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**Support Brings Success**



**Alaska Head Start  
Association**

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

Each one of the 2015 Awards of Excellence nominees reflected the positive and important difference that Head Start families, staff, school districts and community supporters are making every day across Alaska.

**We give a proud CONGRATULATIONS and THANK YOU to the following nominees.**

Adriana Lacle  
Amethyst Tuisamatatele  
Briana Rose  
Cindy Boyer  
Desiree Joe  
Dotty Harris  
Flora Matthias  
Ginger Ameigh  
Jason Matos Sr.  
Jessica Fox  
Kathrine "Ms. Kitty" Merculief  
Lisa Bell  
Makia Daniels  
Marjorie Bolton  
Matrona Kozevenikoff  
Monica Eldemar  
Ms. Jan Vanderpool  
Nellie Edmund

Paige Chase  
Rachel Schafer  
Rita Alexie  
Ryana Johnson  
Shannon Owens  
Tamara De Los Santos  
Tasha Post  
Therese Tamara  
Amee McHatten  
Bob Poechmann  
Catherine Dunham  
Courtney Austin  
Deyone Schultz  
Fawn Charles  
Gertrude Heckman  
Janene Lovelace  
Jeremy Agee

JoEllen Stuart  
Kayse Hinrichsen  
Luana Welker  
Marcy McGraw  
Marvella Webster  
Michaelae Yard  
Mrs. Lo  
Ms. Phyllis Wimberley  
Norton Sound Economic  
Development Corp  
Rachel Boudreau  
Rebecca Yunker  
Robin Anderson  
Selina Ellis  
Shelly Blocker  
Tamara Toy  
Terry Hammett  
Tina Hawkins  
Tracy Storm

*Remembering...*



**Justin Davidson**  
*Father of the Year*  
September 1976 - May 2015  
Loving Father, Husband, Son & Friend





**CCS**  
EARLY LEARNING

**Early Head Start**  
**Head Start**



**Our Children, Our Families, Our Communities:  
Building Resilience**



# CCS EARLY LEARNING



## Father of the Year

Justin  
Davidson



## Teacher of the Year

Kristine  
Ziesmer

### Head Start Father of the Year: Justin Davidson

Justin Phillip Davidson, 38, died on May 3, 2015, in a car accident on Bogard Road near Wasilla, Alaska. He was a beloved husband, father, son, brother and uncle, and a dear friend to many. He will be deeply missed. Justin was born on Sept. 21, 1976, in Round Rock, Texas, to Harry and Judi Davidson. The family moved to Alaska in 1983, where Justin spent his childhood and adolescence, graduating from Palmer High School in 1995. As a teenager, Justin traveled the world as a performing artist and missionary with Youth With A Mission. Summers during middle and high school brought him to Mexico, China, South Korea, Indonesia, Europe, and across the United States. His association with YWAM continued into his mid-twenties, when he met his future wife, Hazel Rebecca Salazar, at a bible school in Montana. Justin and Hazel were married in November 2002 in Los Angeles, Calif. Their daughters, Lucia and Ava, were born there and the family moved to Alaska in 2009, and settled in the Mat-Su Valley. Their son, Ezra, was born that year in Wasilla. An avid outdoorsman and mountaineer, Justin spent many summers commercial fishing in Bristol Bay, where the Davidson family has fished for three generations. He loved his family and friends dearly, loved to be in the mountains and on the sea and loved to laugh and

live life to its fullest. Justin was an active member his community and church, Good Shepherd Lutheran, and volunteered at Fronteras Spanish Emersion School and CCS Early Learning, among other organizations.

Justin Davidson was tragically killed in a car accident on May 3 in Wasilla Alaska. Justin and his wife Hazel have been CCS Early Learning parents since 2010, when their daughter Ava enrolled. Their youngest child Ezra completed Head Start this year and will be moving on to kindergarten. They also have an 11 year old daughter, Lucia.

Justin and Hazel have continuously been involved in leadership positions with CCS Early Learning, both with our Wasilla Parent Center Committee and with our Policy Council. Justin served as our PC Secretary during the 10-11 and 11-12 school years. He served as PC President during the 12-13 school year.

We would like to share several very small examples from Justin's life that demonstrates why he deserves this award.

Justin travelled with our Executive Director and several other parents to Juneau to advocate for Head Start in 2013. He was a fabulous advocate, speaking strongly and honestly about the difference that Head Start made in his own family and in the lives of other families in Alaska. On this visit we tried, but were unsuccessful in setting up an appointment with Governor Parnell. Justin was not deterred, one evening he walked up to the Governor's Mansion, knocked on the door and asked to speak to the Governor. The housekeeper let him know that the Governor was not home, so Justin proceeded to tell her about Head Start, handed her our advocacy materials and asked her to pass his support along to the Governor!

Justin was always someone who saw what needed to be done and did it. Several years ago we had a fundraiser and he noticed that the parking lot of the restaurant where it would be held needed to be plowed. He had access to plow so the restaurant got their snow plowed for free that day - and the people attending the CCS Early Learning fundraiser kept their feet dry. Nobody asked Justin to do this - he just saw a need and he knew he could help.

On April 25th of this year the Wasilla Parent Center Committee held a car wash and yard sale to raise money for the center. Justin was one of the primary organizers of this event, helping to gather items for the yard sale, working the pressure washer, and waving down cars out on the Parks Hwy with his sign. When I dropped by I was able to visit with Justin and he let me know that he was really upset that his last child was leaving CCS this year and that he wouldn't be able to be involved any more. He expressed how grateful he was that his children and his family had been able to be involved.

Justin had a great sense of humor, he had an obvious love of life, and he was an outstanding father, husband and community member. His positive involvement in so many lives - in big ways, and in small ways - certainly qualifies him to receive the father of the year award.

A CCS staff member made a routine entry in Child Plus about Justin in January of 2015 that I think sums it up very nicely:

"Justin came in to eat lunch with Ezra and was talking to the class about eating veggies, and told a story about a giant cauliflower."

We know that the children at this table got a great lesson in healthy eating and it was associated with a fabulous story about a giant cauliflower told joyfully by Ezra's dad.

We join them in remembering fondly the life and countless contributions of Justin Phillip Davidson.

**Teacher of the Year:****Kristine Ziesmer**

I am pleased to nominate Kristine Ziesmer as teacher of the year. Kris has been a teacher for 9 years. Kris started out as a parent, volunteer, substitute and aide. She has worked for CCS for 12 years.

Kris is a very organized, task oriented teacher. She is a big team player, and she helps all the new staff and other teachers from other sites with TS Gold, Lesson Planning, DECA or any other questions they might have during monthly education meetings.

Kris makes all new staff feel welcome and does whatever she can to help them feel comfortable. The new staff said she was a big help to them whenever they needed help. She would work with them as they did lesson planning, TS gold inputting, and gave them pointers that made it easier for her to get observations done in the classroom. Kris's year of experience and willingness to share her ideas and knowledge makes her a valuable team member.

Kris works with non English speaking students and families. By the middle of the first year the students understand and can speak some English. By the end of their second year they are speaking in full sentences in English. Kris has learned their culture and some of their language. She will speak to the children using words of their language.

Kris makes a connection with her non-English speaking families. One of the Hmong families named their little girl after her. The told her they named her "Kristi like you Ms. Kris". This year over half of her class were English Language Learners. On any given day you could walk Kris's room and find a print rich environment of English and Hmong.

Kris keeps up on her education and Early Childhood Development. Kris received her degree in Early Childhood Development, attends the AAEEYC conference every year, as well as reads many articles and books about Child development. This year Kris became a member of the AAEEYC conference community. In the past Kris has presented workshops at the AAEEYC conference.

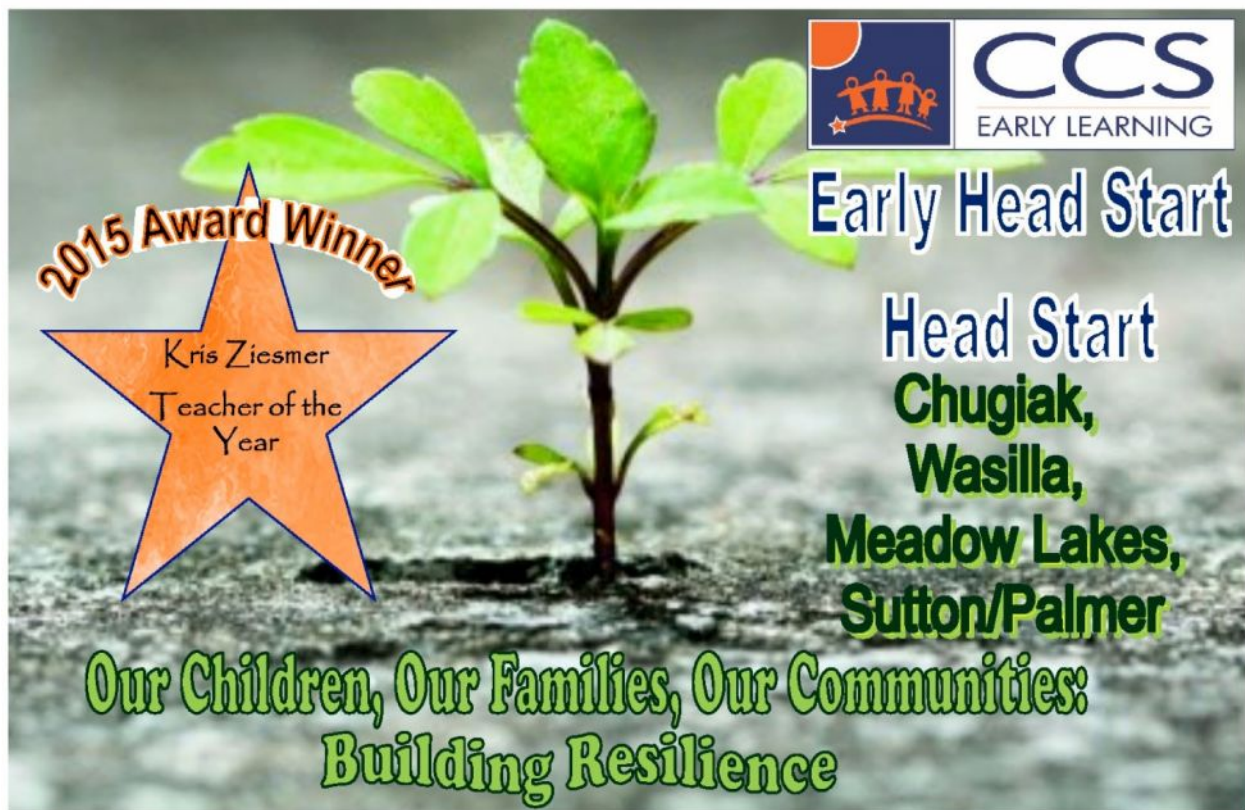
We have a lot of parents requesting her as their child's teacher. This could be returning parents or new parents to the program. Parents can see an improvement in just a few days with their strong willed children. Kris is a firm yet loving teacher, which has each child's best interest at heart.

The teachers that come from the Anchorage School District are always telling me what a great teacher she is and they like working with her.

I would like to thank you for considering Kristine Ziesmer for Teacher of the year. All the Staff at Chugiak enjoy working with and learning from her. Once again it is my pleasure to nominate Kristine Ziesmer for AHSA's Teacher of the Year.

**Kristine Ziesmer had a total of 4 nominations.**





## CHUGACHMIUT



**Assistant or Deputy  
Director**

**Cammie  
Foster**

**Assistant or Deputy Director of the Year: Cammie Foster**

Cammie Foster started working in Head Start as Head Start Coordinator (Assistant to Head Start Director) in March of 2015. She has many years of experience working at APIA Head Start, starting as a parent volunteer, then volunteering on the Policy Council, then becoming a staff member, then promoted to Family Service Coordinator. She worked for 10 years at APIA Head Start, and then came on board at Chugachmiut Head Start and totally overhauled the reporting systems and document systems to be compliant with regulations. Cammie spent countless hours setting up Community Binders and updated training binders and monthly documents for staff. She has gone above and beyond to help our program

# COOK INLET NATIVE HEAD START



**Administrative  
Support Staff**

Elizabeth  
Parker



**Cultural Awareness**

Marilyn  
Woods



**Head Start  
Director**

Ethan  
Petticrew

**Administrative Support Staff of the Year:     Elizabeth Parker**

Elizabeth is responsible for performing general accounts payable, timekeeping, and H.R. Generalist duties. This position assists the Executive Director in coordinating and monitoring the budgets, administrative Board and Policy Council and interfaces with accounting for payroll and CIRI for benefits enrollment.

Elizabeth is the backbone of our Head Start center. She is level headed, and takes no sides when there is a conflict. She is the person to go to when you are seeking advice regarding an employee or your position within the center. She is very knowledgeable about human relations, and is able to successfully redirect negative thought processes. She is able to provide perspectives that enlighten all of us, and which allows our staff to re-evaluate our positions and situations regarding conflicts or concerns. She is able to guide staff through the processes of conflict resolution successfully. Elizabeth (Liz) is an example of excellent professional support in Head Start.

**Head Start Director of the Year:                     Ethan Petticrew**

I have worked at the Cook Inlet Native Head Start center since the end of 2014 and I've seen how our director values people. He values his employees and wants what's best for them as well as our families and their children. He has shown how much he wants to see our families succeed and he also strives to give his employees what they need to make them successful. He strives to make our center a better place for our families and their children.

Of all my "bosses" in the workplace, Ethan has made me feel valued. He makes me feel like I'm his equal. That is a leader. I am appreciated here at our center because our director shows that he values and appreciates me and all his employees.

**Cultural Awareness:                                     Marilynn Woods**

Marilynn is responsible for providing culturally relevant curriculum and mentoring to staff, students and parents, and supervisory oversight of all cultural components of social, emotional and educational services provided to our children and families. She is ultimately responsible for strengthening CINHS' programs through cultural enhancements in all areas. Marilynn has spent countless hours scheduling cultural activities for our students, families, and teachers. She invites culture bearers from all regions of Alaska to our center, and makes sure they are able to spend time with all the classrooms either individually or in groups. She aligns cultural activities with the curriculum, and works with our Education Manager and teaching staff to make sure everyone's needs are being met. When elders are invited into the center, she makes sure they have all the help they need to engage with the children. She balances activities from storytelling to dance, to demonstrations, to language. CINHS looks forward to another culturally productive year.



# FAIRBANKS NATIVE ASSOCIATION



**Mother of the Year**

Deborah  
Hutchens



**Family Advocate**

Angi  
Thomas



**Home Visitor**

Jerri  
Lomax

**Head Start Mother of the Year: Deborah Hutchens**

I would like to Nominate Debra Hutchens, she is an awesome Mother/Grand Mother. When I first met Debra she was very guarded and with good reason. She had gotten custody of her grandson who had developmental delays as well as experienced trauma and neglect. She also got custody of his sibling, who experienced the same neglect. I have watched Debra become a fierce advocate for these children and ultimately adopt them. This road has not been easy; advocating to receive the proper care and education for her grandson. I have seen him grow and flourish under Debra's protective eye. She always puts these children first and she is always advocating for them to receive the proper educational experience from the school system. Debra is an inspiration to all Grand Parents and parents. She never complains and has a smile on her face every day along with a big hug for her grandson when she picks him up from school. She is always stopping in to visit or to go on field trips with the class. Debra has also stood behind her son, who is the children's biological father. She has supported him through his hard times and even though he has made mistakes, she includes him in the children's lives. She has supported him getting a job and helped him build a new relationship with the children. She has also encouraged him to volunteer in the classroom.

**Home Visitor of the Year: Jerri Lomax**

I have had the pleasure of getting to know Jerri Lomax as my son's early head start teacher and as a home visitor for the combo class at FNA. She has given my family, as well as others, knowledge when it comes to showing what head start is about, which is parents as a child's first teacher. She shows respect towards everyone she comes across and does not forget about families whom she has seen after transitions. For Ms. Jerri to get this award would mean that she has impacted kids' lives to give her hand in growing a strong community.

**Jerri Lomax had a total of 3 nominations.**

**Family Advocate of the Year: Angi Thomas**

Angi is an outstanding Family Advocate she has done the job for many years and does not waver in the face of adversary she does whatever it takes to make sure the families she serves have the best experience possible. Angi beats the streets gathering donations for winter gear gloves coats hats boots. If a family needs anything Angi goes above and beyond to connect them with the services that will meet their needs. Angi is not only an Advocate she is a parent and a foster parent so she relates to her clients on several levels and she always acknowledges their feelings and understands them I feel like Angi provides exemplary dedication and service to our organization and is what Head Start is all about.

# KAWERAK



## Leadership Award

Deborah  
Trowbridge

### **Leadership: Deborah Trowbridge**

Deb Trowbridge was the Acting Director for Kawerak Head Start/Early Head Start on and off throughout the 2014-15 school year and has been the Acting Director consecutively since February 2015. She took the reins and her natural ability to be a leader helped solidify our program and support staff during a time of transition. Deb expressed her dedication to the program by working multiple hours getting both State and Federal grants revised and submitted, editing the budget for the 2014-15 school year, and hiring for positions that were vacant. She coordinated an opportunity for Kawerak Policy Council members to have formal training in Nome by T/TA, which members greatly appreciated and hadn't received in years. In August 2015, Kawerak will be opening a new Early Head Start/Child Care Program which Deb supported by helping develop the program structure, training, and staff needs for programs implementation. Deb pays attention to details and understands the importance of recognizing people for the work they do. She is always accepting of input from staff and is always looking at how we can better improve our services, and ourselves. Even when she is busy, she always makes time for her co-workers and the staff she supervises to lead them in the right direction. As an advocate for education in the Bering Straits Region, Deb truly believes in the vision and values of Kawerak Head Start/Early Head Start Program and brings years of experience through Teaching and her education. Deb should be recognized for willingly taking on an abundance of responsibilities and being the leader that our program needed to make it through the school year.

# KENAITZE



## School District Collaboration

### Kenai Peninsula Borough School District

Kenaitze Early Childhood Center (ECC)-Head Start would like to nominate the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District (KPBSD) for the School District Collaboration award. For seventeen years ECC has had a strong relationship with Pupil Services, Child Find, Administrators and Kindergarten & Pre-K staff at KPBSD.

The Child Find Coordinator yearly works with our program to ensure all developmental screenings are completed and reviewed prior to the 45 day deadline required by Head Start. This collaboration allows students with possible developmental delays to be observed and referrals made as early as possible in the school year. Through each school year KPBSD will include ECC staff in their trainings and events. Over the years our relationship has grown to be positive and flexible. Concerns regarding a certified special needs child are resolved timely with a phone call, emails or face to face meeting between ECC staff, KPBSD staff and parents. Our strong Memorandum of Agreement clearly defines roles and responsibilities and provides the framework for our collaborative process to provide the best possible services for children and families.

Each year, for the last fifteen years, ECC has hosted a “Transition Night Dinner” for all of our graduating preschoolers, their families and KPBSD kindergarten staff and principals. On Transition Night, teachers and principals from the LEA kindergartens join us and our families for a dinner to meet and provide information about the schools in which their children will be enrolled. This is a very well attended activity, and is a good opportunity for families to begin developing a relationship with their new school. The goal is to allow for smooth transition of children and families from Head Start into kindergarten. In addition kindergarten teachers have scheduled transition meetings with our Education Coordinator to discuss specific needs and possible placement suggestions prior to students moving on. Some teachers have even come over to observe students in their preschool classroom in the late spring.

The KPBSD continually, year after year, works collaboratively with us to ensure that together we provide quality preschool services in our community. Even though many of the items discussed in this nomination are required within the Special Education/Head Start guidelines, all the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District staff and administrators we come in contact with are always professional, positive and willing to go the extra step in partnering with us to provide services and prepare students for elementary school. We are privileged to work together with the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District to serve children and families in this community and respectfully submit this nomination to recognize their outstanding efforts.

# KIDS' CORP, INC.



**Corporate Award**

Independent Pilots  
Association



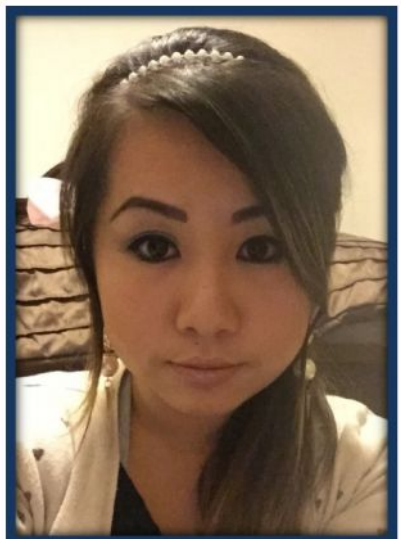
**Bus Driver**

Mona Starr



**Program Policy  
Council**

KCI  
Policy Council



**Assistant Teacher**

Xiong Thao



**Beating the Odds**

Linzee Victoriano



**EHS Teacher**

Stacey Thao-Vang



**Corporate Award:****Independent Pilots Association**

I would like to nominate the International Pilots Association (IPA) for the AHSA Corporate Award.

Several years back, IPA took over our agency wide Holiday celebration for Kids' Corps families from Northwest Airlines when Northwest merged with another company. IPA jumped right in with both feet and started raising funds, planning activities and games, recruiting fellow pilots to volunteer at the event, discussing how many cookies they should bake and what sort of toys they should provide as gifts for the children. What a beautiful testament to their open and caring hearts. All year long they look at toys, games, blocks, gloves, bags, and ask us what we think the children and parents would like to get this year.

This organization has gone way above and beyond for our families. An enthusiastic group of pilots, spouses and even their families work tirelessly all year long to gather funds for purchasing books, toys, and food to give our families a wonderful Christmas holiday celebration.

During the event, many pilots come and play games with the children in the gym of a local elementary school, interact with the children and parents and generally run the show. They have always provided a Santa and Mrs. Claus (pilot and spouse) and when the children complete their visit with Santa, they get a wonderful bag of toys and books (age appropriate), along with mittens, warm hats and candy canes.

They provide the dinner and table activities to occupy the children while they wait to eat. This allows the families to come and not worry about having to make dinner or to rush to feed their families before coming back out for this evening event.

IPA provides a volunteer photographer who takes pictures of the children with Santa and makes sure they are delivered to parents free of charge. Cotton candy is made fresh there at the event for all. What a special treat that is! They even make dozens and dozens of cookies for families to take home after the event. The volunteer pilots and their families make sure there is Christmas music playing and that pilots in uniform are constantly in circulation greeting families and inviting the children to join in the many activities they have set up in the gym and multi-purpose room. They even set up a "mock pit," a booth set up to look like the cock pit of a commercial jet where children can don a pilots uniform and get their picture taken "flying" the plane.

The pilots have even come up with great fun games that include rocket stomp, aerial balloons with remotes, static sticks, remote control airplanes, balloons that are designed in such a way that after they are inflated they fly in crazy loops all around the room. There is also face painting and paper airplane making and flying. There is a balsa wood plane making station with a runway, flight bag toss and this year they even hired a balloon man to come and make balloon animals for everyone. It is so much fun to watch the children and families enjoy a carefree evening of no stress or worries.

They consult closely with our staff re: the toys that they provide for the children were safe and appropriate. They also provided books for over 300 children, in three different age categories.

The IPA volunteers show up early to help set up, participate tirelessly and then clean up at the end of what must be a long day for many of them. They are a wonderful group of people who treat our families with nothing but respect. Even the goodie bags can be saved to put under the tree if they have no other means of getting Christmas gifts for their children.

Needless to say, we at KCI think these pilots are the best and make a huge impact with the children and families. We at KCI want to say "Thank You" to them for all their hard work, innovation and energy and that is why we have nominated them for the Corporate Award.

**Bus Driver of the Year:           Mona Starr**

Thank you for the opportunity to nominate Mona Starr for the Bus Driver of the Year Award.

Words cannot express our gratitude and appreciation for all that Mona does for our children, families, and staff here at Kid's Corps Inc. Since Mona has worked with us, she has become an essential part of our family. You will never see a frown, you will never see a poor attitude, and you will never hear a negative word come from her mouth. Mona greets every staff person, every parent, and every child with a warm friendly smile, hugs, and a kind word. It doesn't make a difference if it's early morning or late afternoon, her open, loving attitude remains the same. Everyone knows her by name, and the children always call out to her when they see her, even at the opposite end of the long hall.

Due to her positive attitude, Mona is our go-to person for new staff orientation, regarding the bus. You couldn't ask for a better representative for Reliant bus services. We know the new staff are in good hands when they learn bus policies, procedures, and safety routines from her. Safety is always her top priority. All of the assistant teachers and substitutes request to ride on her bus route.

She is sensitive to the children's needs, by providing a positive learning environment on the bus. Activities include fun interactive songs, finger plays, and I spy games. When children are over stimulated or tired from the school day, she provides classical music for a calming atmosphere.

Mona is one of the first to arrive to our center every morning, no matter the weather – no matter the daylight. She very rarely misses a day on the job, because she knows the importance of consistency with children. Parents and children will ask after her, if she did need to be out. Mona goes the extra mile – literally – to pick up a child that misses the bus. She knows the importance of good attendance for these children. Mona is reliable.

Finally, Mona is the Grandmother every child loves to have. She treats every child with love, as if they were her own. In return, they all look to Mona as a loving grandmother figure in their life.

We highly recommend Mona for Bus Driver of the Year Award.

**Assistant Teacher of the Year:           Xiong Thao**

It is with great honor to nominate Xiong Thao as Head Start Awards of Excellence Assistant Teacher of the Year. I do not know anyone more deserving of this award! I have had the privilege of working with Xiong for most of two school years and through our experience together I have witnessed positive influences on our preschoolers, their families, our school community, and myself.

Xiong has a true passion for supporting children and their families. This is evident to anyone who spends a short amount of time in our classroom and is reported on Mental Health, ECERS, and CLASS reports. No matter how exhausted she may be from staying up all night with her young children, she walks in the classroom with a smile and manages to pursue her day with energy, a positive attitude, patience, and the goal of bettering the lives of our preschoolers.

Families are always welcomed to our classroom with a smile. Families feel comfortable approaching her about their child, the classroom, and even to chat about personal lives. Xiong cares about the families and

will show concern if their demeanor shows something is wrong. She takes the time to greet siblings and will engage them in activities during meetings and parent cafes.

Xiong is an exemplary employee for Kids' Corps Head Start. She knows and precisely follows the standard operating procedures, maintains a clean and sanitized environment, communicates events of the day with families, appreciates and utilizes trainings and collegial feedback, and above all prioritizes the safety and enrichment of each child. Xiong goes above and beyond to translate for the Hmong families throughout our school community when needed. She works extra hours to provide childcare at agency events and continues to work for the agency through the summer. Her work ethic and pride to be a Kids' Corps Head Start employee are inspiring.

I feel extremely thankful to have her in the classroom. She has a great sense of developmentally appropriate practice, the ability to engage children in any setting, the skill to prepare meals yet maintain awareness of the classroom environment and interact with children as needed, and a gift of coming up with games and songs on the spot that the children request daily from then on!

The following are reasons our preschoolers love Ms. Xiong!

“What do you like best about Ms. Xiong or what do you like to do with her?”

- “How she dresses.”
- “Playing games.”
- “Pretending to go shopping in dramatic play.”
- “When she plays mommy shark.”
- “Play outside. Basketball.”
- “Build castles and houses.”
- “Riding the bus.”
- “Mommy shark.”
- “Riding bus. Playing games.”
- “Playing legos.”
- “Playing with playdoh.”
- “Making things with tubes.”
- “Legos.”
- “Playing lego.”

These 4 and 5 year olds clearly enjoy spending their free choice time with Ms. Xiong!

Xiong Thao is an exceptional nominee for Head Start Awards of Excellence Assistant Teacher of the Year!

**Ziong Thao had a total of 3 nominations.**

**Early Head Start Teacher of the Year:****Stacey Thao-Vang**

Continuity of care is a key to our success at our KCI Early Head Start Program. Stacey Thao-Vang started with our Agency December 8th, 2004. She has committed 11 years of dedication to our agency, even having her children attend our program because she believed in our mission statement. I have had the pleasure of working with this amazing teacher off and on since I started 10 years ago with our agency. She was a teacher in our Toddler Program and I was in our Preschool Program. We shared families that had infant/toddlers and preschool aged children. It was great to learn from Stacey and see her in action on how to implement the classroom aspect and build relationships with families.

On 8/25/2010 Stacey assisted in opening our first and only KCI Early Head Start site and was selected and accepted to be the Associate Administrator based on her being the consistent teaching staff and plethora of experience. I came to Early Head Start in 2011 and became her supervisor and still am. I have seen her continue to demonstrate her commitment to this ECE field by keeping her Infant/Toddler and Preschool CDA's valid, completing her Associates degree in ECE, and applying and receiving the SEED ROOT's Award twice for being in the Alaska SEED Registry.

Stacey works closely with the classroom staff, role modeling and helping them grow as other had helped her grow and achieve her goals. She can be a leader or she can follow. She is bilingual, speaking Hmong for translation support. She brings her culture alive in the classroom teaching the children to speak simple basic Hmong such as counting and colors, having Hmong food available to try, and dressing in her regalia and sharing her music and stories with children and staff about the Hmong history. She is a role model for families and staff to continue put the work in, in becoming a U.S. citizen such as she did. Her personal life experiences and KCI experiences helps her relate and make families become naturally a part of our KCI family.

Stacey is known by many families here in Anchorage due to her decade of being a local teacher. Her previous students are now grown and often go to school with her children and see her out in public. She always stops and makes time for them. Families express much gratitude for her consistency and compassion. She has been referred to by many of our EHS families as, "Momma Stacey" since she spends so much time with her infants who attend school at our full-day, year round site. I truly believe many of our EHS families remain in our program for multiple years because of the continuity of care Stacey provides. One family has had 3 children in Stacey's classroom. Her families attend our events, and acquire a lot of classroom volunteer hours.

Stacey is naturally a quiet and reserved person. She is not flashy and does not draw attention to herself. She is learning leadership through filling in for me whenever I'm in trainings or on leave. I am nominating her for Early Head Start Teacher of the Year because of KCI EHS program would not be the same without her contributions to our team.

Thank you for taking the time to listen about this amazing individual.

**Beating the Odds:****Linzee Victoriano**

Our Early Head Start team enthusiastically nominates one of our outstanding parents for the AHS “Beating the Odds” Award. Linzee Victoriano began our program at the age of 15 years old. She had just finished 8th grade and found out she was pregnant. Starting off as a prenatal teen parent in our Home Based Program, Linzee continued her education at ASD Crossroads Alternative school which is designed to help prenatal and parenting teens obtain their diploma while learning about becoming a parent. After giving birth to her daughter Charlotte, she continued school bringing her daughter to school with her. On the returning school year, our Home Visitor collaborating with our Early Head Start Center Based program to provide child care since her daughter was no longer able to attend school with her due to licensing requirements of the school.

Linzee began the next school year as a 16 year old mother and a freshman in high school. Despite overwhelming factors and barriers, Linzee walked her daughter to school every single day and was at the Center by 7:30 in the morning. In the rain, snow and with icy sidewalks, Linzee pushed her daughter’s stroller a mile to and from childcare so that she was able to go to school. All this in order to accomplish her personal goal of graduating high school before her 18th birthday as we had set out the timeline in our Family Partnership Agreement and did continuous follow-up with credits earned. For two years, despite significant hardships, Linzee attended not only the normal school year but also the extended school year that was offered through the ASD Crossroads School. As well as attending school, Linzee volunteered in her daughter’s classroom on a regular basis. As Linzee grew, she became a natural leader at her school as well as at Charlotte’s childcare. Linzee has been a Policy Council representative for Early Head Start since her daughter started the Center Based program at 4 months old. For this past school year she got very involved in the PC meetings advocating her thoughts and ideas, passing motions, and sitting in on new hire interviews. She is a true advocate of our Early Head Start program expressing her growth through our partnership with her and how we need to expand to help more teen mothers like herself become successes and beat the statistic they are constantly reminded of.

Despite the hurdles presented by Linzee becoming a mother at such a young age, with her determination she was able to graduate early this spring as a junior in high school. Being pregnant and having a baby is the most common reason girls drop out of high school, but Linzee started high school with a newborn baby, and through true grit, graduated in only three years. With the socioeconomic barriers, being a homeless teen, and not having transportation, Linzee still made sure that she and her and her daughter were at school every single day with a consistent, predictable schedule and routine. Even while she was living in a homeless transitional shelter for young, teen mothers, Linzee and Charlotte took two buses each way in order to get to school. She overcame tremendous adversity, demonstrated academic excellence and gave back to the community through her volunteering and leadership on the Policy Council.

Linzee is now employed and continues to bring her daughter to school every morning. She is performing better than statistically expected for her level of poverty, and has become the go-to person in her school for other teens that need advice on parenting. Her achievement is noteworthy because many other people would not have the tenacity to stick with their goals. This award would be so meaningful to this parent, and have a lasting impact for her to remain motivated to continue on her next set of life goals of furthering her education goal of receiving a college degree in the culinary or medical fields.

This is why we are nominating Linzee Victoriano for the Beating the Odds Award.



# RurAL CAP



**Humanitarian**

Cheryl Forrest



**Content Area  
Specialist**

Jaad McElroy



**Cook of the Year**

Christine James



**Community Advocate**

Jennifer Russell



**Maintenance Staff**

John Strongheart

**Humanitarian:****Cheryl Forrest**

I would like to nominate Cheryl Forrest posthumously for the Humanitarian Award. Cheryl coordinated the Food Service Program at RurAL CAP for over 25 years. She trained all new cooks and hand tracked and calculated all reimbursement rates! Cheryl always said it was her mission to “feed the children” - and she was a fearless advocate for ensuring all our Head Start children received high-quality nutritious food.

Cheryl had a Masters in Career and Technical Education and a Bachelor’s in Home Economics. Cheryl was a loyal and dedicated employee, whose sphere of influence was greater than Head Start. She was not only passionate about feeding Head Start kiddos, but also for her work with the homeless. She volunteered a minimum of once a month at Bean’s Café in Anchorage, Alaska feeding the hungry and homeless.

In addition, Cheryl was a staunch advocate for children with special needs. She served on the Board of Directors at the Program for Infants and Children, the Anchorage-based Infant Learning Program. At Board meetings, Cheryl was quick to advocate for the rights of parents, holding the program and staff accountable.

Cheryl is remembered by many for her generous spirit and empathy for those less fortunate than she. Many shared how Cheryl always made time for them, lent a listening ear, or hands and feet to help where needed.

Cheryl kept a basket of snacks/food in her office for fellow employees who forgot their lunch or just needed a pick-me-up! She was always thinking of others more than herself! Cheryl was a woman of few words – her typical answers to questions from site staff about how to do something were; yes, no, or follow the directions! She was known for her dry sense of humor and could always be counted on for a good laugh! Losing Cheryl left a big hole in the Child Development Division at RurAL CAP, and the entire state.

She is missed and remembered fondly!

**Cook of the Year:****Christine James**

Christine is a long-time member of the RurAL CAP team in Alakanuk. She is a dedicated and reliable Cook. This year she went above and beyond her Food Service Specialist job description. In the early hours of November 14, 2014 there was a fire at the Head Start. Fortunately, the fire was extinguished and the building saved. Unfortunately, the damage to building and contents from smoke and soot was significant. Classroom services were suspended and Christine had to shift gears to provide Food Service support for a temporary Home-based service model. As it turned out, that was only a small part of her job. Every bit of the recently received food order had to be discarded. Frozen foods were moved to an interim home at the high school. The brand new kitchen cupboards were black with soot. Christine devoted countless hours to helping with the building clean-up. Based in temporary quarters and with limited resources, she tirelessly scrubbed soot from kitchen walls and food storage areas. She helped clean classroom furniture and learning materials. It was an overwhelming task, but Christine never gave up. She stuck with her site team and helped encourage them to persevere through the difficult months of clean-up. Thank you, Christine, for your unwavering commitment to preserving Head Start in your community.

**Content Area Specialist of the Year:**

**Jaad McElroy**

I nominate Jaad McElroy, RurAL CAP Education Coordinator for AHSA Content Specialist of the Year.

Over the years Jaad has been a strong driving force for quality education in our Head Start and Early Head Start programs. Jaad supports seven Early Head Start Home Visitors in three communities, as well as four Head Start classrooms in four communities along the Kuskokwim River. Jaad provides support via distance delivery. She monitors CDA progress, helps implement school readiness goals, monitors GOLD observations, provides feedback on observations and lesson plans. Jaad provides Case Managements for individual children, and helps sites creatively implement new ideas into the classroom. She consistently meets with sites, returns phone calls, and helps other coordinators on our team when needed.

Just this year alone she has successfully taken on a multitude of extracurricular projects and work above and beyond her job duties. She has exceptional skills in the technical areas of her position and has utilized these skills to perform live classroom observations by using Skype to observe all of the programs she supports in her region.

She is a strong collaborator often working closely with T/TA, classroom staff and her Regional Manager to improve CLASS feedback and individual classroom ratings within her region. She is extremely knowledgeable about Teaching Strategies GOLD and provides support for other coordinators in this area.

She often volunteers to share her knowledge with other agencies. This year she presented at the annual AAEEYC conference. She has volunteered to assist programs/communities that are not within her regional structure. She volunteered to help out Toksook Bay and Marshall this year as well as assisting at Anchorage's Head Start through classroom coverage and assisting 3 staff with CDA renewals and completion. She has also picked up additional responsibilities in supporting and collaborating with the School Districts on partnerships with the Lower Kuskokwim School District and the Yupiit School District.

Jaad represents RurAL CAP in community outreach through participating in the Countdown to Kindergarten program and is co-chair of the ECE advisory committee for the King Career Center. Although Jaad supports a family at home and has another child on the way she continues to further her education by taking distance courses in ECE through the University of Alaska Fairbanks. This year she was selected by UAF as Student of the Year for the ECE department.

I strongly believe she needs to be recognized for her impact on teaching staff, children, and the communities she serves. For the above reasons, I nominate Jaad McElroy, Education Coordinator, as Content Area Specialist of the Year.

**Community Advocate:****Jennifer Russell**

Jennifer has been our UAF advisor for several years now, working tirelessly with our Teachers to help them navigate the murky waters of a distance-delivered Early Childhood degree. She has taken a deep, personal interest in each of our students, providing them with solid support in obtaining appropriate classes, financial aid, and working with various agencies/persons to assist students to meet their educational goals. She has been an advocate for rural students above and beyond reasonable expectations. Jennifer has remembered the financial needs of our students and has given one a financial award from discretionary University funds that were made available, which was a HUGE encouragement to this particular staff member.

Jennifer is a problem solver, and moves mountains to resolve issues in favor of our staff. Even when positive solutions seem remote, she provides alternative suggestions which offer another option for resolve. She is warm and honest with our students, and always willing to listen to their concerns with sincere understanding. She is truly an advocate and supporter of our staff who work with the children in our Head Start and Early Head Start program here at RurAL CAP, and well deserving of this award.

**Maintenance Staff of the Year:****John Strongheart**

John always works hard to keep the Head Start center in Alakanuk running smoothly, but this year he went above and beyond. In the early hours of November 14, 2014 he was awakened with the report of a fire at the Head Start. John rushed over, entered the smoke-filled building to retrieve fire extinguishers and, with the help of a few community volunteers, put out the fire. In the months that followed John worked tirelessly to clean and restore the building. The damage to building and contents from smoke and soot was staggering. Often he worked by himself with limited resources to move, clean and repair. It was an overwhelming task, but he never gave up. Thanks in large part to John's unwavering commitment and heroic efforts, the Alakanuk Head Start will re-open for classroom services in the fall.

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*Disclaimer:*

*All Nominations are printed  
exactly as submitted*

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# Congratulations to the Alaska Head Start Association 2015 Awards of Excellence Winners!

<b>Parent Awards</b>	<b>Name (Head Start Program)</b>
Beating the Odds Award	Linzee Victoriano (Kids' Corps, Inc.)
Head Start Father of the Year	Justin Davidson (CCS Early Learning)
Head Start Mother of the Year	Deborah Hutchens (Fairbanks Native Association)
Program Policy Council	KCI Policy Council (Kids' Corps, Inc.)
<b>Staff Awards</b>	<b>Name (Head Start Program)</b>
Administrative Support Staff of the Year	Elizabeth Parker (Cook Inlet Native Head Start)
Assistant or Deputy Director of the Year	Cammie Foster (Chugachmiut)
Assistant Teacher of the Year	Xiong Thao (Kids' Corps, Inc.)
Bus Driver of the Year	Mona Starr (Kids' Corps, Inc.)
Content Area Specialist of the Year	Jaad McElroy (RurAL CAP)
Cook of the Year	Christine James (RurAL CAP)
Early Head Start Teacher of the Year	Stacey Thao-Vang (Kids' Corps, Inc.)
Family Advocate of the Year	Angi Thomas (Fairbanks Native Association)
Head Start Director of the Year	Ethan Petticrew (Cook Inlet Native Head Start)
Home Visitor of the Year	Jerri Lomax (Fairbanks Native Association)
Maintenance Staff of the Year	John Strongheart (RurAL CAP)
Teacher of the Year	Kristine Ziesmer (CCS Early Learning)
<b>Community Awards</b>	<b>Name (Head Start Program)</b>
Community Advocate	Jennifer Russell (RurAL CAP)
Corporate Award	Independent Pilots Association (Kids' Corps, Inc.)
Humanitarian Award	Cheryl Forrest (RurAL CAP)
School District Collaboration	Kenai Peninsula Borough School District (Kenaitze)
<b>Other Awards</b>	<b>Name (Head Start Program)</b>
Cultural Awareness	Marilynn Woods (Cook Inlet Native HS)
Leadership	Deborah Trowbridge (Kawerak)



