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AHSA 2012

AWARD WINNERS

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## AWARDS

Administrative Support Person

Beating the Odds

Home Visitor/Family Advocate

Maintenance

Cook

Teacher Assistant

Corporate Award

EHS Teacher of the Year

Father of the Year

Bus Driver

Content Area Specialist

Head Start Director

Head Start Staff, Higher Education

Mother of the Year

Leadership

Teacher of the Year

Community Advocate

Humanitarian Award



**Alaska Head Start  
Association**

*Collectively advocating on issues affecting  
Alaska's Head Start children and families*

## Administrative Support Person

Jessica Galyan

1000 words may not be enough to express the work that Jessi does for Kids' Corps and for Head Start and Early Head Start.

Jessi's position at Kids' Corps began as a basic front desk, reception, data entry position. She quickly worked herself into the honorary position of KCI's "go-to" person for everything from computer projects to troubleshooting a printer problem. She orders and assures inventory so that there is never a shortage of paperclips, rubber bands, ink cartridges, hand sanitizer, or just about anything little that is thought of only after a supply is exhausted. If something needs to be here tomorrow at 10:30 A.M. and it is 3:00 P.M. the day before, it is either available at 10:30 or absolutely unavailable from any source in the Municipality of Anchorage.

Jessi has expanded her expertise in network management to include troubleshooting network problems, setting up and assisting with software and hardware, and introducing staff to the use of KCI's network. She is KCI's COPA guru, and is highly sought after at PIR time by every manager and every specialist required to use COPA data to complete their portion of the PIR. She can back-track errors in COPA with skill and finesse. She is also the "formatting queen" when it comes to reports, pamphlets, forms, and projects. She is responsible for compiling information and formatting the agency's annual report, the agency's monthly report, the agency's parent handbooks, standard operating procedures, applications, brochures, planning committee packets, and just about any other report or document required to get information about Head Start, Early Head Start and KCI out to the community.

Jessi is instrumental in rallying the team at KCI. She quickly and easily forms bonds with all staff regardless of which site they work at and helps foster a sense of KCI community despite the fact that staff are spread throughout the anchorage area. Jessi is considered a valuable resource by all who work with her.



If she doesn't know the answer to your question or how to solve your problem, she can readily refer you to the person you need to talk to. She leads the effort in explaining the benefits of being a part of the Alaska Head Start Association; she assists in coordinating KCI's United Way efforts each year; she updates KCI's website, Facebook, and staff information pages to assure that current information and events are always just a mouse-click away. She is respected and liked by KCI staff at all levels.

Jessi's is also the friendly and welcoming voice heard over the telephone when calling KCI's administrative offices and the first smiling face you see when visiting the office. She takes the time to listen to the needs of each caller or visitor before determining how best to help them. She can also be found covering telephones and reception at KCI's largest center when her co-workers are absent.

Jessi is frequently the face of KCI at job fairs and staff recruitment opportunities in the community. She is fantastic recruiter for the agency because her passion for the program and dedication to the agency mission are clearly evident when she talks to potential applicants about employment opportunities. She is the person who orients staff the first day they work and assists them in completing the necessary paperwork to get started. She always starts with the opening line. "I love my job here at KCI and you will like it here too".

On top of all of her work, Jessi finished her 2-year degree in 2010. She began the process of completing her 4-year degree in 2011. She continues to take classes as she can and will probably complete her 4-year degree in 2013. This commitment to furthering her education while working full time has inspired other to do the same.

Jessi is an incredibly valuable presence in Head start. We are very lucky to have her on the front line here at KCI.



## Beating the Odds

Rhonda Drake

Rhonda Drake is a mother, a veteran, a Head Start parent and an inspiration to all people, especially those who have struggled with addiction or loved someone who has. Her story is difficult to tell. It leaves her vulnerable to judgment and criticism but celebrates perseverance and preservation of a family.

Rhonda's story lives close to my heart. I stood alongside her and witnessed her struggles and triumphs. The hardships she endured and what I watched her go through, helped us develop a relationship that is genuine and trust worthy, a relationship of mutual respect for one another.

I met Rhonda in October of 2007 and served as her family advocate for three years. Her two youngest daughters were three and one years old. Both girls were enrolled in our program. During this first year Rhonda and I began to build a rapport. I saw her as a strong woman who was quick to speak up for herself and her children. I also had the opportunity to observe her significant other's interactions with the girls. He was very attentive to their daughters and seemed to have a special bond with the baby. Dad and baby were always within arm's reach of one another. I didn't know much about their family at that time but I could tell Rhonda cared deeply for her children and their futures. This was evident and still is through her level of involvement in the Head Start program.

All four of Rhonda's children went to KCI Head Start. Rhonda served on KCI's Policy Council for the maximum time allowed. While part of the Policy Council, Rhonda attended the Alaska Head Start conference in Juneau. She assists with planning and facilitating every parent committee meeting for our center as well as our end of year celebrations. She serves on the family services advisory committee. She has sat in on numerous interviews and gave valuable feedback. She has also attended annual planning days. Her participation and feedback is valued by KCI's staff and management team. We are appreciative of her commitment to the success of the Head Start Program.

Rhonda's struggles became evident in the fall of 2008 when the girl's father was incarcerated in an out of state federal prison. Overnight Rhonda became a single parent and was dealing with the stress of raising her daughters alone and explaining to them why their dad was no longer present in their lives. She felt utterly alone and discarded, like no one cared. She lost her job and struggled with supporting her family. Rhonda was emotionally and mentally exhausted. During this time Rhonda shared with me her concerns and struggles but she was good at maintaining her composure on the outside. She continued participating in all Head start related activities.



One morning in October of 2008, management was calling Policy Council members for a vote and they called Rhonda. Something seemed very wrong on the phone so they asked me to go and check on her and the girls. As I drove her to her home, an unnerving feeling grew in the pit of my stomach. I knew something was wrong. I found Rhonda that morning lying in the middle of her living room barely conscious. She had a difficult time responding to my voice. Rhonda had overdosed on prescription muscle relaxers. An ambulance came and took Rhonda to the hospital. The Office of Children's Services came and took the girls to emergency foster care.

Over the next couple of months my heart ached with Rhonda's as the girls were moved from foster home to foster home. I supervised visits with the girls and Rhonda at the center the girls attended. During these visits I witnessed the love and loss this family felt. Rhonda tried her best to be strong for the girls and answer their questions in a truthful manner without making promises she couldn't keep. She often cried after the visit was over and the children were gone. It was in those moments that she confided in me. She didn't know what to do for her girls. They were angry with her and confused and asked when they could come home.

They had never spent one night away from their mom. This left Rhonda feeling empty and powerless but not for long. She decided that she would do anything within her power to get her children back home. She used all the heartbreak and suffering as fuel to get better. Rhonda enrolled in drug treatment classes and attended NA regularly. She also participated and graduated from Family Care Court in spring of 2009.

Rhonda and her daughters were reunified in time for Christmas, just three months after being separated. On average it takes children in foster care eighteen months to be reunited with their families. Rhonda's perseverance and determination to better herself allowed her children to come home and thrive in an environment where they feel loved and safe.

Rhonda remains an active parent at KCI. Her baby, the one year old, will be going to kindergarten this fall. Her three year old is now in 2nd grade in the highly gifted program. Rhonda is working full time at Country Financial as a Licensed Production Assistant. The girl's father will reunite with the family in June of this year.

Rhonda has taught me about life, loss, struggles, and overcoming hardships. I am a better person and professional because of my experience and relationship with her. She reminds me of the reason why I chose this line of work. She inspires me to keep persevering when life gets tough. I am honored to know her and to share her story. Without reservation I nominate Rhonda Drake for the Alaska Head Start Association Beating the Odds Award.



## Home Visitor/Family Advocate

Tundra Paulsen



Tundra Paulsen is Kids' Corps sole Early Head Start Home Visitor. Tundra began working at Kids' Corps as a Substitute in May of 2006 and stepped into a teacher role in July of the same year. During her time as a Head Start teacher, Tundra worked hard to balance her family life (sports, school, and social activities for her 7 children) and work life in addition to taking evening classes to get her Associates degree in Early Childhood Development, which she earned in August 2009.

When the agency was awarded and the expansion grant to provide Early Head Start services, Tundra jumped at the opportunity to be the agencies home visiting pioneer. Tundra has been in her position as Early Head Start Home Visitor since January 2010 and although she didn't begin conducting home visits until April of that year, she was very busy attending trainings and helping to establish policies, procedures and forms for the new program option. She also went through the process to become a trained Parent Educator through the Parents as Teachers program. Tundra recruited relentlessly in a community unfamiliar with home visiting programs and officially conducted her first home visit on April 9th, 2010.

Since that first visit, Tundra has proved herself to be an excellent fit for the home visitor position. Kids' Corps Early Head Start program has established partnerships with community programs designed to assist pregnant and parenting teens and young mothers. Tundra has helped 6 young women make the transition to motherhood and has helped many others strengthen and gain confidence in their parenting skills and achieve personal self-sufficiency goals including graduating high school, enrolling in post-secondary education, and finding a job. Tundra forms lasting connections with the families she works with and has had several families drop from the program and then return at a later date when circumstances in their life allowed.

It is not uncommon for those who have exited the program to call her for assistance locating a resource or just to update her on what is going on in their lives.

It's hard to put into words what Tundra brings into the lives of the families she works with. This is especially true for the teen families she visits. It's difficult to be a parent when you are still growing up yourself and this is a challenge faced by many of the families Tundra work with. It's an intricate balancing act to support and nurture the parent as they develop their sense of self while at the same time assisting them to develop strong, nurturing bond with their child. These teen parents are forced to face the realization that it's not "all about me" much earlier than most of their peers and Tundra excels at supporting the parent in their development of self and their development as a parent.

During her time in the role of Home Visitor, Tundra has established community partnership with the staff at Crossroad, the Anchorage School Districts School for pregnant and parenting teens, and the Passage House program, a local shelter for young mothers. She is currently in the process of establishing a relationship with the staff at Clare House to reach out to more families with young children experiencing homelessness. Tundra is truly dedicated to Kids' Corps mission of providing a head start to families with children who need it most.

This spring Tundra is working with that very first family she enrolled to prepare the child to transition to Head Start. Looking back at the positive impact she has made in the lives of all the families she has worked with, I write this nomination to recognize her hard work and dedication to improving the lives of families and young children.



## Maintenance

Teng Thao



I nominate this individual for Maintenance Staff of the Year.

For over 20 years, Kids' Corps contracted with local janitorial businesses to clean our facilities. Although there are many such businesses in Anchorage, we never were able to find a provider who could maintain a consistent level of service. It took constant monitoring and follow up to maintain a basic level of cleanliness in our four Head Start centers. Our children, families and staff deserved better.

Finally, in August of 2010 KCI elected to hire our own in-house janitors. We didn't know what to expect or what pitfalls awaited us. For example, what would we do if a custodian quit without notice? Who, at a moment's notice, would clean the 22,000 square feet of Head Start classrooms, some of which were in use year round?

This concern and many others have never materialized because Teng Thao interviewed for the job and has been our "go-to" custodian ever since.

When Teng was hired, complaints from parents and staff about cleanliness problems immediately ceased and with good reason. With four facilities assigned to him, he has a center specific checklist of the tasks he expects to complete nightly. It's a lengthy list, yet Teng goes above and beyond that checklist every night. Windows sparkle, floors are spotless, rugs and carpets are thoroughly vacuumed, walls are clean, burned out lights are changed, surfaces are dusted or sanitized. Even the garbage cans are clean.

Teng's supervisor tells a story about an unscheduled drop-in visit he made one evening to see how the crew was doing at one of the centers. There was Teng, on his knees, perspiration beading on his forehead, scrubbing a stubborn scuff mark on the floor. There's a saying, "Your character is best revealed by what you do when you think no one is looking." This story illustrates Teng's conscientiousness, his work ethic (which is second to none) and most of all his commitment to ensuring that children have a safe, healthy, and clean Head Start center ready for them every day.

Teng also supervises two other janitors. He has high expectations for what needs to be done from his team, and he leads by example. He is always on time, and he very rarely misses a day of work. KCI's experience with contracted services suggested that the field was plagued by high turnover. The fact that KCI's janitorial crew has worked together successfully for well over a year with virtually no missed shifts and no turnover is a testament to Teng's leadership.



Teng is always kind to the children and unfailingly polite to parents, staff, and visitors. It is not uncommon to find posted in KCI hallways colorful signs that children have created ( with a little help from their teachers) that say “Thank you Mr. Teng!” The high quality of Teng’s work send a powerful, positive message to everyone who enters a KCI facility.

Without question Teng deserves to be recognized for his outstanding service. We are proud to submit his nomination to the Alaska Head Start Association for the Maintenance Staff of the Year award.



## Cook

Jermain Humphrey



I would like to nominate Cook Jermain (JAE) Humphrey for ASHA Cook of the Year award. Jae has been with our program for 3 years now. Mr. J, as the children call him is important to our team. Not only does he cook yummy food but he teaches the children which food group the item belongs to along with what the food can do for our bodies.

Jae is always willing to step into the classroom and lend a helping hand whether it's doing a potty run, or helping with one of our more challenging children get ready to go outside. The children love him!

We have had many families in need of food this year. Jae is always willing to save extras and to make sure they are sent home with the children at the end of the day. He talks with parents in the kitchen and is always available to talk with them. Jae makes sure to check with me as an advocate to see how those families are doing.

Jae is a great role model for our young children especially for our boys. Mr. Jae goes into the classrooms and works with the teachers on fun food activities and is always willing to hear new ideas.

When our local Papa Murphy's Pizza Company comes in to make with pizza with our children Mr. Jae is always willing to cook and serve all 90 little pizza's along with making the rest of the lunch that is required by CACFP. This is one of the highlights of the year for families and children. On any given day you can see Mr. Jae dancing and singing away in the kitchen and hallways of our program happy and excited to serve our "little people". There would be a lot less smiles and giggles coming from our lunchrooms if Mr. Jae was not here. We are thankful that we have him in our program. **Please accept my nomination for Mr. Jae as cook of the year.**



## Teacher Assistant

Dakota Willey



Cody is more than deserving of this award for many reasons. Although I do not work at the Early Head Start site where Dakota is located, I came to know Cody as a grandparent in the Early Head Start location. In addition, our Head Start Staff regularly partners together enabling both programs to provide better services to our families. In many cases our families have siblings at both Early Head Start & Head Start. Our grandson, Kanen, was almost 3 when “Koda” as Kanen called him, first started at the early Head Start site. It didn’t take long for Cody to win the trust and respect of not only the kiddo’s but parents and staff as well. I knew Cody was going to be my nomination for Teacher Aide this year, especially after learning he had never been nominated or received an award thanking him for being such a caring and positive male role model to so many young children. I also had the opportunity to work hand in hand with Cody and a few other dedicated co-workers at our Early Head Start Program for a week this past January to help out with the remodel being done over winter break.

Due to some unforeseen complications, our Early Head Start Program was not ready for reopening as scheduled. I was more than happy to help out but feared I might be stepping on toes however, much to my surprise they made me feel welcome and appreciated. I was impressed with the professional manner in which Dakota supported FNA and it’s mission to our families, it was very clear he is dedicated to FNA, EHS, and the Community.

Dakota was determined to get the job completed to all Health & Safety requirements, allowing them to welcome back the families who depend on them. Cody is respected, very friendly, seems to have a very positive attitude and a kind word to offer. Dakotas’s willingness to exceed the job requirements is one of the reasons FNA is able to provide such a wonderful services to our community.

I would like to invite everyone to take the time to nominate someone, recognize them, when they go that extra mile. Maybe they made you smile or made your life a little better.

**You are appreciated, keep up the good work!!**



## Corporate Award

Paul Pike



We would like to nominate Fairbanks Business Installation and Services owner, Paul Pike, for the 2012 AHSA Corporate award. This man has made amazing contributions to our Fairbanks Native Association Head Start Program. Paul and his company have donated thousands of dollars of office supplies and equipment to our program over the past few years. He takes the time to come in, meet the staff, and design office spaces that accommodate the needs and comforts of our staff. He helps the office be a pleasant place to work. You can find him in our buildings on the weekends, helping our fellow co-workers build offices, fix walls, design new office spaces, and so much more. In addition, he has donated several chairs for the comfort of our staff during staff meetings and trainings. Paul has two immediate family members that are employed by Head Start and he is a grandfather of a child enrolled. Every time you see Paul, he has a helping hand available and he does it with a smile. He will do anything to help our program out, and for that he deserves this award. He believes in Head Start, and all that we do. We feel that he has helped give our program the exterior professional facelift that it deserves, to reflect the bright, professional interior of our staff. Paul has made this place feel like home, and for this we are grateful.



## **EHS Teacher of the Year**

**Mandi French Gonzalez**



I would like to nominate Mandi French-Gonzalez for the EHS Teacher of the Year Award. Mandi was the one consistent teacher for my daughter from the time she was an infant until she was three years old. Continuity of care is really important in the infant and toddler years. My family was grateful to have one consistent teacher for our child for the whole time she attended EHS.

Mandi has a natural ability with children. She is nurturing and children are drawn to her. All the children in her classroom want her to hold them or to sit next to them. Mandi is able to form strong connections with children and their families. It has been 5 months since my daughter has transitioned from EHS and she is still asking for Mandi.

At one point when my daughter was at EHS, Mandi developed take home literacy buckets for the students in her class. Each child had their own brand new sand bucket that had home made games in it, books to borrow for the weekend and other activities that families could do at home with their children. The home made games were made especially for the children in the class. For example, one game was matching the shoes that belonged to their friends. My daughter was able to identify which pair of shoes belonged to each of her friends. Mandi put a lot of time into planning those take home literacy buckets for her class.

Mandi is an exceptional teacher who really cared about the families that she worked with. EHS offered high quality care for infants and toddlers. We will miss Mandi because she is such a caring teacher and had a big impact on my daughter's life.



## Father of the Year

Francis Sweetsir



We would like to nominate Francis Sweetsir for Father of the Year here at FNA Head Start. We are nominating Francis as he has set an example for the fathers in our program. Francis has done an outstanding job balancing his goals of attending college, as well as meeting the demands of a single father. Francis's dedication not only to his goals but to his son is helping to ensure a better life for them.

Even during the cold winter, Francis walked his son to and from Head Start every single day, a couple of miles each way. When staff would tell Francis that it was okay for Mason to miss school. Francis would reply, "No, we are good. Mason loves school and he wants to come." Francis is active in his son's life; he calls and talks with the teachers. He lets us know how Mason is doing or if things have changed at home. Francis advocates not only for his son's education but for all aspects of Mason's life including social and physical needs.

Francis is a great example to the boys in our classroom. When he arrives you can hear "Mason your dad is here." He speaks with kindness and interest to all the children in the class.

**Please accept our nomination for Father of the Year.**



## Bus Driver

Richard Kemper



Mr. Richard,

He greets the families with a smile ☺

Has fun jokes for the Kids.

Keeps the children safe on the bus.



**RurAL CAP**

HEALTHY PEOPLE, SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES, VIBRANT CULTURES

**CHILD  
DEVELOPMENT**



## Content Area Specialist

Doreen Lacy



Ms. Lacy began working with RurAL CAP Head Start as the Southwest Region Education Coordinator in October 2011. She came to us with experience as an elementary school educator, a degree in Community Psychology, and a passion for improving the education experience for rural Alaskans. Though she began mid-year and was busy with formal CLASS training, informal trainings in Teaching Strategies Gold and Creative Curriculum, and on the job training in DIAL, Ms. Lacy maintained her focus on supporting the teaching staff, children and families in our region. She was eager to travel from our Central Office in Anchorage to each of the region's four communities in rural Alaska (Alakanuk, Checak, Emmonak, and Hooper Bay). Simply stated, having her as a new addition to the Southwest Region's team has be great.

When challenges or concerns have come up she provides a new perspective and creative problem solving to address the issues in a timely manner. When I have requested information to better understand a program's status she is quick to look through her files and documentation and sends me accurate information. That being said she is organized and manages her responsibilities well. I appreciate her passion in the work she does and her approach to ensure children and families have a meaningful classroom experience and teachers have the tools and knowledge to provide quality services. She has even contacted me on the weekend letting me know that she has come across some great materials to purchase for the classrooms. (Her regular communication with the staff allows her to know what ideas they have for upcoming activities). This thoughtfulness is particularly significant because our teaching staff do not have access to a variety of materials in their local communities.



Beyond her role as the Education Coordinator, Ms. Lacy is mindful of the holistic model of our program, regularly considering a child's family life, health, and even community as it relates to their educational experience in Head start. In the times when we come across staff who are not as welcoming to new ideas or are not as thrilled that they are being held to a certain level of professionalism, she has been persistent in ensuring the teachers know her expectations, program requirements, and is patient in guiding them. From the staff Doreen supports, I have received only positive feedback as they appreciate the consistent, meaningful support as well as the level of professionalism Doreen expects from them.

As the Southwest Regional Manager I very much appreciate her teaming and open communication regarding the status of the program. A quick email, phone call or stop 'n chat here and there have allowed me to celebrate with staff, reiterate expectations, and offer support in a different means. I really hope that she is happy in her position and stays with our program for the long term. After completing her first program year and visiting all the sites I expect her to really take off with increasing the quality of our program.



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## Head Start Director

Patrice Griffin



Patrice Griffin has been the Head Start Director for our agency since 2006. She worked previously as a Family Service Coordinator and Curriculum Specialist. She has many years of experience running preschool programs on a military base.

Patrice is a strong leader. She oversees 25 Head Start programs in rural and bush Alaska. She travels to some of the sites each year enduring harsh weather and extreme temperatures. She has ridden on a sled pulled behind a snow mobile between small airports and the Head Start centers she is visiting. She always jumps right in and helps out wherever she is needed when she is on site. She has been known to lead a classroom, cook a meal, and clean up a center after a day of class! Patrice is very good with children. We have observed her interacting with children on their level giving them attention and respect.

Patrice is a strong advocate for children and families. She is very knowledgeable of early childhood practices and willingly shares her knowledge and experience with staff and parents. Her degrees in Early Childhood Education (AAS) and Occupational Education (BAS) along with her experience equip her to manage and develop strong quality programming.

In addition to the day-to-day operations of running programs, this year Patrice had to implement a new organizational structure and hire seven new staff members. All of the new staff had to be trained in their positions and she had to oversee that training.

## Head Start Staff, Higher Education

Gladys Landlord



We would like to nominate Gladys Landlord from Mountain village for the Head Start Staff, Higher Education award. Both Jinelle and I have experience working full time and attending school at the same time. We both recognize how much self-determination it takes to accomplish this. Gladys also cares for her large family which is not always an easy task in rural Alaska.

What we most admire about her is she is very dedicated to her education and role models this for her staff as she stays late into the evenings taking classes or working on her assignments. Gladys is within three classes of completing her AA degree. Jinelle and I would like to recognize this accomplishment and support her in completion of her degree in the near future. Despite many challenges in the program and in her community Gladys does not complain. If you called and needed something urgent, she would drop everything to get it to you. Gladys is a great leader for Mt. Village Head Start. We don't know how we would do it without her!

Jinelle Scully & Barbara Roddy



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HEALTHY PEOPLE, SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES, VIBRANT CULTURES

**CHILD  
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## Mother of the Year

Stacie Hopper



Stacie Hopper is a great person. Not only is she a support to our classroom but to all of our staff. She has subbed for our teacher aide for both classrooms all at a moment's notice.

Stacie is familiar with our program and strongly supports it. She has an eleven year old daughter that was a part of our program and one that will transition onto Kindergarten this fall.

Stacie and her girls perform and assist with our annual fundraiser each year. She is a great help to our fundraiser.

Stacie is our AM coordinator as well, she hold many hats at our center. After her daughter moves onto Kindergarten she would still like to be involved in our program — WOW she's dedicated!

This year Stacie took on our book bag project. She prepared the bags and books and each week ensures they are ready to be sent home to the children. This project is alternated each with the morning and afternoon classes.

Stacie also volunteers jobs for her husband Dusty as well ( he is always happy to help when he is available) Having Stacie and her family in our lives has enriched our program.



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## Leadership

Susan Hale



Susan Hale has served as the Finance Director for CCS Early Learning since September of 2006. When she started in her position she inherited a department that had been in a state of transition for several years. A bit of background on what she walked into:

- CCS purchased an accounting software package that was complex and never fully implemented or fully understood.
- CCS moved from having a Finance Director and a Finance Assistant — to having a Finance Director. This was soon found to be inadequate so...
- CCS moved to having a Finance Director and an accounting contract. This arrangement had additional challenges because all of our fiscal records were not in-house and we didn't have access to financial reports that were timely or formatted in a way that made sense.
- The accounting contractor experienced a fire that destroyed their building. Electronic records were not lost but many hard copies were destroyed and there was a period of time when the Accountant was unavailable as they re-established their business.
- The previous Finance Director had a husband who was deployed and a child with serious medical concerns. She worked hard to stay on top of everything but decided that her family needed to come first and resigned.

Susan's first week on the job was the week of our agency audit. She handled it well, considering she had no clue what Head Start was or how the agency worked! The audit was a good one, however, we were very clearly given the message that our agency needed to make some changes prior to our next audit.

As Susan learned the challenges we faced and her awareness of the new job grew, she soon started taking ownership of the Finance Department and started putting all the pieces back together in a way that made sense for our agency. She was a crucial part of creating and implementing a transition plan that was designed to re-establish a strong and independent fiscal department that included:

- Purchasing a simple accounting software system that would meet our needs (QuickBooks)
- Getting the necessary training and implementing the software in a way that would work moving forward
- Adding an Accounting Specialist back into our staff
- And finally moving away from the accounting contract and bringing our books back in house.

We completed this transition within a year of Susan being hired and it was hugely successful, completely due to the hard work and attention to detail that Susan showed.

From the perspective of our Board of Directors—and our Finance Committee — Susan does a wonderful job of staying on top of all the fiscal requirements and details that are associated with her position. She organizes monthly committee meetings and provides the information that is required. She also has tailored the reports to meet the needs and desires of the board so they can provide effective oversight.

Today, because of Susan's leadership we have a very efficient and very professional Finance Department that continues to produce excellent results. Every audit since that very first one has been outstanding — with no issues raised. We have gone through multiple federal reviews and no fiscal findings have occurred. Our fiscal monitoring and reporting are much better than they were in the past — and having just completed our grant application process this morning, I can certainly attest to how smoothly and how organized GABI went together. She also has signed up to participate as a reviewer and has been a part of several federal review teams across the country. This experience further strengthens her knowledge and perspective and allows her to bring new ideas back to CCS.

While Susan has shown incredible leadership in our agency, her efforts have not ended there. She has developed strong relationships with the Regional Office staff and on many occasions has been called upon to assist other grantees. Recently she has spent quite a bit of her time with new fiscal staff at both Kids' Corps Inc. and Thrivalaska helping to orient them to their new positions and to work through the challenges of a new job. In speaking to the directors of both of these two grantees, they appreciate the help she has provided and endorse this nomination as well.

In summary, the AHSA leadership award is designed to celebrate the extraordinary leadership of someone involved in Head Start within our state. Susan certainly has demonstrated leadership both within our agency, and in her willingness to provide help and assistance to other grantees in our state and in our region. I personally am very proud and feel very lucky to have her on our team and I hope you will join with me in recognizing and celebrating this particular **Head Start leader!**



## Teacher of the Year

Sandy Summitt



Sandy Summitt is a Lead Teacher at the Palmer Center of CCS Early Learning. She started as a classroom substitute in 2005, became an Associate Educator in 2007 and promoted to Lead Teacher in 2010. She obtained her Child Development Associate (CDA) credential in 2008; her Associate's degree in Early Childhood Development in 2011 and will soon start work on her Bachelor's degree. Her efforts to set and achieve her own professional development goals provide an excellent role model and inspiration to others.

Sandy shares many fine qualities you would see in other Head Start teachers: creative, compassionate, flexible, involved, and knowledgeable in early childhood development. However, what makes her worthy of this award is her ability to establish a connection to each individual child and adult and the way she can make something positive out of any situation.

Through individualization and the ability to accept families where they are, Sandy is able to quickly establish trusting partnerships and help families see and build on their strengths and use community resources to help them reach their goals. She understands that children develop individually and at their own rate; and they need to have their social emotional needs met before they are ready to learn. She works closely with children and families to find out each child's personal learning style and integrates each one into planning for the group.

Her resilience and creativity were tested in early March when her classroom flooded from a broken pipe in the ceiling. We had to close the center for almost two weeks while repairs were made, and when we re-opened, Sandy's classroom was still not operational.



We were given another room in the building away from the other classrooms for Sandy's class. She had a positive, resilient attitude during the entire process and as a result her children and parents also adapted easily to the changing situation. Since much of what was in the room was also damaged, Sandy got very creative on setting up her new classroom on the Monday before children returned so that they would see it as an adventure for the class that started with a trail of paw prints from the old classroom to the new one for the children to follow.

Sandy encouraged a Dad from one of the families she worked with to become more active in the classroom and center. His involvement has made a big difference from volunteering in the classroom several hours a week to using his handyman skills for projects in the center. Through his involvement a "Daddy and Me" night was created at the Center with great results.

Sandy's ability to connect, understand, encourage, enhance, and celebrate others has had positive impacts on the children, families and staff. Thank you for your consideration of Sandy's nomination for Teacher of the Year.





## Community Advocate

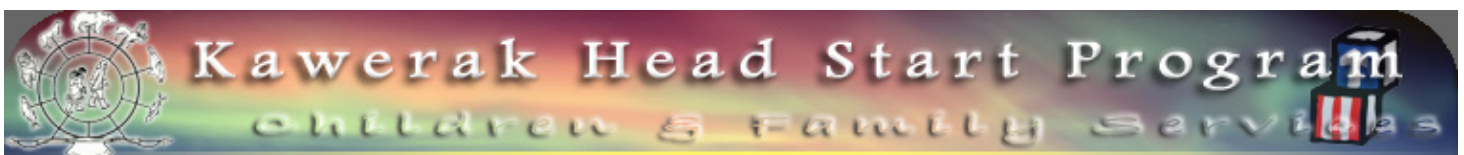
Native Village of St. Michael IRA Council

I would like to nominate the Native Village of St. Michael, IRA Council for the Community Advocate award. The IRA has made a generous donation to our Head Start parents that volunteer up to a minimum of 20 hours or more, in a month. Parents of Head Start children who meet this requirement are eligible to receive one whole reindeer per month.

The St. Michael IRA Council consists of President—Shirley Martin, Vice-President—Pius Washington, Secretary—Elsie Cheemuk, Treasurer—Virginia Washington, and members include: John Lockwood, Thomas Cheemuk, Sr., and Charlie Fitka, Jr.

In addition to help motivate parents of Head Start to volunteer, the St. Michael IRA Council also allowed Head Start to operate in their community building when Head Start did not have a classroom to serve the children. As a result of a fire and damage to the heating system in the City building, the Head Start three(3) and four(4) year old programs were displaced for a while. Head Start utilized the IRA community gathering place as a classroom and another room for an office. If it wasn't for them, we would not have operated and provided the much needed and appreciated educational service to the youth of St. Michael.

We are grateful and please to have the opportunity to recognize our local IRA Council for such an award. It is with sincere pleasure that the TACIQ Head Start staff nominate the Native Village of St. Michael, IRA Council to receive the Community Advocate Award.



## Humanitarian Award

Kay McCarthy



The Central Council Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska Head Start would like to nominate **Kay McCarthy (previously Greenough)** as Alaska Head Start Association Humanitarian of the Year. Kay has worked in Early Childhood in Southeast Alaska for more than 30 years. During this these years she has been involved with writing curriculum, being involved with establishing Head Start Centers throughout Southeast Alaska (Juneau and rural sites), supporting students for their CDA, teaching University Classes in Early Childhood, advising ECE students who were pursuing the AA in ECE as well as being an integral part of growing the Early Childhood Program at UAS throughout the years with her work with many grants. Kay has always been an advocate for young children and their families and a strong consistent voice.

As the Director of CCTHITA Head Start it is with both my title as Director and with my previous history with Head Start that I am pleased to be making this nomination. I have personally known Kay since moving to Juneau almost 28 years ago. At that time my wife Nila and I moved to Juneau from my home town of Wrangell with our two young sons who were Early Head Start and Head Start age. It was a very challenging time for us for many reasons and there were few opportunities that we were aware of in Juneau. Nila had some experience working in day care centers and had a BA degree but the degree was not in early childhood education. In her job search she put in an application at CCTHTIA Head Start. We had become more than a little discouraged until we ran into Kay and the then Director of the program having lunch. At the time CCTHITA was looking for a Nutrition Coordinator and Kay remembered Nila's application and promised that they would review it and get back to her.

The rest you can say is history! Nila started out as a young women and mother of two working at Head Start and has gone on to continue working for Head Start programs throughout the Nation. She is currently working with Head Start 28 years later. You might just say Kay had an eye for people who care about children and is excellent at bringing the best out in young people who are starting out their careers in ECE.

Since those early days Kay has inspired countless CCTHITA Head Start staff into pursuing their CDA's, AA's, BA's and MA's in ECE. Tlingit & Haida Teacher Aide Elisabeth Price had this to say, "She worked with my mother Karin Price in the 1990's to achieve her CDA...and she worked through many hours with me on goals for the CDA application and registration for college classes. Without Kay I am not sure how far I would have been through college courses and pulled off my CDA. For me being a young teacher in Head Start she has been forever helpful in my career in ECE." Sandra Churchill Wrangell TA/Cook had this to say, "She had us taking classes on line and going to summer intensives. Those gatherings we went to were very successful and informative, it gave us inspiration, connected us with our elders and enhanced our relationships working with the families of Head Start. She was our adviser and came to our centers, she told us to always have our classrooms reflect the community that we live in. "If a visitor was to walk in from New York, he would know that he was in an Alaska center." Another Lead Teacher states, "In those moments where I have felt stalled in my development as a teacher she has always been there to provide a firm yet gentle hand towards redirecting me back towards my passion for Early Childhood. She has truly prepared me to be the most effective and empathic teacher that I can be."

Health and Nutrition Coordinator Melissa Morgan thanks Kay by saying' "Kay taught me to, not only care and nurture young children and their families, but also to care for myself. She helped me to recognize how extremely important the work we do is and how (as they say on airplanes) "before assisting children, you must first apply your own oxygen mask." My most recent experience with Kay in the classroom was when she almost had to cancel a class she scheduled because of serious injuries she received from being knocked over by a dog. She was bruised and battered, but on a day when I had to visit her classroom there she was with a cast and all still conducting class just "seemingly" days after the incident.

Many young early childhood educators are in part who they are because of Kay's high level of expectation for them. Many of our young children and families are getting a quality Head Start Education because of the wonderful influence she has had on our staff. I am honored to nominate Kay McCarthy as Humanitarian of the Year.

