



# Alaska Head Start Association

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

## 2013 AHSA Award Winners



**Support Brings Success!**



**Congratulations to**

Julia Sargent (*Content Area Specialist of the Year*) and  
Bonnie Mierzejek (*Cultural Awareness*)  
of the Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association on being  
recognized for their expertise and dedication.

Congratulations and ***thank you*** for the excellent work  
you do for our children and families!



history &  
culture



news &  
events



tribes

# **ALEUTIAN PRIBILOF ISLANDS ASSOCIATION, INC**

## *Award winners*



Content Area Specialist of the Year

[Julia Sargent](#)



Cultural Awareness

[Bonnie Mierzejek](#)



## Content Area Specialist of the Year

### Julia Sargent

The Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association is a very lucky organization. We have a Mental Health Coordinator, a Health and Nutrition Coordinator, and a manager of the CACFP. What's even better, it all is the same person!

Julia Sargent is a deserving candidate to receive this year's Content Area Specialist of the Year award and there are many statements that can support her victory over other candidates. As the Health & Nutrition Coordinator for the Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association, Inc. Head Start program, Julia faces many challenges when providing quality services for the children and families of the region. With offices based in Anchorage, Julia may not always see the faces of the children we serve, but you can always see the cogs turning in her head when she wants to make certain that the children are coming into class every day happy because they are healthy and nourished, eager to learn.

Julia insures that all the children's well-child visits are thoroughly complete and that each immunization schedule is up-to-date. But, should a child not be current, she is tireless in her work with the site staff and family to help them get caught up even connecting with Public Health Nurses to resolve any issues that may be causing delays. You may be thinking this is her job; well Julia has heart and does it with a Mother's love.

Julia manages the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). What more do I need to say about that! (Mark has said that if he had to do this we wouldn't have a CACFP to work with!) She has never failed to see the program through a good review without findings. During the most recent review, the reviewer said she wished she could have recorded the meal service at one of our sites to use as an example to show other programs how Head Start meal service should be done. This program that assists us in promoting healthy nutritious meals and snacks also requires excellent supervision and monitoring with exceptional attention to detail. Not only that, Julia also supervises our Environmental Health and Safety component. She works diligently with site staff and Environmental Health & Safety Officers to ensure that our facilities are kept safe for our children to play learn and grow, which Julia does with a Mother's eye.

You might think that Julia does this as a job...that would not be an accurate view of why Julia does what she does so well. It is her passion, her life and her Calling.

So, let me re-cap, Julia Sargent is a highly skilled and knowledgeable professional who has a passion for working with Head Start Families and Children. She insures that the environments in our sites are safe, tracks health information and coordinates, connects families with service providers, works with environment health, develops healthy and tasty menus, works with WIC, Public Health Nurses, oversees the HSAC and manages the CACFP expertly...There should be no question that Julia Sargent is the most deserving individual to be awarded the Content specialist of the year. Oh, did I mention her closest site is over 600 miles away!





## Cultural Awareness

### Bonnie Mierzejek

“Aang, aang,” which means “hello,” is the common greeting heard on the regular Monday teleconference at Head Start. Beverly Mierzejek, “Bonnie,” is an Unangan (Aleut) originally from Saint George Island, Alaska. Currently, Bonnie serves as the Head Start Education Coordinator in the communities of Sand Point, Saint Paul, Unalaska and King Cove.

Bonnie is instrumental in keeping the Unangan language alive today as there are only 150 Unangan Tunuu speakers. Bonnie’s parents have fostered her role as a cultural advocate by conversing with her in Unangan Tunuu, sharing their way of life on the island of Saint George, and overcoming their horrific experience as internment camp survivors at Funter Bay. Through their challenges, this family has promoted and grounded their cultural values and ultimately made them accessible to family, friends and staff.

A few years ago a language revitalization grant was implemented in the Head Start program. Bonnie assisted in the creation of the grant and accessing materials for the children enrolled in Head Start. Today, children can still use the audio card reader to learn common names of animals, activities, numbers, and other common phrases in Unangan Tunuu.

When traveling, Bonnie frequently visits the elders in the communities and checks up on them. This past year many elders in the region passed away making it vital that the Unangan traditional values are carried into the future. Bonnie recognizes this as she cares for her elderly parents and frequently takes them to participate in Russian Orthodox Church services and events.

Bonnie is always willing to share the importance and respect for cultural values. A few months ago she was able to provide an impromptu meeting on cultural appropriateness for Head Start Staff. Bonnie is a valuable member of the Head Start Program and a deserving award winner of the Cultural Awareness Award.

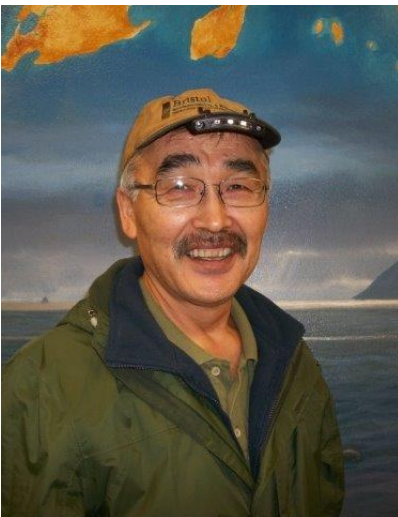


# BRISTOL Bay Native Association

## Award winners



Assistant or Deputy Director  
Jennifer Gardiner



Bus Driver  
John Nick



Corporate Award

BBNA



## Assistant or Deputy Director

### Jennifer Gardiner

When Jennifer Gardiner started with the Head Start program nearly 5 years ago, she earned the title of “The Missing Link”. We had carefully rebuilt the program from the ground up but had been searching for someone who had excellent managerial, computer and organization skills; someone who is always cheerful and someone who was willing to work for low wages. As you can imagine, that was not an easy find, at least not until Jennifer came along! We were able to steal her from another organization in town who ‘couldn’t keep her busy enough’. I assured her that she would not have that problem here at Head Start, and 5 years later, that assurance is still very true.

Jennifer title is “Program Logistics Manager” which pretty much means, Jen will do what has to be done. Her department consists of herself and two program assistants and is responsible for all files, both staff and child; all data entry; CACFP reporting; grant application and submission; Child Plus entry, reports and PIR; purchasing and timesheets; travel and other responsibilities too numerous to count! In addition, that department is responsible for getting food and supplies to all the classrooms. This is no small feat when you realize that we need to charter 2-3 airplanes full of food annually to each site along with weekly grocery orders and everything else that a classroom needs to function. Teachers often order large items and then leave for the summer with no realization as to the logistics that re behind getting those items on site. To Jennifer, getting a stand up freezer from airport to barge to remote site classroom (often via 4-wheeler) is just another day at work.

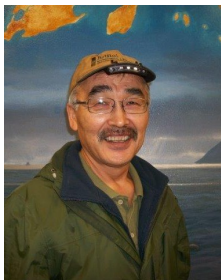
Jen built the BBNA Head Start web page where parents can access application and training materials, Policy Council can access meeting packets and budgets, and staff can complete required forms and submit them directly to the correct manager through the website. This has saved us an inordinate amount of time and has greatly reduced the ‘paperwork snowstorm’ as well as the need to fax or mail in required reports and documents.

Jen has the incredible ability to pull just the right report at just the right time. During one federal review, she was asked to pull up something that none of us had ever seen (nor ever heard of). Jen just smiled calmly, retreated to her office, and returned ten minutes later with just the exact thing that they had requested.

She has done this all while earning her AA in Early Childhood Education. She had to over 300 hours of scheduled classroom time the year before last which she managed to squeeze in with everything else she had going on, and when panel denied those hours due to a technicality, she re-wrote her plan and started all over again. Jen completed her AA this year and plans on continuing on to a BA in Business Administration.

Due to our bandwidth challenges, Jennifer has been uploading federal grant documents from her home for the last 4 years. This year she opted to work on Memorial Day in order to get our Federal and State grants finished up on time. Because there was no other staff in the building, the internet speed was lightning fast and we were able to get all our documents uploaded with no problem. It was then that she decided to work on Memorial Day every year so she could take advantage of the faster internet. It is this kind of selfless dedication that I would like to recognize I Jen and I hope the awards committee agrees.

Jen is a vital member of the Head Start management team. She goes above and beyond every day and we hope that she wins this award so that others besides her co-workers get to recognize what an amazing employee and person she is!



## Bus Driver

### John Nick

John drives the Head Start bus in Togiak, a community of around 800 people on the coast of Southwest Alaska. The community of Togiak is known for its high winds and large snow drifts. The community is split in two and separated by a long steep winding road which is often completely buried in snow. John is responsible for bringing 2 classrooms of children to and from Head Start daily.

Two years ago, when we were recruiting for a driver, John came to us with a CDL but no Bus Drivers Endorsement. We were able to find a trainer to come out and provide a full training for 3 potential drivers; out of the three people who started the class, only John was ultimately successful in obtaining his endorsement. He went right to work and has been on the job ever since.

John takes his responsibilities very seriously and always has the safety of the children as his first and foremost priority. He has taken the empty bus through the route early in the morning to determine the safety of the road conditions before he'll allow any students to board.

His reports are always complete and timely and he always is working on maintenance issues that could potentially impact a safe run. He will always call the main office if he has a maintenance or service question or if he thinks the weather is too bad to run the bus.

This year our bus was vandalized, a hole was shot through the back window in the emergency exit. John immediately cancelled the runs that day because he knew that the safety of the children would be compromised. He did his best to patch the window until a new one could be ordered, sent out and installed. The bus inspector took the bus off the road until a new window could be installed. Rather than just sit home, John jumped in and started subbing for classroom staff when-ever he could.

It is very hard to be a remote school bus driver. Supervisors, mechanics and inspectors are all located far away and decisions sometimes need to be made immediately. John is able to make those decisions in a calm and certain manner. Staff and parents trust in his judgment and know that he will do everything he can to ensure the safety of each and every one of his passengers.





## Corporate Award

### Bristol Bay Native Association

I would like to start off by saying that there are many companies that work with the BBNA Head Start program that I could have nominated for this award. Companies that have donated time, space or even items for the students attending our program but none of those companies compare to our own grantee.

Bristol Bay Native Association hasn't just been a grantee; they have been the driving force to keep this program going. Since before I started working as the Program Logistics Manager, Bristol Bay Native Association has only taken a very small percentage of indirect from the grant. Along with the very small percentage of indirect collected they pay almost all of the directors' wages. These may seem like small feats for a grantee, but without these generous donations BBNA Head Start would have a hard time existing.

Working for BBNA Head Start has always been a rollercoaster, at no time has a school year been exactly like the last. Head Start sites have changed each year, from Home Base to two centers in one site and even adding a Pre-K program to another site. BBNA Head Start has closed sites and reopened others all to meet the vision of Head Start and the performance standards. Our program has made so many cuts that we live on precipice of disaster each morning, we call it "The Blanket Toss". With these changes we are always in need of extra support and Bristol Bay Native Association has allowed us to pull from their own resources to make this program what it is, a whirling vortex of amazing staff, parents, and students. They have paid for extra support staff so students can go to the bathroom without bringing the entire classroom to a bathroom break. They have given us their maintenance men, janitors and IT guys at the first sign of a BBNA Head Start emergency, and we have many. They have paid off a BBNA Head Start mortgage so we could continue to serve kids without losing staff; and have bought mini-trucks so that our village staff can be safe and warm in the winter.

Again this is still only a small part of what Bristol Bay Native Association does for the BBNA Head Start program. They are support, a backbone, a lifeline when needed. I have heard so many times "We do it for the kids", the truth is they do it for all of us, the teachers, the teachers' aides, the classroom and family support liaisons, the cooks, the bus drivers, the program assistants, the managers and most importantly the kids. I work for BBNA Head Start but I am a part of something so much more. I consider Bristol Bay Native Association to continually go over and beyond a grantee's duties and responsibilities and it was for this reason BBNA Head Start has not had to cut children or quality during the sequestration and why I believe that Bristol Bay Native Association deserves the Corporate Award. So I choose to end this nomination with a word from Albert Einstein "Once we accept our limits, we go beyond them" a true tale of Bristol Bay Native Association and BBNA Head Start.



## Award winners



Cook of the Year

RaeAnne Lacrosse



Family Advocate of the Year

Alicia Fields



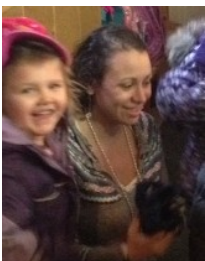
Mother of the Year

Leilani Horton



School District Collaboration

Mat-Su Borough School District



Teacher of the Year

Monika Johnson



## Cook of the Year

### RaeAnne Lacrosse

RaeAnne LaCrosse graduated from AVTEC with a certificate in Culinary Arts last year and joined us for this program year. In addition to her education and experience she brought creativity, energy, enthusiasm, and impressive knowledge of nutrition. The children really enjoy the food she prepares and love to be the one that gets to go to the kitchen for more food. RaeAnne always has a warm smile and greets them by name.

RaeAnne is a valuable member of our team. In addition to providing nutritious home cooked meals she is always helping out. She helps in the classroom when needed, participates in family fun nights, and even played the Easter Bunny for our celebration. If she notices something that needs to be done, she just does it to help anyone in need.

RaeAnne has gotten to know the parents. Her friendly and gracious demeanor and her mad cooking skills have won their hearts. Parents are always asking her for recipes and also have recommended her for cooking jobs during the summer. She works with staff and parents on special dietary or mealtime issues. She incorporates required modifications into the daily planning in a way that does not single out one child and allows to them eat with the group either the same foods or similar looking food. She also serves a variety of foods which consider cultural and ethnic preferences and also broaden each child's food experience

RaeAnne does more than ensure federal and local requirements are met and children are fed. She can be counted on to share her knowledge and cooking expertise to assist children and staff with nutritional cooking activities and healthy life style choices. We appreciate her flexibility, dependability and her dedication. She is very deserving of this award.



## Family Advocate of the Year

### Alicia Fields

I am nominating Alicia Fields for the Advocate of the Year award. The reasons for this nomination are many and varied. Alicia has worked for CCS Early Learning in the position of Family Advocate since 09/20/04. As the Family Partnership Coordinator I have supervised her for the last 4 years. From our first meeting Alicia has proven herself to be a most caring and resourceful person. My first introduction to her was actually before our school year even began. The center Coordinator and I were completing enrollments and enrolled a homeless family. Being brand new in my position and relatively new to the community I was not aware of all of the resources available to this family. The Center Coordinator called Alicia and before the day was over the family had the clothes and food they needed and a place to stay that night... all before Alicia was even back to work! The quality of her work has not waivered since that day.

It goes without saying that to be a great Family Advocate knowing the community resources is of prime importance. The way that Alicia goes above and beyond in this area is that she is always working at forming relationships with not only the people who might be in new agencies in the community buy also with the people who are new in their jobs in the agencies that our families use in the community. She is excellent at networking. When anything is needed by anyone in our center, whether it is a resource for a family or a donation for a volunteer luncheon everyone knows that Alicia is the “go to” person. If Alicia doesn’t know about it or can’t obtain it, it doesn’t exist!

Alicia’s work with the families always comes from a strength based approach. One of the ways that I know the affect she has on families is that over the last few years a number of people have come back to visit, not asking for additional resources, but to let Alicia know that they are finishing up their degree that she helped them to start or they have been promoted in the job that she helped them attain or to brag about how well their children are doing thanks to Alicia helping them increase their parenting skills.

Another aspect of Alicia’s work that is outstanding is her eagerness to work with other staff. She is extremely generous in sharing her knowledge and skills which makes her an invaluable team player. To that end she is an active member on the agency’s Wellness Committee and helps plan training sessions and activities and programs that will benefit the health and wellbeing of our staff.

Additionally Alicia is always looking to increase her knowledge and skills. She has often taken training during the evenings, on weekends and/or during summer that she has located on her own. Often it is a supervisor is who asking their staff if they are interested in a training but not with Alicia! She seeks out trainings that would be beneficial to her and them makes the time to attend them.

Another way that Alicia goes above and beyond the call of duty is her flexibility. Though she has a busy, active life outside of work she is always willing to work evenings or weekends for a Family Fun Event, or at a community event where our agency is being represented.

To sum up, Alicia is more than deserving of this award. I guess the main reason I feel this way is because I know that if you asked Alicia if she was deserving of recognition for her work her response would most likely be “I’m just doing my job.” Head Start families throughout the country would be very fortunate if they had Alicia Fields as their Family Advocate because she does so much more than “just a job.”





## Mother of the Year

### Leilani Horton

I would like to nominate Leilani Horton for the Head Start Mother of the Year award. Leilani has showed great courage as she has advocated for her children during the past year. Leilani stood up for her children as she learned about criminal activity perpetrated by her husband. She was instrumental in protecting her own children from their father's harmful behavior and is now single parenting 4 children under the age of 5.

Two of Leilani's children are in the Head Start program at CCS Early Learning. They both have an IEP and receive special services through the school district. Leilani has gained knowledge about how to advocate for her children and has surrounded herself with a strong support network. Leilani partnered with the local disability support agency, Links, as well as her head start staff to ensure quality support for her boys in their school environments.

Leilani has exhibited great patience as she interacts with her busy toddler daughter. She patiently redirects her to activities that are suitable for her development. Leilani encourages her daughter to use words to ask for things she needs. Leilani meets with an Early Head Start home visitor to increase her knowledge of her daughter's development and to work on goals for her education and development.

The youngest of her children was born after his father was incarcerated. Leilani has maintained a positive attitude as she has spent the last five months nursing a baby. She has worked with Early Head Start staff to support her in early development. She is patient and positive as she cares for each of her young children.

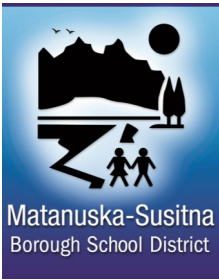
Through the school year Leilani has sought information to help her children cope with having a father in prison. She has read books and asked for resources to support them as they are making the transition to not seeing dad regularly. Leilani has maintained contact between the children and their father through letters, phone calls, and supervised jail visits to help them during this transitional time.

Leilani has sought out professionals to assess the needs of each of her children. She has pursued counseling when necessary to help her children overcome their daily struggles. She remains patient and open and thanks them for talking to her and sharing what they are going through.

Leilani suffers from a disability that does not allow her to work outside the home. Leilani has attended budgeting classes and worked to become as financially stable as possible. She has learned creative ways to stretch her family budget so she is able to provide for her children.

Leilani has a desire to provide healthy meals for her family and has sought information about child nutrition. She is learning about correct portion sizes for each of her children and strives to offer them a healthy variety of foods. She has set family nutrition as one of her priorities and has worked toward the goal of having a healthy family.

Leilani is a strong and courageous mother. Her children are always at the front of her mind and she does not make a decision without first considering how her children will be impacted. She is involved in community programs that offer parenting classes and is always looking for ways to increase her knowledge and skills. Leilani is humble and selfless. She is an amazing mother and I would like to recognize her for all her hard work and vigilance.



## School District Collaboration

### Mat-Su Borough School District

CCS EARLY LEARNING would like to nominate the Mat-Su Borough School District (MSBSD) for the School District Collaboration award. For over ten years CCS has had a strong relationship with the Student Support Services and Federal Programs departments at MSBSD.

Student Support Services (SSS) have consistently held Child Find sessions in each of our CCS centers within the Borough at the beginning of each school year and again prior to the 45 day developmental screening deadline required by Head Start. This service allows developmental screenings to be done once for each child and makes it possible for children with possible developmental delays to be observed and action taken much earlier in the school year. SSS is more than willing to include CCS staff in their teacher and administrator training and to share information about upcoming UAA classes that CCS staff have attended. Our relationship has always been extremely positive and flexible. Many times a concern with a certified special needs child can be solved within minutes, or a parent can call for clarification, and a solution is discussed with possibilities set up to try. This positive relationship has its roots in the realization that strong communication and clearly defined roles and responsibilities are necessary. MSBSD administrative staff have been great partners in establishing both effective channels of communication and Memorandums of Agreement that provide a foundation for our collaborative work.

This year MSBSD staff including SSS, Federal Programs, and the State Pre-K program staff worked together with CCS to host a "Welcome to Kindergarten" event. The goal was to allow for smooth transition of children and families from Head Start and from school district preschool programs into kindergarten. MSBSD and CCS staff worked for months on the agenda, materials and activities for the evening. Head Start and district preschool families attended and met representatives from the various school district departments ie: transportation, nutrition, Indian Ed, bilingual, special needs, health services, federal programs, registration, and individual elementary schools. They were able to personally ask questions and receive information one to one. They also experienced a traditional school lunch and learned how to open the various containers. To add to the evening the school district provided a school bus for children to sit on and get the true feeling of what kindergarten will be like.

CCS also has a strong relationship with Widening the Net (WTN), which is the MSBSD preschool program. Our programs have shared a common goal in doing all that we can to make sure that additional children receive preschool services in our community. With so many children not receiving any services the last thing either program wanted to do was duplicate services or "compete" over enrolling children. The district established a process that allowed CCS to accept the applications for all families interested in enrolling in either program. Family eligibility is first screened for Head Start, then if the child qualifies we place him/her on the waitlist and later refer him to WTN if space is not available at HS. This arrangement allows CCS to serve the lowest income families and WTN serves additional families who may not qualify or who cannot be served due to Head Start eligibility criteria or long waiting lists. The partnership is also broadened by sharing training opportunities. Currently we are planning for a fall inservice speaker on RTI with costs shared by CCS and SSS.

Many of the items discussed in the nomination are items that are required within the Special Education/Head Start guidelines, but it is always so much more pleasant when the people you work with go above and beyond the job and do it with a positive and cheerful demeanor. We are honored to work together with the Mat-Su Borough School District to serve children and families in this community and are equally pleased to submit this nomination to recognize their outstanding efforts.



## Teacher of the Year

### Monika Johnson

I am delighted to nominate Monika Johnson for Teacher of the Year. As the Center Coordinator at Meadow Lakes, I have had the pleasure of training alongside and working with Monika for the past three years. From the moment I met her, it was evident to me that she is a caring, creative, and flexible individual. She shows a high level of commitment, quality and heart in everything she does. In addition to teaching, she is also raising a family and working on her education. She graduated in December 2012 with her Associate degree and will complete her Bachelor degree in the next year.

Monika's soft spoken, yet firm management techniques create a safe learning environment and warm atmosphere. Her caring attitude, warmth, openness, and expertise in the field of early childhood development helps develop strong relationships with children, families and other staff. She listens attentively to ideas and always has a positive response.

Monika consistently brings her creativity to each aspect of our center openly sharing ideas with staff and families. She approaches lesson with an enthusiastic curiosity as though it is the first time she has experienced the subject matter. This captures the attention of the children allowing for the maximum learning experience. A recent example is when she showed the children what happens when you mix baking soda and vinegar. The children were captivated as they watched the mixture bubble and fizz excitedly giggling their way to small group.

Monika's flexibility, communication, and professionalism make her an effective team member whether she is moving to a new classroom, training a new classroom aide, implementing a new practice, or participating in an Education Advisory meeting. She eagerly embraces change, welcomes challenge and views it as an opportunity for her own growth and development. She conveys these skills to families helping them identify and develop strengths to advance their own learning interests through education, training and other experiences that support their parenting, well-being, and goals.

Thank you for considering Monika for Teacher of the year. She is truly worthy and would be honored to be selected. She is an essential asset to me, my staff, our families and the entire CCS Early Learning agency. Once again it is my pleasure to nominate Monika Johnson for AHSA's Teacher of the Year!





# Early Head Start Head Start

Chugiak, Palmer, Wasilla,  
Meadow Lakes

## Building Healthy Brains and Bodies

**2014 CCS Early Learning Award Winners**

**Head Start Mother of the Year: Leilani Horton**

**Cook of the Year: RaeAnn Lacrosse**

**Family Advocate of the Year: Alicia Fields**

**Teacher of the Year: Monika Johnson**

**School District Collaboration: Mat-Su Borough School District**





## Award winners



Leadership

Karin McCullough

Central Council Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska Head Start would like to nominate **Karin McCullough as Alaska Head Start Leadership / Content Area Specialist of the Year.**

Karin has worked in the area of Early Childhood Education for over 35 years; beginning at the Children's Center in Petersburg, and the past 25.76 years serving Children, Families and Teachers with Tlingit & Haida Head Start! Karin has performed every role in the service of Families with young children in Southeast Alaska. From Lead Teacher Petersburg Head Start for 17 years (1987 – 2004) to Teacher Mentor, Staff Development Specialist, and Site Supervisor for over 9 centers in 9 communities. Karin's title this 2012 – 2013 year was devised to match her Leadership and Teacher Mentor skills 'Regional Coordinator – Southern.' As an immensely creative thinker and positive problem solver, with over a quarter century of dedication in Head Start beginning August 11, 1987, you can see why in nominating Karin for recognition, the challenge is to choose just one category!

## Leadership—Continued

### Karin McCullough

It is rare to find a person more interested in diverse people, and more gifted at speaking with children and adults of all ages, backgrounds and cultures. Karin's values in work are to be with young children where they are now, to reach out to parents and families with gentleness and humor, to be intradependent in her own and neighboring communities, to support and mentor Teachers both current and past, local & state-wide, and steer the current Management Team in the right direction. Karin knows and embodies collaborative relationships with local and regional resources, and understands well-trained teachers are a key component of high quality child development programs. As the Staff Development Specialist, Karin successfully increased the number of teachers with AA and BA degrees in Early Childhood Education. As a strong Advocate and inspirational Site Supervisor, Teachers have glowing accolades of her work. "I met Karin in 1995 as a Classroom Aide and was mesmerized hearing her words of wisdom, and being close to her quiet strength. I looked up to her and wanted to be like my idol. I am now a Component Coordinator in Head Start." Lead Teachers describe Karin as a "shero" (a she hero) who in 1999 was voted 'Advocate of the Year' by AAEEYC.

A roadblock is a challenge to Karin; a teaching tool for Teachers to tackle together to get around. Always helpful, Teachers know she is always there to call. A few years ago Karin devised a humorous way to de-stress and communicate with Teachers preparing for Monitoring Reviews. Speaking as 'Nervous Nellie' a flighty filly she documented the missing bits and pieces for Teachers to address in preparation. We all need and appreciate those that can bring us down from a crisis reminding us what is foundationally important.

Hallmarks of Karin's work is her easy going, fun-loving positivism that quietly, yet doggedly holds very high educational and ethical standards in the service of children and families. The AEYC Code of Ethics is never cold or far from her hand! Living by the percept of 'work hard and have fun, while keeping the fun in the work we do' Teachers are excited to be around and work together with Karin. The depth of Karin's relationships with Teachers is second to none. "Karin has been with me and my family through it all and we have grown together as Teachers, wives and mothers raising families in our communities" states a recently retired Head Start Teacher with 29 years of service.

Karin is both phenomenal and a phenomenon. Karin brings every conversation full circle with an open hand, an open heart and an open mind. As an adult learner, Karin is studying Tlingit phrases and sentences over the internet with a Lead Teacher. With such insight, grace and integrity, our Head Start community is headed in a positive direction, mentored by Karin.



## Award winners



Beating the Odds  
Jamye Gunderson



Father of the Year  
Dennis Biorklund



## Beating the Odds

### Jamye Gunderson

We would like to nominate parent Jamye Gunderson for the AHSA Beating the Odds Award. Jamye is the mother to three children Kyndall, Taylor and Baylee. Jamye's journey with Head Start began in the Home base option in 2010. Currently, she has Taylor and Baylee enrolled in the Center base option. When Jamye was 20 years old, before having any children, she was in an automobile accident. From this, she suffered traumatic brain injury, and she became a double leg amputee. With many challenges that Jamye faced, she persevered through it all. She became a wife and mother during these challenges. Jamye's dedication to her children has shown during her time at Head Start. She is committed to getting her girls here daily through public transportation. She eats meals with her girls at Head Start and participates in the classroom on a daily basis. Jamye shows strength and courage, that no matter how much life could bring her down, she continues with her efforts to be a role model and positive influence to her children. One year ago, Jamye had a surgery that stood in the way of her using prosthetic legs. She has been in a wheelchair since then. Currently, Jamye is attending therapy to gain use of new prosthetic legs. When she first started this therapy, falling down and a sore body were very discouraging to her. We would encourage her to continue with laughter and inspirational words such as "No Pain, No Gain Jamye!" She communicates daily on her progress. Her enthusiasm is uplifting to all of us. She lets us know when she is discouraged, and just needs a listening ear to remind her she can push through this. Jamye is an inspiration to so many people. All of us here at Head Start and especially Jamye, are looking forward to her walking through the doors with her girls once again.

Please consider this nomination for Jamye. She has been through tough times and is dedicated to making it through and beating the odds!





## Father of the Year

### Dennis Bjorklund

I am very happy to be nominating Dennis Bjorklund for Head Start/ Early Head Start Father of the Year. It has been a special privilege to serve the Bjorklund family, who have been making good use of Early Head Start/ Head Start home visiting services for the past 5 years. I became their home visitor shortly after coming to FNA, and just as Dennis and Gayle were finalizing the adoption of their four Native Alaskan children who are siblings, from Barrow. Dennis and Gayle are originally from Wisconsin, and brought their two biological children to Alaska in the 1990's. They began doing foster care through OCS as their own children grew up and began leaving home. When they began fostering the Kudralook children, they decided to adopt them, which made the kids very happy. This year, the family has finalized the adoption of three-year-old child from Dillingham, whom they have cared for since he was four months old. If you met this amazing family, you would have a hard time believing that they were a blended family, except that the parents are not Native!

The Kudralook/Bjorklund children all have varying levels of special needs, and require doctor and therapy visits several times a week, which requires the Bjorklunds to drive into Fairbanks from Salcha about 3 days per week. Because of these needs, Dennis and Gayle have decided to home-school their children, which also requires a lot of dedication and hard work on their part. Dennis and Gayle have made sure that the children have got braces and glasses, as needed, and are always on time with their immunizations and well-child checkups. The Bjorklund children get a lot of socialization through church, home-school groups, friends, and sports such as cross country skiing. This summer, the older children are taking part in Calypso Farms' gardening camp, for which Dennis will drive them to town each day.

When Dennis lost his job three years ago, due to company downsizing, he and his wife decided to have him stay at home to care for the children, while Gayle continues to work part time for Salcha Fire and Rescue, and at Advance Printing. Since the family lives a subsistence lifestyle in Salcha, Dennis spends a lot of time seeing to the family's needs while including the children. For example, when they need to get firewood, Dennis makes a family outing of it, taking along sleds and skis, and packs a lunch such as hot dogs and soup, which they can cook over a campfire while they are out for the day.

Because the children's extended family lives in Barrow, Dennis and Gayle take them there once a year to visit. This is very much appreciated by their grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, who plan lots of family get-togethers while they are there. Their Grandfather always makes beautiful baleen carvings for them to take home, and their grandmother has made them each a beautiful parka this year. Preserving this family connection has been a priority for Dennis and Gayle, who included the children's family name in their names when they were adopted. The children are proud to be Bjorklunds, but they are equally proud to be Kudralooks. The school district in Barrow gave Dennis and Gayle a language program to help them all learn Yupik, which Dennis has made a part of the children's home-school curriculum.

I am proud to be nominating Dennis Bjorklund Father of the Year!



## Award winners



Assistant Teacher of the Year

Michelle Simon



Home Visitor

Rebecca Callahan



Humanitarian Award

Dr. Christine Roalofs



## Assistant Teacher of the Year

Michelle Simon

We would like to nominate Michelle Simon for Assistant Teacher of the Year.

Michelle has been working for our program as a Teacher Aide in White Mountain for the past 2 years.

She was awarded her CDA in September 2012!

She works on attendance plans and follows up with families in a timely matter.

She works well with families to ensure that students are getting the most out of our program.

When the lead teacher calls in sick Michelle is able to step up and be the lead teacher during those absences.

Michelle writes weekly newsletters for her parents every week. Through these newsletters she ensures that there are pictures and a story of what the children did/learned through the past week. When reading her newsletters you want to be in her classroom. The children look happy and excited to be there.

Michelle has also had to deal with building issues this past school year due to pipes freezing. She has taken it in stride. She works with community partners to move her classroom for the day or even to provide a hour of service when the classroom is unavailable.

Due to her being located in a remote community it is important for her to maintain an open line of communication with the main office. During our review this year the day the review team was scheduled to observe in the classroom there was no electricity. She called and emailed us right away so that we could meet with the team leader and determine what are next steps were. By Michelle calling and communicating with us we were able to work with the team leader and ensure that the site visit went smoothly when the review team was out there.



## Home Visitor

### Rebecca Callahan

We would like to nominate Rebecca Callahan Home Visitor of the Year.

Rebecca has brought her experience from her previous job at child care to help her succeed in her current job. She has been with our program for 2 years now and is a former Head Start parent.

Rebecca has taken on caseloads where they are difficult to manage but she is persistent and sticks with the families to help them succeed. When she has questions she contacts the appropriate person to ensure that everything is in order. Becca helps to organize and keep the office areas clean – regardless of who has made the mess J.

Becca ensures that home visits are done with her families weekly. She makes a concerted effort to meeting every family each week and will work with each individual family to ensure a visit despite conflicts, obstacles, and family obligations. She will make up visits whenever she can. She works hard on developing a rapport with the family, so commitment is stronger by the family and more enjoyable for both herself and them. She also gathers information to present to staff with issues arise within her cases.

Rebecca is always looking for ways to improve the program and the services we provide. Her goal this year was to improve attendance during the socials. She worked with her co workers to come up with different ideas and creating a list of community partners that would help to make the socials informative and more enticing for parents to want to come. Through this process we started to see attendance improve at socials and more families participating each month.

Rebecca is able to work in the evenings and weekends if needed. Becca is able to adjust her day when clients need to cancel or reschedule their home visits. She understands what is expected of her with getting home visits and socializations completed.

Not only is Becca a hard worker but she is a mother to 5 children (2 of them she just adopted) and she is continuing to take classes to obtain her ECE degree. She was awarded her CDA in September 2012.



## Humanitarian

### Dr. Christine Roalofs

We would like to nominate Dr. Christine A Roalofs, DDS with Just Kids – Pediatric Dental Center for the Humanitarian Award.

Dr. Christine Roalofs and her team from Just Kids Pediatric Dental Center travel throughout the Bering Strait Region – traveling to Brevig Mission, St. Michael, Shaktoolik and Nome this current school year. She has been providing services to our region for over 6 years. Dr. Roalofs and her dental team form relationships with our community members and parents – making children comfortable and relaxed with the dentists. She also works long days and late hours when traveling to our sites.

She is a strong advocate for our children and families. She understands the importance of communication and the dental needs in communities she serves. She works to keep our program informed of travel plans and coordinates services and appointments for our children’s dental needs.

In St Michael one of our parents stated: “Dr. Roalofs and her staff are a much needed service for children ages 6 and younger. If we did not have this service many of our children would not get dental treatment that is needed. Children who do see the NSHC dentist only do an exam on children head start and younger. Those who need extensive work usually have to get sent out to Anchorage or wait for Dr Roalofs and her team. I think that if it wasn't for the team many of our children would not get the services needed to have healthy teeth and gums.”

Another parent in Brevig Mission said that Dr. Roalofs team helps with early prevention so they have healthy adult teeth. She is friendly and welcomes the parents and students. She also shows the children what she is going to do on their teeth before working on them. She also gives little prizes to the children when they are finished.

In Nome the Health/Nutrition Specialist stated: During this past school year Dr. Roalofs and her staff came to the Nome Head Start and performed free dental screenings on 40 of our Head Start children. Not only did she fit our program into her busy schedule while working in Nome – She managed to see all of our children in about an hour and a half. It was very pleasant to work with her and her dental team arranging her visit to our program. Dr. Roalofs and her dental team at Just Kids really know how to work well with children. The 4 year olds in our program had a positive experience and it was an educational opportunity for both the children and teaching staff.



# Congratulations

Emily McLaughlin

The AHSA Early Head Start Teacher of the Year.

Congratulations

to all the other Alaska Head Start winners!





## Award winner



## Early Head Start Teacher Emily McLaughlin

Choosing a Kids' Corps nominee for Early Head Start Teacher of the Year was a difficult task. All the EHS staff are truly deserving of acknowledgment because of their hard work and dedication to serving children and families. To help us make this difficult decision, we approached our Policy Council representative, who has been enrolled in our program for 3 years, and she named the same person we were considering. We are excited to share our story as we nominate Emily McLaughlin. Emily is everything you would expect from a Teacher of the Year nominee and more!

Kids' Corps has a small Early Head Start program that has been serving families for 3 years now. During this past program year, the services provided by the Early Head Start program have been greatly enhanced due to a commitment to teamwork from all the EHS program staff. Our EHS program is small and close knit and most of the staff have worked for the agency for multiple years. All of our Early Head Start staff transferred from the Head Start program, except for Emily. Emily applied for a position with KCI after deciding that early childhood was a field she wanted to explore. When she came to us, she had a degree in Foreign Language and no early childhood experience, let alone experience working with the challenging infant/toddler age group. She came to us wanting to gain experience and build her educational resume and ultimately return to school to fulfill the requirements necessary to become a kindergarten teacher in the small town she grew up in. Despite the lack of experiences, it quickly became clear that Emily had the natural skills and abilities of a great I/T care provider.

During this past year, Emily has exceeded KCI expectations and had made a lot of professional growth. Emily has met with a UAA advisor, tested for her Infant/Toddler CDA, sought out and attended community trainings, and participated in webinars and teleconferences whenever possible. She also attended the KCI CDA Saturday that was hosted at the Early head Start Center. Additionally, she applied for the Alaska Seed Registry and ROOTS Award. Emily also completed the Teaching Strategies Gold Inter Rater Reliability Certification and assisted other staff to successfully complete the certification as well.

## Early Head Start Teacher—Continued

### Emily McLaughlin

Emily really stepped up this year, helping advocate for EHS within the agency. She joined the Health and Nutrition Advisory Committee and participated actively when she learned from working with children in the EHS center how important menu planning and a healthy diet for children are. She seeks parent input about foods served in the program and has been researching CACFP guidelines to ensure that all requirements are met while keeping in mind her individual classroom needs. Emily has also been a great role model for staff. She brings a water bottle to have with her in class, always brings a healthy nutritious lunch and she even flosses when she is done! Emily rides her bike to work when the weather is permitting and has shared her personal health resources, lending staff her health books and sharing tips from the website she utilizes to live healthy. She invites her coworkers to watch her play hockey or go workout with her to help bring the team closer.

Emily also joined the Early Head Start Advisory Committee this year and helped to enhance the agencies school readiness goals for infants and toddlers. You could really see her passion for education during these advisory committee meetings through the expression of her thoughts and ideas. She was always relating back to her classroom experiences to help the committee make informed decisions. Emily easily makes connections to classroom practice while attending meetings and trainings and then takes suggestions or ideas to make improvements.

Emily is a great team player. When a staff member was not able to be a team leader for agency's annual self-assessment, she was selected as a replacement and welcomed the chance to learn more about the agency. Rarely do you see an assistant teacher step up and take on such an important responsibility. She was nervous at first because she had never had the chance to get so involved in the inner workings of the agency and hadn't even visited all the agency centers yet, but she embraced the opportunity to learn about the program and lead a content area self-assessment review.

In addition to being an amazing team player, Emily has really grown in all the ways that count for an infant/toddler care provider. During her time with Early Head Start, she has really looked for guidance and mentoring from the EHS staff around her. She is always seeking input and opinions on ways to improve the quality of her work with children and families. When offered advice or suggestions, you can readily see her implementing new strategies and resources into practice. Emily makes the most out of her regularly scheduled reflective supervision meetings and video mentoring sessions to advance her knowledge and skills.

Emily also embraces the idea that you can't be successful working with children unless you also work with their families. She is one of the closers for the EHS center and has shown tremendous growth in her communication with families since joining the EHS team. She takes the time to listen to families, understand their needs and assist them in any way possible. Emily goes out of her way to ensure that she is open and available to all families in the program and has been successful at forming meaningful relationships with parents and children enrolled in the program.

Emily is a valued member of the Kids' Corps Early Head Start team. She is positive, genuine, flexible, conscientious, caring and responsive care provider. For all these reasons, and more, we ask that you consider Emily McLaughlin for the Early Head Start Teacher of the Year award.



# RURAL ALASKA COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAM, INC.

## Award winners



Community Advocate  
Ashley Westbrook



Maintenance  
Daniel Nashoanak



Policy Council  
Savoonga HS Policy Council



## Community Advocate

### Ashley Westbrooke

Ashley is being nominated for the community service award based on her service to the children and families of Savoonga. This program year we have been elated to have Ashley based full time in the Savoonga clinic. She is able to perform well child exams for Head Start children and align her exams with our federal requirements.

This year Ashley came to the classroom and performed lead blood tests for our enrollees, a screening that is very challenging to have done in our most rural communities. After collecting the samples and placing them in the shipping container for the state lab, we learned that the local Post Office had been shut down due to a break in. Knowing that we would lose the samples and children would have to be poked again if the situation was not resolved Ashley worked quickly with our central office to remedy the problem. Within hours we had produced a shipping label off the internet, scanned her the label and Ashley hand carried the samples to the plane who brought them to the mainland for shipping into Anchorage. This is just one example of how isolated Savoonga is and how creative solutions and flexibility are essential in a health care provider.

The Savoonga clinic is an invaluable community asset to our Head Start program. Our statistics for health in this community are very high this year. We have collaborated with dental health as well as the clinic hosed a dentist for three whole weeks this spring. An outbreak of RSV has been going around and the clinic has supported our staff and parents with prevention education to keep everyone as healthy as possible.

We credit Savoonga clinic and their PA, Ashley Westbrooke with this rating of success. Thank you for all you do to make our community a healthier place.



## Maintenance

### Daniel Nashoanak

I am nominating Daniel Nashonak as Maintenance Staff of the year. Danny has taken on the remarkable challenge of moving from a small old head Start building in Stebbins, Alaska to a newly remodeled Head Start building with a running water system, a flush/haul toilet system and a heating system that involves maintaining 7 Toyo stoves, including filling the oil tanks to keep the building warm and comfortable at all times. Danny works diligently to keep the center clean and everything running smoothly.

Danny is always available with his huge smile to pick up visitors, packages or help in any situation he is needed in. He has cooked the breakfast meal when the center cook was ill and the TD is unable to find a substitute, he was the point of contact and answered the phone when the TD was out for surgery and willingly takes on any task that he is asked to do.

In addition to his Maintenance duties Danny is a single father of a Head Start child and Wyatt has enjoyed the closeness of having his father at school during the day. Wyatt stays with his grandparents when there is no school while Danny is working which makes it a wonderful "family affair." Each school day Danny and Wyatt get up together and both come to "work".

Over the summer of 2012-2013 Danny worked diligently on the new HS center to have it ready to open in the fall. Danny's hard work as well as that of others paid off with immaculately clean, warm inviting Head Start that everyone is proud of.





## Policy Council

### Savoonga HS Policy Council

Our P.C. Committee this year:

The parents we have this year are awesome, they started fund raising for their children before school started. (2 months before)

They attend monthly meetings. They volunteer in the class. They get everything done that is required to be done.

P.C. officers did most of the hard work all school year. Heather Penayah, Tawny Alowa, Kara Miklahook, and Renita Toolie.



**RurAL CAP Head Start congratulates all of the Alaska Head Start Association Award winners! Thank you for supporting Alaska's young children and their families.**



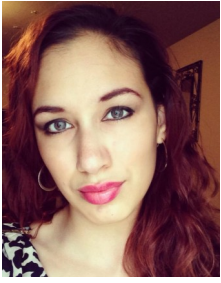
For more information on RurAL CAP's Head Start and Early Head Start programs, please visit [www.ruralcap.com](http://www.ruralcap.com) or call 907.279.2511.

**Award winner**



Administrative Support Staff

**Saphyre Burns-Shafer**



## Administrative Support Staff of the Year

### Saphyre Burns-Schafer

In the summer of 2012 a “supernova” or bright shining light entered the Head Start/ Early Head Start Department at Tanana Chiefs Conference. Saphyre Burns-Schafer, the newest and youngest member of our Central Office team, brings her energy, enthusiasm, and youthful exuberance to every interaction and job she performs. She picked up the details of our program as if she had been part of it forever, using incredible public-relations skills to communicate with the vast number and variety of people and agencies that we work with. She cares for her co-workers and looks out for the best interests. From arranging and coordinating meetings for Policy Council volunteers to arranging pre-service for 40 plus staff, and additional trainings during the year, Saphyre does it all with aplomb and grace! She is willing to learn and practice new skills and helps out every member of our team well, quickly and with professionalism. Her customer service skills are exemplary. She has been willing to go above and beyond in her duties, travelling on weekends and attending evening meetings in support of the program. Her common sense serves us well. Saphyre brings smiles to our faces and infuses humor into the workplace with her laminated signs e.g. “Take a Number, please” on the Director’s door and “Please Clean Up After Yourself... the maid is on (permanent) vacation” in the kitchen area. Her youthful enthusiasm and exuberant personality is an asset to us in Head Start. Her artistry and decorating skills earned us an honorable mention for the Halloween decorating contest and First Place for the Christmas decorating contest. She completes tasks with amazing speed and competence. None of us doubt she has the potential to someday be a director with her unique abilities and skill set. Added to all of these wonderful qualities, we have yet to hear her complain!

From her co-workers:

“Saphyre’s favorite quote is ‘you can only do what you can do.’ She does it all and in a calm, competent manner.”

“Her position is vitally important. What an amazing job she does; Saphyre has amazing insight for such a young age. She is awesome...”

“Because Saphyre handles so many different tasks ‘all at once’ and completes them, I once gave her an octopus bookmark. She has a never-ending happy smile while doing her work, giving us all a cheery smile every time we pass her desk.”



**thrivalASKA**

Healthy families. Thriving children.

*Award winner*



Head Start Director of the Year

**AnneMarie Mattacchione**



## Head Start Director of the Year

### Ann Marie Mattacchione

AnneMarie Mattacchione is an amazing, fabulous, remarkable, dedicated, and devoted Head Start Director. I've had the pleasure of working with her for 14 years! She has been a "gift" to our EHS/HS program, helping it grow, nurturing staff and families through the process, and consistently striving for a model program that exhibits best practices.

She was born to lead and has a natural gift in helping others reach their potential and succeed. I have never worked with anyone quite like her. She's involved in so many community organizations - AHSA, FAEYC, UAF, and she truly cares about children, their families, and all those who care for them.

She's an inspiring teacher and through her coaching has led our program through many successful reviews. She's currently working on CLASS observations and helping teachers embrace and excel at what is expected of them.

One of the most remarkable things she's done for our organization was assisting us through a director transition. She gave us notice over a year ago and has continued in her position until we could find a director who met the qualifications. I simply have never witnessed that level of commitment before. During the past year the program continued to thrive, and provide the excellent quality of services our families deserve. There were literally no bumps in the road. I have thanked her so many times for her selfless devotion to the program, our families, and the organization – there are simply no words left.

She deserves this award because she is so skilled, competent, courageous, decisive, dependable, ethical, focused, innovative, resourceful and passionate about her work. Head Start has become a way of life for her, one that she heartily endorses and advocates for at every opportunity.

AnneMarie is very goal oriented and focused on self reflection and learning, which has caused her to pursue her dream of full time teaching at UAF. She will be leaving her position here as the Director, and plans to continue her career path in teaching early care and education students. What I sincerely appreciate is that she's going to continue working with Thrivalaska as a consultant – to help us maintain our excellent standards, train with the new director, and work with our teachers on CLASS.

It's been an honor working with her and I will miss her daily presence. I wish her all the best life has to offer and can only hope you will honor her with this award.



# AHSA 2013 Award Winners



<b>Parent Awards</b>	
Beating the Odds Award	Jamye Gunderson (FNA)
Head Start Father of the Year	Dennis Bjorklund (FNA)
Head Start Mother of the Year	Leilani Horton (CCS)
Program Policy Council	Savoonga Head Start Policy Council (RCAP)
<b>Staff Awards</b>	
Administrative Support Staff of the Year	Saphyre Burns-Shafer (TCC)
Assistant or Deputy Director of the Year	Jennifer Gardiner (BBNA)
Assistant Teacher of the Year	Michelle Simon (KAW)
Bus Driver of the Year	John Nick (BBNA)
Content Area Specialist of the Year	Julia Sargent (APIA)
Cook of the Year	RaeAnn Lacrosse (CCS)
EHS Teacher of the Year	Emily McLaughlin (KCI)
Family Advocate of the Year	Alicia Fields (CCS)
Head Start Director of the Year	AnneMarie Mattacchione (Thrialaska)
Home Visitor	Rebecca Callahan (KAW)
Maintenance Staff of the Year	Daniel Nashoanak(RCAP)
Teacher of the Year	Monika Johnson (CCS)
<b>Community Awards</b>	
Community Advocate	Ashley Westbrooke (RCAP)
Corporate Award	Bristol Bay Native Association (BBNA)
Humanitarian Award	Dr. Christine Roalofs (KAW)
School District Collaboration	Mat-Su Borough SD (CCS)
<b>Other Awards</b>	
Cultural Awareness	Bonnie Mierzejek (APIA)
Leadership	Karin McCullough (CCTHITA)