



It would be nothing without a woman or a girl

By: Margarita A.
“Teacher Team Leader”

By now, when you hear about Agri-Business Child Development (ABCD or Agency), my hope is that you think of us as one of the most inclusive, open-minded, all embracing, high quality comprehensive early childhood education agencies in New York State.

If you read ABCLatino, you have had a glimpse into my thoughts in regards to education, nutrition, integration, immigration, family values, love and culture. Today, in view of Women’s Month, I would like to write a bit about how the women of ABCD use their strength to promote and sustain the daily efforts of the Agency.

I will start by saying that even though **90%** of ABCD’s workforce is made up of **women**, we love and appreciate our 10% male population. The men in our agency are progressive, dedicated, strong and just as supportive of women and girls as their counterparts. Kudos to them.

The women though... they are a force to be reckoned with! Below is a sample of women’s efforts in support of ABCD’s mission;

- **“The heart of each ‘home’ is in the kitchen”** ~ ABCD employs approximately 20 female cooks and cook aides. These women generally arrive at our centers before anyone else. With humor and conviction, they plan, execute and serve hundreds of nutritious, home-cooked meals to ABCD children and staff with devotion and love. No one goes hungry in ABCD! The job is not easy; it involves complex paperwork, math, organization, nutritional knowledge, cultural understanding, patience and strength! Have you ever seen the biceps needed to carry one of those big metal pots needed to cook pasta for 100 plus children and staff?

- **“Cleanliness is close to heaven”** ~ Other early arrivals at ABCD centers are the women who clean our centers daily. As you can imagine, all ABCD centers need to be impeccable to ensure that children remain healthy. ABCD prides itself on immaculate surfaces, disinfected changing tables, “spic and span” clean floors for babies to crawl on, and sweet smelling surfaces for all. If you have ever had children in your house, you understand that cleaning after hundreds of children each day can be a big job. Thank you ABCD custodians!
- **“The wheels of the bus go round and round”** ~ ABCD children are transported back and forth between home and the center 5 days a week, all year long! Many of the bus drivers and aides are women. They are women who can maneuver busy roads, make split-second driving decisions and conscientiously ensure the safety of those on the bus. These women go through extensive background checks, and mandated Department of Transportation tests and license requirements. They transport precious cargo safely and are often the main contact between parents and the center. These women know the children they transport as if they were their own. They know names and favorite songs. They clean noses, keep children entertained, and know how to evacuate a bus in an emergency. Bus drivers and bus aides do miraculous things within the confines of those little yellow buses. They are a true extension of the classroom and its lessons!
- **“One book, one pen, one child, and one teacher can change the world”**
Malala Yousafzai ~ The majority of ABCD teachers are women. They are mothers, grandmothers, friends, and lovers of early childhood education. They are accomplished career women. They are adult learners and trained professionals. They know how to calm a sick child and entertain another. They know how to fill a mind with knowledge and squeeze teachable moments into their days. They are loving and disciplined. They recognize the power in their hands and the responsibility on their shoulders. They appreciate their role in society and acknowledge the privilege. ABCD teachers are loved by the children and families they serve and are

respected by all.

- **“Part super/part duper – 100% the glue of the centers”** ~ Center Administrative Staff: The women who make up this administrative team are professional, generous and kind. They are supervisors and mentors. These women understand humanity and dedicate their lives to reinforcing the power of early childhood education and parent engagement. They keep the centers running and tackle a million daily responsibilities with grace and enthusiasm. Education Coordinators, Family and Community Services Coordinators, Health and Nutrition Coordinators, Center Directors and Administrative Assistants know the ins and outs of the regulations they adhere to. They prepare for Federal and State reviews. They roll their sleeves up when needed and join in the singing, dancing, and storytelling. Their commitment is palpable and their laughter is contagious.
- **Leadership practiced in attitude and in actions** ~ Last but not least, I must talk about the women who make up the Agency’s Statewide Leadership Team. The women in this team have proven time and time again that they have the capacity to translate vision into reality. These women crisscross the State to support their co-workers at the Centers. They are role models for all. Their imagination and dreams, their planning and hard work have led the Agency for more than 70 years. The excitement of possibilities is very much alive within this group. Through relationship building and hard work, with a feminine touch and an open heart, these women share their knowledge as they also learn from others. They set the tone of compassion, strength, and acceptance, and lead by example. They were once at the other end of the spectrum: little girls needing the love, support and commitment of administrators, teachers, custodians, bus drivers and aids, and cooks. The circle is complete and yet ever never-ending.

As a teacher, a mom, a daughter and an educator, I reach deeply into what being the woman that I am means to others. I look at all the women that form ABCD and I am humbled. I look at the ABCD moms that we serve and I learn. I look at all the little girls in the classrooms and I want to promote their health and education.

I want to instill in them their rights and assure them that their minds are a wonder and their voices matter. I want them to be engineers and math whizzes, as well as moms and teachers. I want them to reach for their dreams whatever they might be. I want to have them hold the future in their hands. I know that with girls in charge, we will be led into a more peaceful and equitable world.