all Head Start lead teachers have an associate degree. For those currently working in centers, the T.E.A.C.H. initiative pays the majority of costs of seeking additional education including travel and books.

• Money Matters

Rather than substantial monetary compensation, the rewards of a child care career are in seeing a child's accomplishments, forming a relationship with families, and gaining the trust and love of children. Median hourly earnings of wage and salary child care workers were \$7.86 in 2002, with more education generally meaning higher earnings.

In Greenville County, median hourly earnings of child care workers in 2001 were \$6.90 with the hourly wage of the top 20 percent at \$9.50 and the hourly wage of the bottom 20 percent at \$6.00.

• Forecast

Child care teachers held about 1.2 million jobs in 2002. The number of children under the age of five is expected to rise gradually over the period from 2000 to 2010, and the proportion of youngsters enrolled in child care and preschool programs is likely to continue to increase, causing demand for additional child care teachers.

• Dot Communications

Learn more about this profession and others by checking out books, magazines, and videotapes at your school or local library. The Internet is also a great resource. Check out these sites:

www.cdacouncil.org
Council for Professional Recognition

www.nccanet.org
National Childcare Association

www.naeyc.org
National Association for the Education of Young Children

• Sources

Bureau of Labor Statistics
Child Care Services Association

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