

# “Head Start has made me grow”

## Benefits—and challenges—when family child care providers offer Head Start

By Laura Bernell

When we think of Head Start, most of us probably think of a child care or preschool center. But in Santa Cruz county, 460 children of immigrant farm workers are among the small number of children who attend Head Start in family child care homes. As a high-quality education program offered through family child care, this offers a possible model for universal preschool planning (see page 4).

The family child care homes of Santa Cruz County Head Start providers Maria Ana Granados and Catalina Martinez are organized into learning and play areas, marked with bilingual hand-printed signs. Granados's art center has an easel and paints, and playdough made from homemade *masa*. Martinez's dramatic play area has old clothing, pots, plates, eyeglasses, and a telephone. The coffee table in the living room is the book center. And Granados and Martinez are always in the midst of activities with hugs and encouragement.

In Shasta County, Kim Henderson started providing Head Start two years ago. “What made me the teacher I am today is Head Start,” Henderson says. “I’ve learned so much. I have a waiting list of 27, and parents come as far as an hour and a half away. Head Start has made me grow.”

When family child care providers offer Head Start, there are numerous benefits to children, parents, and providers—but also challenges for providers and Head Start agencies.

### Providing Head Start in your family child care program

- If you live in an area where children qualify for Head Start, contact your local Head Start agency.
- If Head Start contracts with family child care providers, find out the requirements—and how you can work toward meeting them.
- Tell the staff person about your education, background, and credentials, and talk with them about how you fill a need in the community.
- If Head Start doesn't contract with family child care, ask how you can get involved when they review their plan for meeting community needs.

### WHAT DO CHILDREN AND PARENTS GET?

- **Home-like setting:** “The family child care home is a smaller setting [with] close relationships between provider and child, between provider and parent,” says Maria Fátima Castro, Central California Migrant Head Start Coordinator. “You get the benefits of mixed age groups and can keep siblings together.”
- **Providers from the same culture:** Head Start offered in family child care “allows parents to select care that reflects their culture,” says Castro. “Our providers are of a similar background with parents and show the possibilities of being bicultural while still being very traditional.”
- **A system of quality education:** “In a typical family child care home, it depends on the provider whether or not they are continually learning,” says Castro. But Head Start expects “that providers continue their education and attend trainings.”
- **Flexible hours:** Parents who work nights, weekends, or other shifts can pick the providers whose schedules fit theirs.
- **Partnerships with providers:** Head Start requires providers to involve parents in their child's program—Henderson invites a Spanish-speaking father in to teach the children words in Spanish. “The father loves doing this, and we love having him,” she says.
- **Family support:** When a child in Henderson's program had a history of seizures, Head Start sent a nurse to talk with both the mother and Henderson about what to do during the seizures and how to use diet to control them.
- **Connections with other parents:** Head Start requires that each provider gather parents together at least three times a year. At these events, parents chat and find out how others handle parenting struggles. At a recent meeting, Henderson and another provider brought in safety experts to talk about what parents should do if Shasta Dam breaks.

### Resources

- National Head Start Bureau, 866-763-6481, [www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/hsb/index.htm](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/hsb/index.htm)
- California Head Start State Collaboration Office, 916-324-8296, [www.cde.ca.gov](http://www.cde.ca.gov)
- California Head Start Association, 916-444-7760, [www.ca-headstart.org](http://www.ca-headstart.org)
- Santa Cruz County Migrant Head Start, 831-477-5488
- Shasta County Head Start, 530-245-2842



Family child care Head Start teacher Blanca Lara says, “smaller groups of children allow for more snuggling.”

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### WHAT DO PROVIDERS GET?

- **Guaranteed pay:** In Santa Cruz, providers caring for six to eight Head Start children make as much or more than a teacher working in a center. In Shasta, family child care providers are paid for two Head Start spaces each. “Our funding follows the provider, not the child. So if the child leaves, the provider still gets the funding,” explains Terri Martin, Shasta County Head Start specialist. And all the children in their care benefit from Head Start's training and support.
- **Training:** Head Start works closely with community colleges to offer affordable courses for providers at convenient times. Head Start also provides trainings to help providers meet federal Head Start standards. Workshops show providers how to set up learning areas without spending much money. Henderson learned new recipes from the Head Start nutritionist, who gave her suggestions on how to include the children in the preparations. “We had Chinese Food Day, and the children did most of the cooking,” she says.
- **Respect:** “To be a Head Start provider is such an honor,” says Henderson. “People used to think of my work as—well—babysitting. Head Start makes you feel like you're somebody.”

### MORE WORK FOR PROVIDERS AND AGENCIES

Despite the benefits, not many family child care providers offer Head Start programs. There are real challenges, including:

- **Education requirements:** Although Head Start requirements vary from county to county, all set educational standards for providers. Providers are also expected to attend ongoing trainings.
- **High standards:** Federal Head Start standards “require dozens of additional forms and continual visits from social workers, quality monitors, consultants,” says Castro. Providers need to be open to visits (sometimes unannounced) and to make changes in their program.
- **Tests for children:** Three times a year, providers assess children's development, health, and skills. “I say, ‘Can you stack these blocks on top of each other?’ and I write down what he does,” says Henderson. “Or there's a little car with a ball and a string. ‘Can you tell me about this car?’ I'm writing down everything the child says. ‘It's yellow. It has wheels. It has an engine.’”
- **More work for Head Start agencies:** “It requires so much more time and energy to monitor these programs,” says Castro, because the small group size means staff have to visit more programs. And it takes more staff time, she adds, to help family child care providers with paperwork, parent involvement, and connecting parents with resources. “But the payoff is great!” she says, “Now our Spanish-speaking providers are better trained on average than our English-speaking providers. It's changed how people perceive the Latina provider. They're as professional as the teachers.”

Henderson admits that since she started providing Head Start, she works harder, longer and—since the two spaces reserved for Head Start kids are funded at a lower rate—for less money, and yet, she says, “I wouldn't drop my Head Start for the world. Not only do I love my kids, I love Head Start!”