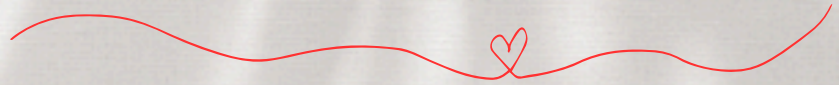




Qianna Tidmore
Executive Director, Ohio AEYC

THE PART NO ONE SEES



Qianna's Corner: The Part No One Sees

This month I am doing something I have spent years preparing for—and approximately zero minutes being emotionally ready for.

I am dropping my daughter off at college for her freshman year.

There will be boxes, bedding, last-minute shopping trips, and enough dorm-room supplies to make one wonder whether she is attending college or preparing to survive a small apocalypse. I will offer advice she did not request, remind her of things she already knows, and ask countless times whether she has her charger. Then I will hug her, tell her how proud I am, and try to reach the car before the ugly crying begins.

As I prepare to watch her begin this new chapter, I find myself thinking about the little girl she used to be.

Before college applications. Before acceptance letters. Before she was ready to step into a world beyond our home.

I think about the early childhood educators who knew her then.

They welcomed her into their classrooms, comforted her when she was afraid, and celebrated every small accomplishment as though she had just won an Olympic medal. They tied shoes, wiped tears, and listened patiently to stories with no beginning, six middles, and absolutely no ending.

They taught her letters and numbers, but they also taught her something far more important: that she was safe, capable, valuable, and loved.

They poured their knowledge, patience, and hearts into her. Because of them, she was given a foundation upon which she could live—and truly love—her life.

The thing about a foundation is that once a building is standing, no one can see it.

It is completely hidden.

People see the finished building. They admire its height, its strength, its beauty, and everything happening inside it. But they cannot see the foundation buried beneath the surface.

Still, every room rests upon it. Every door that opens depends upon it. Everything the building will ever become is possible because someone carefully laid a foundation that would eventually disappear from view.

That is what early childhood educators do.

As I watch my daughter walk into college as a freshman, people will see the young woman she has become. They will see her confidence, her potential, and the future waiting before her.

They will not be able to see the educators responsible for it all.

They cannot see the person who comforted her when she missed home. They cannot see the teacher who noticed something special in her before she could see it in herself. They cannot see the countless moments when someone chose patience, offered encouragement, or helped her try one more time.

But those moments are there. They are holding her up.

Some of those educators may never know where/if she went to college. They may never know what she accomplishes, whose life she changes, or how far their love travels through her.

That is one of the most beautiful—and most difficult—truths about this work: you may never see the life built upon the foundation you helped lay.

Perhaps you are reading this after a week when no one thanked you. Maybe a family questioned your judgment, a leader overlooked your contribution, or someone else received recognition for an outcome rooted in seeds you planted.

Let's be honest: appreciation matters. Respect matters. Compensation matters. Being called "essential" is not a substitute for being treated as such.

But being unseen is not the same as being unimportant.

Your impact does not disappear simply because you cannot follow it into every classroom, graduation, career, relationship, or future achievement.

You may never see the finished building.

You are also standing on a foundation laid by giants who came before us: Betsey Stockton, a formerly enslaved Black woman who became a pioneering educator; Dr. Susie Weems Wheeler, who fought for educational opportunities for Black children in segregated Georgia; Patty Smith Hill, who helped shape modern kindergarten and the organization that became NAEYC; Lucy Sprague Mitchell, who challenged educators to begin by understanding how children learn; and Barbara Bowman, a preschool teacher who became a transformational leader and advocate for children.

Their names never filled headlines. Yet generations of children and educators are still standing because they stood first.

There are countless other giants whose names were never written in history books: family child care providers who opened their homes before sunrise, teachers who purchased classroom materials with their own money, and educators who kept believing in children the world had already underestimated.

We are standing because they stood.

Now we have a responsibility to become the foundation for those coming next.

Soon I will unload those boxes, help arrange a dorm room that will probably be messy again before I reach the parking lot, and say goodbye to my daughter as she begins her freshman year.

When I look at her, I will see more than the young woman standing before me.

I will remember everyone standing beneath her holding her up.

Every educator who protected her curiosity, spoke life into her, and helped her believe she belonged will be part of the foundation carrying her into this new beginning.

She is standing on the shoulders of giants. So am I. And so are you.

You may never know how far a child travels because you loved them well at the beginning. You may never enter the rooms your work makes possible.

Build the foundation anyway.

With Love and Empowerment,

♥ Qianna