

E-mail Received August 10, 2021

Subject: Working during the pandemic

Sandy,

I am a school age teacher who has worked for New Horizon for almost 30 years. I would like to share with you my experience of working during especially the beginning of the pandemic.

I had surgery to repair my rotator cuff the first week of March 2020. I was back at work for one week when the governor announced on Sunday that all Minnesota schools would close Wednesday of that week. Our school district decided they would not go back at all. Monday morning we opened our doors not knowing which children would be there and which families would leave, some of them forever. Those parents who could not work from home were especially happy their children had a little bit of their routine to comfort them. My young school agers were dealing with the abrupt end of the school year never imagining they would not go back to their classrooms or finish the school year with their teacher or classmates.

As early child educators we were left to teach the children about the seriousness of the pandemic without scaring them. Each cold, cough or fever made us fear for our own health. By the end of the week we had lost half our staff. Several of our over 60 employees were not allowed to work. Those of us that are over 50 wondered if we would soon be told to stay home.

We shortened our hours of operation to try and financially survive the loss of so many families. This resulted in decreased hours for those of us still working. Although there was extra unemployment pay available I did not qualify because I have a second job to help ends meet. I worked while others stayed home and made far more money than those of us choosing to work and help our centers remain open. After two weeks the children began distance learning. With little preparation. Teachers began teaching on line. Although some computers were available through the school district many children had to use whatever they had or whatever their parents could afford. Some of these devices did not support the programs their teachers used to teach them. As their primary caregiver I needed to learn this technology very quickly. I worked to make sure they finished their schoolwork the best they could .

Because I live with my husband and adult stepson who is a vulnerable adult I was in fear each day that I would unknowingly spread the virus to him or other family members.

I was very careful anywhere I went that I did not get too close to anyone in fear I may be infected without knowing it.

I wondered as weeks turned into months if my company would survive and if I would suddenly lose my job.

We have dealt with a lot, I hope this helps give you a better picture of being a child care worker during the heat of this pandemic.

Judy Nelson
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