

Children tend to be an under-served population with virtually no voice within our communities. It is necessary to have adults who are willing and ready to be that voice for them. I knew early on that I wanted to be that voice for children and be an advocate in any way I could.

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My role here at PEACE, Inc. Head Start and Early Head Start is to provide social emotional support and/or training to staff, children, and their families. All staff members are trained in Conscious Discipline, which is a social emotional program Head Start has adopted. Conscious Discipline focuses on the emotional and mental state of the adult - first, before assisting a child with their own upset. By providing the necessary tools and support, classrooms are able to build what Conscious Discipline calls a "school family."

It is necessary to create an empathetic and caring environment in each classroom for each of our children to feel safe and secure. As a mental health coordinator, I provide workshops to parents and sites to encourage and create consistency of the program from school to home. As one of many coordinators, I work collaboratively with our multidisciplinary team to ensure that our families have the necessary supports to overcome obstacles they may face. It is necessary to build a positive bond/attachment with those individuals - teachers, parents, etc. - that I am working with to provide the best possible care and assistance.

Mental health coordinators and other positions assure a sense of security and stability. For example, foster grandparents and mental health coordinators support classrooms by helping to create loving and empathetic environments. The field of child development and health services understands the importance of a foster grandparent in each classroom and the large role they play in a child's development. Knowing this, we provided foster grandparents with an individualized introduction to Conscious Discipline. This was intended to ensure all adults in the classrooms provide consistent social emotional support for each child attending our program.

I earned my associate's degree in early childhood education at Onondaga Community College. I always knew I wanted to work with children, but was unsure of the capacity I wanted to do so. I initially wanted to open my own daycare center. I realized fairly quickly that I wanted to do something more to assist those most in need. It was then that I decided to be a social worker. Upon graduating from Syracuse University with my master's degree in social work, I looked for a career fulfilling my need to work with children and their families.

I began my journey working as a mentor to children and adults with developmental disabilities. Being a mentor was the stepping stone I needed to find my home here at PEACE, Inc. Head Start. I initially applied as a family worker. However, I was asked to interview for the assistant mental health coordinator position. After reading the job description and researching Head Start more, I realized that this is where I was meant to be. I thankfully was offered the position and accepted most enthusiastically. After a few years, I was lucky enough to move into the mental health coordinator position - I am happy to be in this position today.

PEACE, Inc. Head Start is a multifaceted program that realizes you must look at the family as a whole in order to see the most change. That is the piece I had been searching for when finding my place and career path. It is my goal to support adults and children through their most difficult times in hopes to create a positive change. PEACE, Inc. Head Start has been that positive change for so many individuals and their families. I am thankful to be part of a program with a mission and goals that coincide with my own.