



# Why I Built

## *Bright Steps* Academy

**Te-Anna Alain - Founder**

I knew I wanted to work in childcare from the time I was twelve years old. It was the work I pictured myself doing — leading summer camps, running classroom corners, becoming the kind of adult that children naturally gravitated toward. I went on to study Early Childhood Education before opening my own program.

But long before I ever ran a daycare, I was a mother. And it was watching my own child navigate the school system — being labelled, misread, fitted into a box that had clearly been built for someone else's child — that taught me, in a way no textbook ever could, what hundreds of families would later describe to me. That early, personal experience shaped everything about the program I would eventually build.

When I opened Divine Care Academy in Keswick, I expected to serve a fairly typical mix of families looking for a regular daycare. What I received instead, almost from week one, was a steady stream of parents reaching out about children who had been asked to leave somewhere else. Licensed daycares. Home daycares.

Established programs with strong reputations and long waitlists. The kind of places that, on paper, are supposed to know exactly what they are doing. These were children who had been called "behavioural," "dysregulated," "not a fit for our environment." Some had been removed from multiple programs before they ever reached my door. Their parents arrived exhausted, defensive, and often privately convinced that something was wrong with their child.



What I noticed very quickly was that I was not struggling with these children the way the other programs had been.

I was not doing anything extraordinary. I was not gifted in some way other educators were not. What I was doing — quietly at first, almost without naming it — was paying close attention to environment.

To the lighting in the room. To the volume of background noise. To group sizes. To the way transitions were handled between one activity and the next. To how a child's nervous system responded to over-stimulation, under-stimulation, or the wrong kind of expectation placed on them at the wrong moment.

Through coursework, placements, and years of patient observation, what became clear to me is this: the modern daycare system in Ontario has been moving steadily toward a model that does not work for sensitive or neurodivergent children.

Subsidies and government funding have incentivized centres to scale — larger groups, brighter spaces, louder rooms, more standardized routines built for efficiency. That model works beautifully for some children. It does not work for others. And the children it does not work for are precisely the ones being asked to leave.



The system, in other words, has been quietly filtering out the very children who need it most.

The moment that crystallized all of this for me arrived on a phone call. A mother called me — distraught, in tears — because her daughter had been enrolled at another daycare in the area, one with a strong local reputation, and had spent her days there screaming from drop-off until pickup.

The mother had finally managed to pull the truth out of the staff: her daughter was being physically restrained in a stroller, all day long, simply to keep her contained. The child's only "issue," as it would soon become clear, was that she needed smaller class sizes and was being emotionally dysregulated by an environment that was too loud, too bright, and too crowded for her nervous system to tolerate.

Within one week of joining my program, that little girl had attached to a teacher and a peer. By the end of her first month, she was walking into care independently and following daily routines on her own. Nothing about that child had changed. Only her environment had.

Around the same time, a family from Oakville began driving their child to Keswick three days a week — past dozens of daycares closer to home — to bring her to Divine Care. They had found us through a chain of word-of-mouth referrals. A respected woman in their circle, whose sister's son had been thriving in our program after struggling everywhere else, had spoken openly about the transformation in him.

When a friend of hers mentioned she was facing the exact same challenges with her own child, the recommendation was passed along. That family was the friend. They were not the only ones. The distances parents were willing to drive for this kind of care told me everything I needed to know about the size of the gap.



I realized two things at once. First, my daycare was not enough. I could not personally serve every family who needed this approach, no matter how much I wanted to. Second, this was not a Keswick-specific problem. It was an Ontario-wide failure of imagination — an entire generation of sensitive and neurodivergent children being told they did not fit, when the truth is that the rooms they had been placed in were never designed for them in the first place.

**That is when I began building Bright Steps Academy.**

Bright Steps is a half-day readiness program opening September 2026 in the Simcoe and York region. Its small groups, its intentional environment, and its built-in regulation practices are not afterthoughts. They are the entire point. The program has been designed from the ground up around the needs of the children most other programs are quietly turning away.

I am not promising any family a miracle. I am not promising that their child will be fixed, because there is nothing about their child that needs fixing. What I am promising is this: an environment that meets a child where they are, gives them genuine space to practice readiness skills and regulation, and prepares them for the louder and busier worlds they will eventually need to navigate.

Bright Steps welcomes every family. The children who tend to benefit most are sensitive, neurodivergent, and on-the-spectrum kids — the ones who need calmer spaces, smaller groups, and an approach that meets them exactly where they are.

*- Te-Anna Alain-Founder & Director, Bright Steps Academy*

