York entrepreneur fills gap in childcare with help of United Way funding

Dinorah Jerez started her in-home childcare services when she needed to stay home to care for her kids but also needed an income. Now, she runs a childcare center with 93 students.

When Dinorah Jerez started her in-home childcare service in 2014, she never imagined it would grow into her own childcare center, with 93 children and dozens of families relying on her.

She clocks in long days, cooking meals made from scratch, reviewing lesson plans, and managing her staff.

“It’s a lot of stuff. It’s difficult,” she says. “But everybody can have their dream come true if that’s what they want.”

Despite the daily grind, Dinorah sees the rewards of her work. She’s creating a safe, affordable place for York parents to take their kids while they head to their own jobs — a resource she knows doesn’t exist for everyone.

“I always wanted to help people,” she says. “Things in life didn’t always go as I planned, but I’m really happy with where I’ve ended up.”
Helping herself, helping others

Dinorah grew up in the Dominican Republic. After coming to the United States, she worked a variety of jobs but struggled to maintain a career while raising her family.

After deciding she would stay home with her kids, she later started watching three other children and saw an opportunity to build it into something more.

That’s when she found out about United Way Partner Agency Child Care Consultants. The York-based organization supports low-income working families in paying for childcare and offers professional development resources to early childhood education providers.

With the help of Child Care Consultants, Dinorah learned how to budget, market her program, and make her home a safe place for children.

For Dinorah, it provided a regular income while giving her the opportunity to stay home with her children. And for parents looking for affordable, reliable childcare, it helps shorten their wait time at already full childcare centers.

“It’s a win-win for these children, their families and the small business owners,” says Christy Renjilian, Executive Director at Child Care Consultants. “And it’s made possible by the United Way of York County Community Fund.”
A need for more

It can take three months for a low-income working parent in York County to get the assistance needed to help pay for childcare. In addition, many high-quality programs have waiting lists in the hundreds.

“We just don’t have the funding to help everyone,” Christy says.

Many of the families who fall through the gaps are part of a population United Way refers to as ALICE: Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed. In other words, households that are working hard, but living paycheck to paycheck and struggling to make ends meet. These families may not qualify for subsidies and other public assistance.

One piece of the puzzle in supporting those families — in addition to providing more opportunities to find high-quality childcare — is helping them become independent as they move out of poverty, Christy says.

Home-based providers like Dinorah serve more children than the center-based programs, and they also tend to be the only ones to provide second- and third-shift childcare, critical for parents who work nontraditional shifts.

“We’ve seen a lot of success with entrepreneurs like Dinorah,” Christy says. “They’re contributing to our community in really big ways, and the United Way support empowers us to help them reach their goals.”
A new life

The simple need to take care of her own children, which now include three adopted boys, and the dream of helping others, gave Dinorah opportunities she never imagined.

"Those programs changed my life and my family," she says. "And now I can try to change the lives of the people I serve."