

Connecting With Jameria Maddox

"I define connection as the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship." — Brené Brown



When we asked Jameria Maddox if she was willing to be featured in our Annual Report, her initial response was surprise. What she didn't know was that her fierce determination to complete our Child Development Associate® (CDA) course earned her the admiration of Kristi Cusa, our Director of Professional Development. When Clare White, Jameria's boss at SUNY Upstate Child Care Center, explained how much she impressed Kristi, surprise turned to delight.

So on a gray, rainy day we sat down with Jameria to learn a little bit more about her history. Her smile and spirit lifted the clouds, even though her story moved us to tears. At the young age of 22, she is a single mother to a two-year-old daughter, cares for her mother struggling with multiple sclerosis, works full time and is furthering her education. With humbleness, she described how she got to this place.

In high school, Jameria's family moved from Syracuse to Nashville Tennessee. "High school just wasn't for me," she told us repeatedly. But instead of becoming a dropout statistic she earned her diploma through a Job Corp career development program in Kentucky. Job Corp, a U.S. Department of Labor program, helps young people improve their lives through vocational and academic training. Jameria studied medical office support but realized she needed a less sedentary job. She returned to Syracuse, moved in with her grandmother, took classes at OCC and ultimately landed a job at Securitas security company. She was assigned to the SUNY Upstate Child Care Center where she worked as the front end guard. Her infectious spirit caught the attention of Clare, the center director. "She loved interacting with the children when they walked in the door!" After telling Clare multiple times how much she wanted to work for the center and become a teacher, she got her shot. She was hired as a "floater" who could cover breaks and lunch hours. Because Clare believes in the value and necessity of education for early childhood professionals she told Jameria that to become a regular classroom teacher she had to, at a minimum, earn her CDA.

The CDA is the most widely recognized credential in early childhood education (ECE) and is a key stepping stone on the path of career advancement. Students learn to meet the specific needs of children and work with parents and other adults to nurture children's physical, social, emotional and intellectual growth. Determined to become a classroom teacher, Jameria secured an Educational Incentive Program (EIP) award to help cover the cost and enrolled in our CDA course taught by Kristi. The course requires a tremendous commitment from participants. Classes meet 1-2 times per week from 6PM-9PM for six months. Students develop a portfolio that they submit for review and are observed in their work settings to determine eligibility for the credential. It is difficult for many to complete. Obstacles made it even more challenging for Jameria.

She missed some of the early classes, and Kristi thought she was simply quitting the course. Unbeknownst to anyone, Jameria didn't have reliable transportation, but instead of giving up she made a deal with her brother's girlfriend and paid her for rides to and from class each week. She missed her daughter and sacrificed time with her after working all day to attend class at night. She turned this sacrifice into opportunity, however, and asked her mother to provide child care while she was at class. Caring for her granddaughter allowed Jameria's mom to feel better about herself and helped her cope with her severe illness. When we asked Jameria how her mom reacted to her earning her CDA she beamed and said, "So proud. I'm the only one in my family going to school, and it makes my mom so proud."

The staff and parents at SUNY all cheered her on and watched her confidence grow as she worked to complete the program. With Kristi's guidance and support, Jameria finished all of the coursework and designed her portfolio, typing on a borrowed work computer during lunch breaks. Her hard work and sacrifice paid off, and she earned her CDA credential nine months after starting the process. Her certificate hangs on the wall of her home where she plans on lining up her Associates Degree next, then her Bachelors, then maybe who knows.

Jameria is an example of how determination coupled with community support can lift a person personally and professionally. Because of the connection she made with Child Care Solutions, the children she cares for are the fortunate beneficiaries of her education and training. They happily receive "all the love she has to give."

Providing diverse and unique training opportunities for child care providers is a critical component of improving the quality of care available to Central New York families.

Our professional development team offers workshops, on-site trainings, one-on-one coaching and our annual training conference held in October of each year. This training not only help providers meet NYS training requirements but also allow them to:

Stay on top of trends and important topics in the field of early childhood education.

Learn about effective child care practices and procedures that create high quality child care environments.

Start or advance early childhood career paths and increase professional marketability.

Increase confidences as early childhood education professionals.

In 2015 The Professional Development Program Made the Following Connections

41 Child Care Providers learned the skills they need to nurture children's physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development in 2 English and 1 Spanish Child Development Associate® (CDA) courses.

38 On site trainings for Child Care Centers throughout Onondaga & Cayuga Counties increasing center staff's knowledge of developmentally appropriate practices in child care settings.

97 hours of training was provided specifically for caregivers of infants & toddlers in order to help them understand and nurture the development of children during these critical years.