Maddy: Discovering Her Voice

Maddyson (Maddy) Rae Dingman-Ellis always knew she wanted to be a teacher. Surrounded by cousins and inspired by the way her grandmother lovingly cared for 10 grandchildren, she discovered early on just how much she loved working with children.

Following in the footsteps of her mother and aunt, she began volunteering at Winchester Learning Center and soon stepped into an assistant teacher role. "I always loved being around kids," she says.

"Teaching was always the dream, I just needed the chance to prove I could do it."

The Child Development Associate (CDA) credentialing program changed that.

"What surprised me most was the confidence it gave me," Maddy reflects. "There was a time when I felt unsure of myself, like I didn't quite belong in the classroom. But the program gave me the tools to commit, and the courage to speak up." Today, she sees herself not just as a teacher, but as an important part of a team.

That confidence shows up in the way she connects with children. "I used to think discipline was about saying 'no' or redirecting behavior. Now I understand the power of positive reinforcement and giving kids space to explore.

I recently watched a little boy defend a classmate who was being picked on. He said, 'She doesn't like that.' And I realized, it's working. They're learning how to advocate for themselves and each other."

For Maddy, those moments are everything.

"Seeing the kids grow, knowing I'm helping them find their voice, it's the most rewarding feeling."

The skills she gained through the CDA program also gave her the ability to pivot in real time. "We had a day in preschool when behaviors were tough, so we split the group, some kids went outside while the others did Play-Doh. Just that small shift made a big difference. I've learned to adapt, to meet kids where they are."

Now, when Maddy walks into her classroom, she doesn't feel shy or unsure, she feels like she belongs.

"I feel equal. I feel like a real teacher. And I know this is just the beginning."