



Kiddie Kare

Phoenix/Glendale, AZ

Directors: Jenni Smith, Rachel Katz

Quality First participants since 2009

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Tell us about your program and why you decided to participate in Quality First.

We are a family-owned child care center with three locations in central Phoenix and Glendale. Our philosophy is that all children of all abilities deserve the best care possible to grow and develop as they learn to become active participants in the world. We saw Quality First as an opportunity to take our centers to the next level. The training, support and materials have allowed us to train our staff to better meet the needs of our children and families.

How has your program changed since joining Quality First?

The biggest change has been moving to a play-based curriculum and creating classrooms that invite children to explore and try new experiences hands-on. In many ways the teachers are learning along with the children. They have changed their ideas about how children learn best and are always looking for ways to enhance their classrooms to provide more opportunities for exploration and learning.

Parents have definitely noticed the changes. At first, many were skeptical that "playing" all day would benefit their child. Now parents are commenting on the improvements in their child's language and vocabulary. They are often surprised by what the children come home and tell them they did at the center, from experiments with color to a week-long experience with worms, to planting gardens. Parents are pleased with the results of "playing" all day.

Can you give us an example of how you have benefitted from the team of experts available through Quality First?

Two of our centers are able to participate in the Inclusion program and have an Inclusion Specialist in the centers on a monthly basis. This has been an invaluable asset to our program. We use ASQ and ASQSE as part of our children's portfolios and have been able to identify and, working with our Inclusion Specialist, help the parents understand the process of getting services for their children. We had one child who was doing well after moving from the baby room to the toddler room, but then we began to notice changes in his language skills and behavior. He went from a happy child to one that screamed for no apparent reason. We worked with our Inclusion Specialist and the parents to get a referral to get the child assessed, and the diagnosis of autism came back. The parents were overwhelmed but so grateful that we were there for them. The Inclusion Specialist was always available to answer questions and support the parents.

What are your goals for the future?

To continue to learn and grow and continued improvement in our centers. One goal that we are working on now is to redesign our playgrounds to become an extension of the classroom to allow for outdoor experiences on a regular basis. In addition to providing room to run and play, we are incorporating places for science, dramatic play and blocks outside. All three centers are adding garden areas that the children will be able to grow foods that can be used for cooking experiences in the classroom.

