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Qianna's Corner: What happens after the applause?

One of the strangest parts of conference week is how quickly the noise disappears. For an entire year, our team plans, prepares, builds, dreams, problem-solves, and pours everything we have into creating something worthy of the people we serve. Then suddenly, after thousands of hugs, conversations, sessions, celebrations, and moments of inspiration — the lights dim, the hallways quiet, and everyone heads home.

But while the conference may be over, the impact is not.

What stays with me most is not the stage production or the packed sessions. It's the people. It's the educator who told me she arrived running on empty — and left with her notebook full of new ideas and her spirit restored. It's the first-time attendee who said she finally found her people — a community that understands both the challenges and the beauty of this work. It's the veteran teachers, directors, advocates, and leaders who continue showing up for children and families despite the enormous pressures facing our field.

That is what makes this community so extraordinary.

This year, together, we produced the highest-rated conference in Ohio AEYC history. But what makes me proud is not the rating itself — it's what it represents. It represents thousands of early childhood professionals who came together to learn, grow, support one another, and recommit themselves to the important work happening every day in classrooms and programs across Ohio.

A conference can inspire you for a weekend. A community can sustain you for a career.

But what about the days when that community feels far away?

Not everyone reading this was in that ballroom. Some of you are working in programs where the adults around you don't share your values. Some of you are the only person in your building who fights for play-based learning, who reads the research, who keeps asking hard questions. Some of you are exhausted not just from the work itself — but from doing it alone.

I see you. And I want you to know: isolation is one of the hardest parts of this profession, and it is not a reflection of your worth.

Here is what I would offer to those of you navigating that loneliness:

Find your one person.

You don't need a whole village right now—just one colleague (in your building, your county, or online) who truly gets it. Protect that relationship. Nurture it. One steady person can carry you farther than you expect.

Let the children remind you.

When adult conversations drain you, get back on the floor. Watch a child light up with discovery, persist through a challenge, or trust you with their biggest feelings. Those small, pure moments will recenter you in ways no staff meeting ever could. The children always remember what this work is really about.

Stay connected to the broader field.

Read a good article. Listen to a podcast on your drive. Follow educators who inspire you. Join a webinar. Ohio AEYC exists to be that connection point for you—even when you can't be in the room. This community is here, and you already belong.

Give yourself grace.

You are not failing because your workplace doesn't yet reflect your values. You are doing something quietly courageous by holding onto them anyway. That matters—even when no one around you says so.

Thank you to every attendee, presenter, exhibitor, volunteer, sponsor, partner, and staff member who helped make this year's conference so meaningful. Whether this was your very first conference or one of many over the years, thank you for being part of this incredible community.

As we move forward, I hope you carry the encouragement, ideas, laughter, and connections from the conference back into your work and your lives. The work you do matters deeply. You are shaping children, supporting families, and building the future of our communities every single day — often without enough recognition.

Please know this: Ohio AEYC sees you. We value you. And we are honored to stand beside you. The applause may have faded, but the impact is still unfolding across Ohio.

Now, we turn our full attention to creating the most inspiring conference ever, the 2027 Ohio Early Childhood Conference. Join us April 22–24, 2027, at Kalahari Resort to experience it for yourself.

With Love and Empowerment,

 *Qianna*