

EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH: Marycomfort Opara



Marycomfort Opara, known to the children as Ms. Mary, has been a teacher at Harmony House Early Learning Center for four and a half years.

It takes patience and dedication to work with young children, attributes Marycomfort Opara possesses. She has been a teacher at Harmony House Early Learning Center for four and a half years, mainly teaching toddlers. This school year, she has taken on a new challenge of teaching in the infant room.

Harmony House Early Learning Center is the first job Opara has had. When her children were young, they attended Community Hills Early Learning Center, also run by New Community. Since she wasn't working, she would stay behind after drop off and watch the teachers interact with the children. That piqued her interest and she decided she wanted to work in an early childhood environment as

well. She started off volunteering at Harmony House Early Learning Center and then applied for an open position and was hired.

Center Director Sister Maurice Liguori Okoroji said Opara, who is known as Ms. Mary to the children, is an asset to the facility.

"She goes beyond her job description and is barely absent from work. She is always willing to work extra time whenever we are short of staff," Okoroji said. "She uses best practices and has excellent classroom management."

Opara's favorite part of her job is interacting with the children. She currently oversees infants ages 4 months to 14 months in her classroom.

"We teach them, we nurture them, we show them love and care, we play with them. We show them how to explore, how to play, how to mingle, how to socialize, make friends," she said.

Staff members also read to the children and encourage them to begin making sounds and talking.

"If they make any sounds, we praise them for doing that," Opara said.

Opara has personal experience with children as a mother of three. Her daughter is 12, her older son turns 10 this month and her youngest son is 8. She lives in East Newark with her husband and children and enjoys spending time with them when she's not at work.

Opara sees Harmony House Early Learning Center as a special place.

"I love our school. It's so nice. We have an amazing director. We have nice teachers," she said. "We help each other. And we love our kids and the families."

In addition to teaching and caring for the children, Opara said the teachers assist the families when they can. If families are in need of supplies like diapers, staff members refer them to places where they can receive those items. She said parents will confide in them at times and the teachers offer advice.

"All of us, we work like a family," she said.