



Inclusion and Universal Design Project Helps El Paso County Child Care Provider Create a Welcoming Space for Children of All Abilities

Inclusion and Universal Design in ECE Settings
(2019-2023 PDG B-5 Initiative Strategy 4.1.2)

Polly Doering didn't set out to be a child care provider. But when her son, now 4, was born, she was one of many women who faced a difficult choice to leave the workforce due to a lack of affordable child care options. Polly soon turned her frustrations over the child care shortage into action and started her own licensed, in-home child care program, hoping to meet a critical need in her community east of Colorado Springs and help other moms like her.

"I call this my mom ministry," Polly shared. "As moms, there's a lot of pressure on us, and we're just kind of expected to do it all. And I feel like we don't have a lot of support, so I'm designing my program to meet community needs."

This passion for supporting her community soon led her to the Inclusion and Universal Design Project, funded by Colorado's 2019-2023 PDG B-5 Initiative and implemented through the expertise of the Center for Inclusive Design and Engineering at UC Denver. The eight-month program provides up to nine hours of free training on practices to make early care and education settings inclusive for children with disabilities and developmental delays.

"This inclusion grant - it really helped open my eyes to some of the things that kids face. And with that, I wanted to find a way to make my program more inclusive, which is why I applied for the grant," Polly noted. She cited her experience growing up with a family member who had a disability as another factor that drove her to make her program more inclusive. "I saw growing up how much our world is not set up for everybody," she shared.

The Inclusion and Universal Design program gave participants access to a loan library of low-tech adaptive equipment such as recordable speech devices, sensory tools, or adaptive grip tools for writing and art, among other items. Polly borrowed a light table from the library and noted that all the kids in her care found it "magical." She is also in the process of creating a music room in her home-based program, after learning in the Inclusion and Universal Design program how music can benefit children of all abilities.

"This is something I'm passionate about. I'm passionate about making sure that children have a safe place to go, that they feel welcome, that they feel loved, that they feel included, because that's what they deserve."

About Inclusion and Universal Design in ECE Settings

Improving inclusion and access to care for children with disabilities and developmental delays emerged as a key need when Colorado conducted its comprehensive birth to 5 needs assessment in 2019. In 2020, Colorado launched the Inclusion and Universal Design Project - now called the Colorado Early Learning: Universal Design & Inclusion Project. The cohort-based program provided up to nine hours of free training on inclusive practices for staff at participating licensed child care centers, family child care homes and preschools, along with customized coaching. Participants received an Adaptive Materials Kit that includes low-cost, low-tech adaptive materials, assistive technologies and resources to support inclusive learning environments. Participating providers also accessed a loan library of low-tech adaptive equipment, allowing them to borrow materials as needed. 96% of participants said they felt more confident supporting children with delays and disabilities upon completing the program according to the [final evaluation report](#).

