

Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family. Kofi Annan

When I was young it was a kindergarten teacher who told me that I was poor. I remember to this day because I had never heard the term, and I had to ask my mother what she meant. My mother explained that some people were confused about what makes a person awesome. She explained that as I was her daughter, and knew Jesus; those things alone made me awesome and very rich. To this day in difficult times I fall back on what that moment of empowerment did for my life. Bear with me; this is going somewhere I promise☺.

I grew up in a small town in Pennsylvania. My family did not have a car which meant I often had to walk places late at night and alone. I would walk past the more affluent homes and see the lights on in houses with a lot of windows and beautiful front entrances, and I would imagine that the people inside must be so warm and happy. To get to my home, which was in the 'projects', I had to pass the foam factory, the mushroom factory, and two junk yards. The 'projects' were on the edge of town, out of sight. I was always scared because it was very dark, and I never knew if I would have to deal with stray dogs. But, as I drew closer to my home, I would begin to feel the comfort of knowing that my mom and sisters would be there and that mom would have cooked something to eat and would be expecting me. We use to call our meals bare cupboard meals, and to this day I teach people how to set up a pantry in spite of having very little money. What does this have to do with the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Project? Everything!

One of the goals for creating T.E.A.C.H. was to develop a cohort of educated, equipped, professional, reflective leaders; that could impact the field of not just early childhood education, but the whole spectrum of services in the education field through advocacy and leadership worldwide. The T.E.A.C.H. scholarship allows for a diversity of leaders to impact grass roots societal changes by providing funding for those who otherwise may not have been able to acquire an advanced degree in education. T.E.A.C.H. also hopes to create diversity in the influence of early education policy through its outreach into all areas of society.

Leaders have to understand that just because the journey may be fraught with challenges, and it looks like no one can see your cause, the destination of getting home, or to your purpose, means connecting with those organizations that have the expertise, the money, and the vision, that supports you getting to the place called 'there'. In other words, I have a vision that requires that I get connected to the people who understand how advocating for early education works. I also needed to get the weight of academia to understand the needs of practice, so that education and regulation could accurately support the realities of practice, as well as the changing cultural landscape of the children and families that early educators are supporting. But I *did not* know how to get from my vision to my destination.

T.E.A.C.H. gave me the opportunity to knock on the doors of *influence*, instead of walking past the veiled windows, wishing I knew what they were doing. T.E.A.C.H. also allowed me to connect with people who were committed to empowering me through training and education so that I could become a person of influence who can, and will positively impact the early childhood education field.

Rochelle Sanders
2018

Rochelle Sanders is a Family Child Care Educator in Durham, North Carolina. She has earned her Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education, Bachelor's Degree in Early Care and Education, Post Baccalaureate Certificate in Leadership in Early Care and Education and Master of Education in Birth-Kindergarten Interdisciplinary Studies; all were earned with T.E.A.C.H. scholarships. Rochelle says, "For me early child education is about legacy. What I do with the children and families today will transcend time. What I do as an educated, early educator is to impact the children and families in excellence."