

Hello Big Steps Little Feet Parents!

My name is Jessica White-Hatinger and I grew up in MI, with family in the Grand Rapids area. I met my husband Clay in college and we have been married for 11 years. We have 2 children; our son, Ledge is 4 and our daughter, Azalea is due June 5th! We are members of Ada Bible church and attend the Cascade campus. My husband owns a small business and we live out in the Lowell area.

After earning a Bachelors in Social Work from Grand Valley State University, I joined DeVos Children's Hospital as part of the Child Protection Team. This is where I started to gain firsthand knowledge of how a child develops. In this role, we worked with children of various ages who had experienced trauma. Through group sessions, we were able to help both the children and their parents process through that.

I then became a Family Service Worker with Head Start of Kent County and continued my career working with families and children. Two years later, an opportunity opened up in workforce development through West Michigan Works!. This is where I have spent the past 10 years of my career. I was hired in as a bilingual case manager and progressively took on more responsibility. For the past five years, I have been part of the management leadership team of West Michigan Works!.

During this time, I also began my Masters of Public Administration and was part of the 2017 Leadership Grand Rapids class through the Grand Rapids Chamber. Through workforce development, I learned to adapt quickly to ever-changing licensing and monitoring requirements of the State of Michigan. My work in various community initiatives, the Essential Needs Task Force, and being a Kent County Community Action Board Member has strengthened my knowledge and appreciation of the systems within our community that move families forward.

As a professional, I understand I have not arrived and that I do not have all of the answers. What I do have is energy and eagerness to incorporate my personal and professional skills into Big Steps Little Feet! I also find that my faith aligns with the value of having the 5 Christian principles within the Center:

- prayer before each meal
- integrating Bible themes into the lesson plans and art projects
- teaching and modeling positive character qualities
- instructing from a Creation perspective and
- educating from a non-denomination viewpoint

I first came to Big Steps Little Feet as a parent seeking a child care setting for our son after maternity leave. We had researched and visited other providers, but after taking a tour of Big Steps Little Feet and hearing positive comments from the community, we understood this was where we wanted our son to be. We appreciate the thoughtful intention of the mission that provides a safe and nurturing place of care and learning and a stimulating environment where my husband and I are treated as partners in developing character qualities for our children and really taking care of our future generation.

Every day in workforce development, I worked with individuals who were at various points in their career path and it was my job to manage the Center to help adults continue on their path of success. And now, as part of the team of Big Steps Little Feet, I want to help every child who receives care here to feel ready and truly be prepared for their next step toward success. I look forward to engaging with parents, staff, and getting to know each child to continue the quality care and further support the mission of Big Steps Little Feet. I am excited for this opportunity and am ready to jump right in!