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I am the owner of The Doodle Bug Preschool & Daycare Center. After working in early childcare for eight years, I decided to open my own center. It has never been easy. I went into my own business knowing financially I was not going to make too much, but nothing would prepare me for what was in store.

I was lucky enough to find a couple of solid employees in the beginning. Employees that would stay with me for years to come. Several employees throughout the years would work for me to get through college, or if I was lucky enough to stay for a little after they received their degree. I was never able to offer benefits or competitive wages, but I did offer staff free childcare. Unfortunately, that was not enough to keep the "good ones." I was only a stepping stone until they found a "real" job or start their career.

Financially, it has always been a struggle, but never anything close to this. When I first opened my center, I could only keep my center open with the help of my husband's paycheck. More times than not, I could not pay my personal bills because I had to pay the staff's wages with his paycheck. As the years passed, it got better and I was able to pay the center's bills, staff, and even myself. Then Covid shut us down.

The only way I was able to even keep the business alive after Covid was from a PPP loan and a grant I received. If I didn't have that to reopen, it would have not been possible. Since then, losing staff started to become a problem. Finding quality staff that would take a low hourly wage is very difficult to find. Especially after they have worked a day or two and realized how hard this job really is. I have lost more staff in the last three years than I ever did. Due to being short staffed, I have had to shut down one baby room, and only accept half enrollment in two rooms. I went from having 55 children a day to 37 a day. Starting in June, I will be forced to shut another baby room down and possibly a toddler room if I don't find somebody. The waiting list grows daily. I have over 65 babies on my infant waiting list, toddlers, and preschool children are not far behind. Parents are trying to bribe me to get their children in. My hands are tied. I can not accept any children with being so short staffed. I am licensed to have 86 children in the center, and could fill that up in a heartbeat and still have a long waiting list.

In addition to the cost of everything raising drastically, the staff need and want a raise. I can not afford to accommodate and compete with the local companies that are paying almost \$10 an hour more than I can afford to pay. If I was to raise my rates to reflect the current need, parents would not be able to afford childcare.

Now after 16 years, I am forced to work in the classroom, some weeks about 50 hours a week. My office work is suffering, for I am trying to do it after work, when I get home, or usually on the weekend. Sadly, at this point in my career, I am not even able to take a paycheck. If something does not change soon, I will be selling or closing the center. I have worked so hard to create this place for children to learn and be loved and cared for like family. I never thought after all of these years, it would come to this.