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**REFLECTIONS ON WHAT MATTERS MOST:
45 Years of Showing Up**

Qianna's Corner: Attendee Spotlight — Joan Derryberry

There is something incredibly powerful about consistency in this work—showing up year after year, continuing to learn, and staying committed to the children and families we serve.

Joan Derryberry represents that commitment in the most meaningful way. Her journey with the Ohio AEYC Conference spans decades, and her story is a reminder of why this work—and this community—matters so deeply.

We asked long-time attendee Joan Derryberry to share her experience attending the Ohio Early Childhood Conference:

How many years have you attended the Ohio Early Childhood Conference?

I attended my first OAEYC conference in 1981 in Dayton, Ohio.

What year did you first enter the early childhood field?

I began teaching preschool in 1976.

What originally inspired you to work with young children?

I was inspired by my 1st grade teacher, Mrs. Bachelor, and I wanted to be a teacher like her when I grew up. She was kind and loving and treated each and every child in her classroom with respect. She always listened. She gave plenty of hugs.

If you could go back and give your younger self one piece of advice when you first started attending, what would it be?

Encourage your school to pay for the conference because it is so important for your professional development and demonstrates their commitment to excellence.

Do you remember your very first conference? What do you remember most?

Sue Koverman invited me to that 1st conference. She drove me there and allowed me to share her hotel room (as I certainly couldn't have afforded to pay for a room myself). I remember the enthusiasm and energy of the keynote speakers and workshop leaders. I also remember the sense of community being around other Early Childhood teachers and having someone understand what your day was like. It was a lot of fun too!

What keeps you passionate about this work after all these years?

Each child is so unique and every year is different. The children's curiosity and enthusiasm about learning is what keeps me going. I also enjoy all the opportunities I have to learn from them.

When you're not working, what brings you joy?

My family. Being outside in nature, biking, hiking, walking. Traveling and experiencing new people and places.

Coffee, tea, or something stronger after conference day?

Chocolate!

What's one classroom moment you'll never forget?

There are way too many to choose!

What keeps you coming back year after year?

The opportunity to learn something new, find out about new resources, be inspired by other Early Childhood Professionals, and to have fun!

What is one session, speaker, or moment that truly stayed with you?

Mimi Brodsky Chenfield has always been such a motivational presenter as her enthusiasm and love for children is so contagious and invigorating. Red Grammer has always been one of my favorite and most uplifting musicians. They are both so much FUN! (Editor's Note: Both presenters are at the 2026 conference!)

What surprises you about how it continues to evolve?

It is amazing after attending all these years that there are new and inspiring keynotes and different workshops to attend, and new ideas evolving.

What does it feel like walking into the conference each year?

Excitement to be back - very energizing - confirming that I have chosen the right profession.

Why is this conference still worth attending today?

There is always something new to learn and everyone here is so encouraging and supportive and it's still FUN!

What would you say to someone attending for the first time?

Attend all the keynotes, be sure to participate in all the “interactive, hands on” workshops, try to choose a variety of workshops with different subject matter, network with other Early Childhood Professionals, check out the Exhibit Hall, and HAVE FUN!

What would you say to someone who isn't sure about registering?

The conference is well worth the money spent and will energize you to return to your classroom with new ideas and resources to use.

Three words that describe the conference:

- *Inspiring*
- *Community*
- *Fun*

Finish this sentence: “I’ve been attending since 1981 and I still come back because...

There is always something new to learn, so many fantastic presenters, a wonderful community of Early Childhood professionals, and it is still so much fun.”

Thank you, Joan—and to all who have helped shape this conference over the years. It is because of educators like you that this work continues to inspire, evolve, and matter.

We look forward to welcoming you April 23–25, 2026, at Kalahari Resort.

With Love and Empowerment,

♥ Qianna

