



“**We Are the Care**” is a county-wide advocacy initiative comprised of families, professionals in the early childhood care and education field, civic leaders, TK-12 teachers, higher education leaders, employers, business owners, community members, government employees and elected officials who are partnering together to address our local child care crisis.

MARCH'S HERO

Carmen Castañeda

HOW CARMEN SHOWS HER CARE

Being the best she can be for the children she nurtures daily.

ONE OF CARMEN'S HOPES

For all children to be loved and to have the quality early childhood education they deserve!

Carmen Castañeda is a champion for children— as a role model for little ones in her care as well as individuals in the Early Childhood Education (ECE) field.

Carmen is learning first-hand the demands of juggling work-life balance while still a student at Cuesta College to earn her AA and permit in Early Childhood Education and also teaching at the Atascadero Children's Center. She has watched friends and relatives wrangle long wait lists to find the most ideal child care setting for their kids— especially for the infant-toddler population. Now, Carmen provides the very peace of mind and support so many parents are seeking.

Carmen's passion for the job and desire to make a difference overrode the challenges of pursuing a position in ECE— including the reality that it is vastly underpaid compared to other fields. Despite the difficulty of making a livable wage, Carmen knows that she and her counterparts are enriching the lives of our next generation during the most vital stage of their development. And we are all better for it.

Maggie Payne, Carmen's Supervisor at Atascadero Children's Center, says she is inspired by Carmen's positivity, kindness and grit. Carmen is committed to her

own professional growth, completing trainings on evenings and weekends even as she helps out with her 2-year-old sister while attending school and working full-time.

Carmen encourages everyone to understand that ECE professionals are not just “babysitters,” and that the children in their care are the future of our community— so their issues are *our* issues. She says life would be incomplete without the love of her young students and their families. In Carmen's words, “You get paid more from your experience with the children than you do in your salary, but that's what makes it so worth it.”

**Thank you, Carmen.
You are a true Hands-On Hero.**

Look for more on all of our “We Are the Care” Heroes on COE-TV Channels 2 and 19!



“We Are the Care” was born from “Where's the Care?”, a Town Hall hosted in May 2019 by First 5 San Luis Obispo County with the support of local stakeholders. It led to the creation of three task forces dedicated to addressing challenges and identifying opportunities to improve and expand our local childcare system. “Hands-on Heroes” is a recognition program, coordinated with partner agencies, that honors individuals making a difference in the lives of young children and families. The year 2020 highlights Heroes in Child Care. To learn more about “We Are the Care” and “Hands-on Heroes”, please visit first5slo.org.