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# 2019 AWARDS

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Alaska Head Start Association



OCTOBER 14, 2019

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## *Beating the Odds*

### **Cecelia Lockwood**



I would like to nominate Cecelia Lockwood for the Beating the Odds Award. She has been involved with Head Start since her first daughter, Madison, was in Head Start 6 years ago. Her other children that have gone through the program are Trevor, 3 years ago, Anastine, 2 years ago, and Rosina, who is currently in her last year in our program. Cecelia is a single parent who has raised her children on her own with the support of her parents and other children's grandparents. Her current child who is in Head Start lost her father to cancer August 1, 2016. This has been a great loss to her and her children.

Cecelia was employed before with the Kawerak Head Start Program, but due to low enrollment, she had to be let go. Cecelia struggled to find jobs within the community. Despite the many hardships Cecelia encountered, she never gave up, and landed a job with Bering Air, as a weekend village agent. Even though it only paid her 3 days per week depending on passengers, cargo, or mail, she accepted the job for the sake of financially supporting her children.

This year, St. Michael's Kawerak Head Start advertised for another Teacher Aide/ Janitor position due to increased enrollment. Cecelia applied, and was successfully rehired and enjoys working with our children again. She had her CDA before, but did not renew it when she was not working for Head Start. She is determined to work hard toward getting her CDA again and has started the process to obtain it. Her resiliency and can-do attitude has led her to the right path and she continues to work hard for her children.

I hope you consider this nomination because despite her personal struggles, she has not given up, and is always striving to do better so that her children have a good life. She is my role model, and I would not have it any other way because I am also her parent. -Mary Long

## *Corporate Award*

### **Trinity Sails and Repair**



I would like to nominate Trinity Sails and Repair (TSR) for the Corporate Award. In February of 2018 our Nome Head Start/Early Head Start/Child Care Partnership (HS/EHS/CCP) was making plans to move out of our own facility while an addition and remodel took place. TSR owns what used to be a hospital 5 years prior, so it already had rooms and hallways ready to be transformed into classrooms while the facility we owned underwent its own transformation. Within two months, TSR removed walls to create classrooms (with existing bathrooms in the classrooms), helped create a kitchen that was DEC approved, built a ramp from the entrance deck to the parking lot, fenced in a grassed playground area outside, and did everything needed to be State of Alaska Child Care licensed in the newly named Dawn of Life wing in the TSR facility! We offered services in Dawn of Life from May 2018 to May 2019. We are so grateful to TSR for the incredible commitment given to make this space available to us in such a short time so that we could continue to provide State approved child care to 64 children and keep 32+ employees employed all under one roof! TSR was also fantastic about addressing maintenance issues in a very timely manner, had their employees participate in fire evacuation drills with us, and they had trees outside our windows which is a rare site in Nome. Your location was perfect for us! Thank you TSR! We are incredibly appreciative for what you provided us...what you provided to our community! -Deborah Trowbridge

# *Head Start Father of the Year*

## **Ethan Eidenmiller**



I'd like to recognize Ethan as the Alaska Head Start Association Father of the Year.

Ethan is a young father of one of the boys in my classroom. His son was enrolled in my class last year and they returned this school year. I feel that Ethan is an incredible loving, kind and fun dad. When Ethan's son, Mason, was first enrolled, he was very shy. It took teachers 2 weeks to get him away from the exit door. When the teachers moved a table near the door, Mason finally sat down to do some art. However, Mason would not talk to anyone and spent a 6 ½ hour day not eating anything. My teaching team spent hours coming up with plans to get Mason involved in the class.



One day, Mason's dad took time off from work and had lunch with us. All of a sudden, Mason was no longer a shy little person but a child who loved talking and loved eating lunch even more. Mason's dad continued to take time off work or adjusting his lunch break so he could have lunch with us. After lunch, he sits and reads with Mason and before you know it Ethan is reading stories to a group of children. The more time dad spent in the class, the more Mason enjoyed school. Mason is anything but shy now, and dad still has lunch with us 1-2 times a week. The other children in our class have noticed Ethan having lunch with us, so if he misses a week or comes at the end of the week, the children start asking where he is. If Ethan says peas are good the class thinks peas are good and they try some.

Some of the children in my class live with their grandparents. Some children only have a mom and some of the children in my class have had their dads pass away. The class has adopted Ethan as the class dad. Children refer to him as their dad or ask if he will be their dad. After Ethan leaves, sometimes I can over hear children talking about how cool Mason's dad is, or they ask Mason to share his dad.

What really stood out to me as a teacher was the support Ethan has for Mason's mom. The two had Mason while in high school and have since then, split. When Mason talks about his parent's relationship, Ethan quickly jumps in supporting Mason's mom and the arrangements they have established. While many parents would have taken the opportunity to criticize the other parent, Ethan chose to put his son first.

At the end of lunch, I can see Mason's love bucket overflow from the love his dad shows by taking a lunch break, driving across town to sit with 4 and 5 year olds, and listen to them talk about who can burp the loudest or who has the fastest running shoes. -Mary Morris

# *Administrative Support Staff of the Year*

## **Irina Blomroz-Choulguine**



The RurAL Alaska Community Action Program Team is proud and excited to nominate Irina Blomroz-Choulguine for the Administrative Support Staff of the Year Award. As many of you know, the role that data plays in the world of Head Start is essential for the delivery of quality services. With the new Head Start Performance Standards, data became more & more important in the world of Head Start.



Irina serves as the Database Specialist/Data Supervisor for the Child Development Division. In this capacity, she is responsible for knowing Child Plus, one of the most commonly used databases in the world of Head Start, inside and out and for leading her team of two data technicians. The fact that Irina is knowledgeable about Child Plus and the standards or requirements for each of the programs served in the Child Development Division is impressive on its own. What makes Irina special in this field is how effortless and caring she can be in her support of her team and the program services teams.

Irina supports her team by making sure that they understand that they are a valued member of the data team. She does this by making sure that their ideas are respected, their questions are appreciated and that they have what is necessary to understand where their best investment of time is. She helps them understand how to manage their workflow in a healthy, consistent manner and how to increase their accuracy and efficiency in their data entry. She is also very happy to “roll up her sleeves” and get into the messier parts of the work to support her team.

Irina supports program delivery staff by seeking to understand their needs and helping them understand how Child Plus can meet their needs. Irina is very skilled at quietly listening to others data needs, helping them clarify what parameters are required and quickly and accurately runs their reports or helps them understand how to do so in the future. Any question, regardless of how basic or how many times she has heard it before, is treated with a high level of importance and respect. She is especially patient with the kinds of questions that are asked for the millionth time – she truly understands the adage that this question is being asked for the first time by this person and gives it that level of attention.

Irina’s ability to deliver high level, accurate, timely reports is amazing. That alone is a feat. What Irina offers that makes her an absolute asset to the Child Development Division is her commitment to ensuring her reports, the definitions and formulas used are grounded in fact... not in “but we’ve always done it this way.” She is very skilled at researching the regulations, standards and guidelines that drive how the numbers are calculated. Irina is meticulous about keeping notes about what formulas we use and why we changed what we changed; this history taking allows us to have a better understanding about how our numbers evolved over time.

If all this were not enough, there is another very important reason that Irina and her impeccable knowledge of Head Start data should be recognized as the Administrative Support Staff of the Year: Irina makes data FUN! The data team is very hard working but we know how to have fun with data. We have a “Data Geek of the Day” award... which you can claim for yourself if you feel that you have done something brilliant. When the notice regarding ChildPlus Updates come out, it is just like a kid in a candy shop –“did you see this? And that? Oh I hope they added this...” Even more exciting is when we discover something not working in Child Plus or our systems; you can feel the energy in the air because the race is on, he or she who figures it out first will likely to declare themselves “Data Geek of the Day.”

Our team would love for Irina to be recognized as “Data Geek of the Year”. We know this will not happen for two reasons; first, Irina is a very humble person and would not be so bold as to stand in front of a large group and declare herself award worthy and, secondly because the Alaska Head Start Association does not have such an award. Therefore, in lieu of that, perhaps you would recognize her for Administrative Support Staff of the Year. -Colleen Carroll

# *Home Visitor of the Year*

## **Rita Alexie**



I am nominating Rita Alexie from Nunapitchuk, Alaska for Home Visitor of the Year. Rita has done an outstanding job for Rural Alaska Community Action Program (RurAL CAP) since 2002.



In Rita's 17 years working with Head Start families, she has made a great impact on her community and the families she serves. As an EHS home visitor, Rita understands the unique challenges and obstacles home-based programs have in regards to parent engagement, yet she has overcome those challenges and found a way to connect with families in her community. She engages with families in a respectful, positive, and culturally appropriate way. She is on a first name basis with everyone in her community, as her personality is such that people enjoy Rita in their company. Many families in the community understand the high demand to have Rita as their home visitor so much so that they request early to have Rita as their home visitor every year.

Rita is a team player, hard worker, and a leader. Not only has she demonstrated professionalism in all areas of her job duties, going above and beyond expectations like providing families with more than the required number of home visits because she knows their needs, but willingly takes on extra tasks. For example Rita took on extra families due to a hardship of one of her colleagues. She consistently trains new home visitor substitutes and provides valuable suggestions for a successful home visit experience. Rita ensures that Group Social planning is occurring consistently and timely, delegating tasks like preparation and clean up as needed. She often motivates and encourages her co-workers so the Head Start and Early Head Start program can achieve positive outcomes.

With Rita home visiting seems a breeze. She has a beautiful ease to the way she works with children and families. From the moment she walks into the home to when she leaves, children and families share with her smiles and excitement. Rita's families enjoy working with her at their home and having great conversations about child development and activities. Yet, she doesn't end at the home. To Rita, home visiting doesn't stop when her work clock stops, she is consistently meeting parents where they are and will always answer questions for parents and community members when they have them.

It is for these reasons, and a ton more, that I nominate Rita Alexie for AHSA's Home Visitor of the Year Award. -Sophia Larson

# *Humanitarian Award of the Year*

## **Meyers Farm**



It is our pleasure to nominate Tim and Lisa Meyers, owners of Meyers Farm in Bethel, for the Humanitarian of the Year award. Tim and Lisa initially planted a vegetable garden for their own family, then started Meyers Farm with a desire to make fresh, nutritious vegetables available to everyone in their community of Bethel. They soon realized that their capacity for producing crops in the rich, fertile soil of the Kuskokwim Delta exceeded the demand for vegetables because most people in the region were not used to having fresh vegetables. However, Tim and Lisa were passionate about sharing their nutrition knowledge and bounty with others. In September of 2016, Tim and Lisa learned about Head Start programs in nearby villages and discovered that Head Start had a similar mission...to educate others about the value of nutritious food and also make it accessible, especially to young children and families. Upon learning this, Meyers Farm donated freshly harvested vegetables to Mt. Village Head Start. The beets, turnips, carrots, rutabagas, and daikon radishes were met by a sense of wonder. After exploring the unfamiliar roots, leaves, and stems, children devoured them with delight.



From their 15-acres farmland in Bethel, Meyers Farm has since been supplying 13 RurAL CAP Head Start programs in the YK region, plus programs in Stebbins and Savoonga, with fresh locally grown vegetables. Additionally, Meyers Farm has partnered with organic farms throughout the world to provide produce that would not otherwise be available in rural Alaska. Tim and Lisa work diligently with local airlines to get produce to each site as quickly as possible, overcoming barriers such as weather, holidays, and pilot shortages, to ensure that Head Start programs receive fresh, high quality produce. Tim and Lisa share information and recipes to help customers prepare unfamiliar vegetables. Meyers Farm has been a true asset to our Head Start programs and communities in the YK Region. Their efforts have helped to reduce food shortages in rural Alaska while increasing awareness about the nutritional value and sustainability of local agriculture. For these reasons, we believe Meyers Farm is well deserving of the Head Start 2019 Humanitarian of the Year Award. - Jennie Grunert

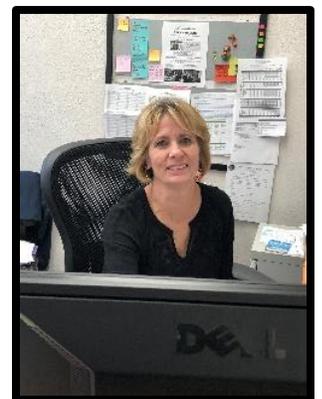
# *Leadership Award of the Year*

## **Lisa Goneau-Danielson**



I am nominating Lisa Goneau-Danielson from RurAL CAP Head Start and Parents as Teachers for the AHSA Leadership Award.

Lisa is one of those leaders who did not start her career in early childhood with aspirations of being a supervisor or manager. She began as an employee where everyone around her saw her leadership qualities within her, before she saw them herself. I would define Lisa's leadership style as a leader with a servant's heart. She found her way onto the leadership track by working tirelessly to develop her team. Her end goal has been to guide these teams to have an others centered focus, meaning "What can we do for Head Start's children, families, and staff?"



Lisa has a long history with Head Start and Early Head Start. Her first position as a classroom teacher was in 1988 in Tok Alaska. She learned quickly through her work with children in the frigid north that there is no such thing as bad weather, but only bad clothing. During this phase of her career between 1988 and 1996 she started moving from her teaching role into a guiding role as an Education and Disabilities Coordinator.

From 1996 to 2001 she moved with her family down to Coeur d'Alene Idaho to work with North Idaho College Head Start. During this time she was on the cutting edge of Early Head Start programming. Her program received a Wave 2 Early Head Start grant making her EHS program one of the first Early Head Start programs in the country.

With the new skillsets acquired in Idaho, she moved back to Alaska to continue her long career with RurAL CAP Head Start and Early Head Start. In 2002 she became an Education Coordinator serving classroom teaching staff across the state. RurAL CAP's leadership staff quickly saw her leadership potential and asked her to run their Anchorage Child Development Center in 2006. The Child Development Center Manager position was the position that quickly grew Lisa into the strong leader she is today. Lisa found herself drinking from the fire hose learning municipality and state regulations, the ins and outs of State and Tribal child-care assistance, and the never ending demand of maintaining an early childhood facility.

In 2009 another great opportunity came available for Lisa through the Parents as Teachers Program. Due to her strong knowledgebase in Early Head Start she was asked to move into the role of Parents as Teachers State Coordinator, a statewide position within the Parents as Teachers National Office network. In this position she was the State Liaison between Parents as Teachers Programs statewide, Early Head Start programs using the Parents as Teachers model, and the Parents as Teachers National Center. In this position she offered training and technical assistance to Early Head Start and Parents as Teachers grantees across the state. She also developed strategic alliances with other early childhood programs, the State, and with other National agencies. During this time she played a key role in educating our State officials on the benefits of in-home early childhood programming. Educating stakeholders on the benefits of programming for children 0-3 year old was not always an easy task, but Lisa never shied from the challenge.

In 2012 she was promoted into the role of Parents as Teachers Supervisor which continued to build her leadership foundation for administrating home visiting programs. In 2017 Lisa was promoted into her current split role as Manager overseeing the Parents as Teachers program and Regional Manager overseeing three Head Start sites in the Kuskokwim geographical area.

In Lisa's current position it is easy to see the immediate impacts she has made within the programs she serves. One of her greatest strengths is her adaptability. No matter what program she finds herself in, she finds a way to thrive in that position. As the state and federal landscape of funding ebbs and flows Lisa embraces the changes and finds positive ways to hike her programs and staff back to the top. Currently, in her position working with the communities along the Kuskokwim River, Lisa has been received with open arms. Site staff describe her as a "can do" person, noting that she tirelessly works to search out solutions, and that she supports them through challenging issues where other supervisors have struggled in the past. She knows that Head Start and Early Head Start is not a one size fits all approach. Lisa's approach to education and family development is well rounded. She understands the diversity within the organization of RurAL CAP and helps communities to embrace their unique cultures and values.

If you were to ask Lisa if she saw herself as a leader she would probably say "not really." But everyone who spends any time around her can tell within a few moments with her that she is a visionary, with a strong professional network, and a "you can't stop us from succeeding" attitude. I would like to personally thank Lisa for her long commitment to RurAL CAP, Head Start, Early Head Start, Parents as Teachers, and to the families all across Alaska. It is leaders like Lisa who make us want to get up, drink our coffee, and make a difference in somebody's life every day! -Drew Hansen

# *Assistant or Deputy Director of the Year*

## **Cindy Bergstrom**



Please accept this nomination for Cindy Bergstrom for the Assistant or Deputy Director of the Year Award. As a Center Coordinator, Cindy is the supervisor for center staff and responsible for education, health, transportation, nutrition, and safety.

Cindy Bergstrom has been in a leadership role with our agency since July 2017. She quickly learned the role and responsibility of a Center Coordinator and has helped the staff at her center work together as a team to provide quality services and succeed at our mission of making a difference. When you walk into Cindy's Meadow Lakes Center, you immediately feel the strong level of engagement the staff have to providing high quality services to children and families and the staff's appreciation and support of each other. They are a great team, are willing to do whatever it takes, and they do it joyfully. Since Cindy has joined the Meadow Lakes team, her center has had the lowest staff turnover rate than any other center.

Her center is the first one where all of the Associate Educators have a Child Development (CDA) Credential. She is an excellent supervisor and coach. She finds out where each of her staff are in their performance and professional development and helps them develop plans to increase their knowledge and skills and move forward in their professional development. She does this with a genuine desire to help staff learn and grow that is evident to everyone - she cares and it shows.

In 2018, Cindy took over the leadership role of Chairperson of our agency Safety Committee and started the huge task of re-writing our emergency preparedness plan. She has guided us through the stages of developing and drafting a new plan that would be more streamlined, includes all the relevant possibilities we need to be prepared for, and ensures it is presented in a way that is easy to understand and follow. The work the Safety Committee completed prior to the November 30 earthquake helped each center and the agency is better prepared.

Cindy is also very active in our Staff Wellness Committee and ensures her staff are kept informed about wellness opportunities that are provided. Helps facilitate our Education Advisory Committee and is a strong member of our Programs Team. She communicates very effectively and can quickly help build consensus of a new idea or procedure. She has a logical mind, a caring heart, and a graceful way of including others in the discussion and decision making. For these reasons, I hope you will choose Cindy Bergstrom as the recipient of the Assistant or Deputy Director of the Year Award. Thank you for your consideration. -Cathy Gruver

As anyone walks into our center Cindy Bergstrom is the first person to greet you. Her warmth and sweet charm makes our families and staff feel so warm and welcome. Her positive attitude reflects throughout the center. She is always the first person to ask how we are and if there's anything she can help us with. There isn't anything that she will ask us to do that she won't do herself. From cleaning, organizing, shoveling snow, and even knocking down ice off the building, portraying the attitude of safety First. There is no job that Cindy refuses to do. She often gives breaks to staff, rides the bus, and even helps out with janitorial jobs, all done with a professional manner and a beautiful smile. Cindy is respected throughout our agency and is on several committees. She continues to offer her hand and her experience where ever she goes. CINDY is by far one of the most approachable center coordinators by being non-judgmental and always making staff feel respected with her honesty and fairness.

That being said I would like to nominate this amazing woman for the Assistant or Deputy Director of the Year award. -  
Cindy Deschamps

Cindy is the kindest, sweetest, and most amazing person I have ever worked with/for. I couldn't ask for a better boss, not only do I and all of my fellow co-workers enjoy coming to work every day but our students do to. She is more than just a center coordinator; she is the heart and soul of our center.

Cindy is amazing, kind, and understanding. I have never worked with anyone more understand and caring then her. Not only does she make sure every student is taken care of but her staff as well. I have never met anyone more deserving of this award than her. She is the reason I want to teach, she is the best role model I could ask for.

Cindy is the most dedicated and hard working person I have ever met. Not only does she show compassion to all of her staff but to all of the children and Families as well. I couldn't think of anyone more deserving of this award. -Jennifer Hoffman

## *Bus Driver of the Year*

### **Matt Jones**



I am pleased to nominate Matt Jones for AHSA's bus driver of the year award.

Matt has been a bus driver for CCS Early Learning Chugiak center for the past 3 years.

Matt goes the extra mile to ensure that all the children have a safe and enjoyable ride to and from school each and every day. Matt knows all the children and parents by name and greets each and every one of them with "good morning" or "have a great day".

All the children on his bus route make and give him pictures they have drawn. He makes each child feel special because he hangs their art work in his bus and tells them thank you for the picture. Matt has downloaded the children's favorite songs to play during their bus ride. During their bus ride they are all singing and having fun. One of the children's favorite songs is Five Little Monkeys and Matt will play that song for him when he notices he is getting restless. I have filled in on the bus several times and it is such a joy to see how much the children enjoy their bus ride.

Matt has volunteered many times around the center. He has helped us out during our family events at the center. He has moved tables and chairs, set tables, helped children that did not have family members that came to the event, and helped the teachers in any way he could. This year Matt took the lead for our Father Involvement. He led our father night out on several occasions this year.

He heard us talking about a fundraiser to help raise money to build a new storage shed on the playground. Matt said he his son was an Eagle Scout looking to do a project and he would ask him if that would be a project he would like to do. I am happy to say we are getting our much need new shed. Matt has sent other Eagle Scout to our center to do their Eagle Scout projects. We have new bookshelves for our centers main library.

Thank you for considering Matt Jones for AHSA's Bus Driver of the year. I can't think of another individual that is more deserving of this award. All the staff, children and families at the Chugiak site has enjoyed working with Matt. Once again it is my pleasure to nominate Matt Jones as AHSA's bus driver of the year. -Bonnie Monson

## *Cook of the Year*

### **Torri Carlson**



It is my pleasure to nominate Torri Carlson as AHSA's Cook of the Year.

Torri puts a lot of love and time into the food she prepares for the children. The children really enjoy her cooking and love to be the one that gets to go to the kitchen for more food. Torri greets them by name and has taught them to say please and thank you as she gives a warm "you're welcome" back.



Torri 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 with cooking projects, steps in the classroom when an extra hand is needed, shops for some of the teacher's supplies. She was so happy to put on the Clifford costume to help us in our celebration of winning the Scholastic \$10,000 book give away.

Torri has gotten to know some the parents. Her gracious demeanor and her mad cooking skills have won their hearts. 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.

Torri loves to cook and she loves her tiny kitchen especially since it was recently renovated. We appreciate Torri's flexibility, dependability and her dedication. She is very deserving of this award.

## *School District Collaboration Award*

### **Lucy Hope, MSBSD – Student Support Services**



Lucy Hope has been an outstanding example of School District/Head Start collaboration for many years. As the (soon to retire) Director of Student Support Services, Lucy has been the go-to-person for CCS Early Learning. She has helped us to write, implement, and refine MOA's; helped us streamline services to children with disabilities; helped us to secure space for our Sutton Head Start program; assisted in grant writing; and most recently helped us to secure space in Valley Pathways High School as we transition those Sutton slots back into the community of Palmer. This list goes on and on - as does Lucy's obvious belief that there should be no divide between the services delivered by a school - and the services delivered by the local community Head Start program. We have been very fortunate to partner together with her to serve young children and their families - and we ask that you consider honoring her with the School District Collaboration award! -Mark Lackey



# *Early Head Start Teacher of the Year*

## **Chante'e Miller**



Chante'e is, simply put, one of the most amazing teachers I have ever had the pleasure to work with. Chante'e comes in every single day ready and excited about working with the children in her class. She ensures that she creates lesson plans to scaffold development in each child, she constantly encourages the children to branch out and experiment. Chante'e puts heart and soul into everything she does with the children she works with. She develops close relationships that are full of trust and love, and you can tell that each child in her class absolutely adores her. She radiates happiness and excitement to her classroom. Chante'e genuinely wants each child in her room to have a happy and fun day of learning. She takes so much pleasure from seeing children accomplish their goals, that you can see how proud she is of each one of them, and they can see it too.

Chante'e takes an active part of the centers community, encouraging parents, and participating in staff committees. She constantly checks in with the coworkers around her for thoughts and ideas on how to make the center better, how to improve it for those that work and learn there. She truly wants her center and classroom to be the absolute best, and she works hard to work towards that goal. She is constantly reevaluating and reassessing to make sure that she is confident in her opinions and her practices.

Additionally, Chante'e is a pillar of strength to her coworkers. She is there for them, no matter how much she is going through, she is always willing to sit and help a coworker. Chante'e had to miss two and a half months of work due to her knee surgery, and still had restrictions when she came back, but just wanted to be back at work and with her students. While she was gone, she still thought about her class, and reached out to the teachers to see what support they needed. When she returned with her restrictions, she drove back into the work that she could with a passion rivaled by none, excited to be back where she belongs. We need more teachers like Chante'e, those that are willing to go above and beyond the job description, those excited about connecting with their students, and those that are the best friends to work with. That is why Chante'e deserves to be recognized as the EHS Teacher of the Year. -Allison Mae Webster

I am pleased to nominate Chante'e Miller for EHS Teacher of the Year. Chante'e has put great effort into her personal growth in her time here with CCS. She began working in the classroom as an aid and diligently obtained her Infant Toddler CDA and became a Lead Teacher. She assisted newly hired classroom staff in our EHS expansion, going from two to six classrooms. Her skills are instrumental in providing a nurturing environment for infants and toddlers. Her play based learning approach allows for the children in her room to learn and grow based on their individual needs. She works in partnership with her co-teachers to build their teaching relationships so children have a maximized learning environment. Every time I am in her classroom, she exhibits compassion for each child. I have also observed her communication with the families she works with. She professionally conveys important information about the progress children are making to the families. You can see that there are trusting relationships with her and the parents. I highly recommend Chante'e to receive EHS Teacher of the Year. -Tabatha Peterson

# *Community Advocate of the Year*

## **The United Methodist Church of Chugiak**



I am pleased to nominate The United Methodist Church of Chugiak as AHSA's Community Advocate of the Year.

The United Methodist Church of Chugiak has supported CCS Early Learning over the last 15 years. They have contributed Thanksgiving Baskets, Christmas present and food baskets, and Easter bags for our children and families for years. The last 10 years they have increased their efforts in supporting our families in need. They have provided schools supplies (backpacks, glue, paper, pencils, and folders) for families to start school. Winter gear is bought for many of our families who are struggling to get the proper gear for their family. They bring extra winter gear for us to use to have at the center for children who forgot their gear or if it has gotten wet. They bring in food donations year around for our families who are having trouble making ends meet so we have a center food bank.

The church has helped families get needed furniture. They also donated \$25.00 gift cards – for gas/food from Fred Meyers. The church has made it easy for CCS Early Learning to meet the needs of many of our families without having to send them to other agencies. They are very generous and willing to help wherever there is a need with our families.

Thank you for considering The United Methodist Church of Chugiak as AHSA's Community Advocate of the Year. I can't think of another organization that is more deserving of this award. They have helped so many families in our community of the past years. Once again it is my pleasure to nominate United Methodist Church of Chugiak as AHSA's Community Advocate of the Year. -Bonnie Monson

# *Assistant Teacher of the Year*

## **Donna McKay**



Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (Tlingit & Haida) Head Start is pleased to nominate Donna McKay as Assistant Teacher of the Year. Donna is a dedicated Head Start (HS) educator from Wrangell, Alaska; and, for the past 27-years, Donna has gifted us her teaching talents.

Donna grew up and raised her 6 children in Wrangell, Alaska. As a loving mother, auntie, and grandmother, Donna's impact starts with her small, southeast Alaskan community but radiates throughout the region and across generations.

Donna's love of her Tlingit culture, nature and children informs her culturally-relevant and holistic approach which she brings to HS each day. As a Tlingit woman, Donna was always going to be teacher by ensuring that her culture continued on with the next generation. But early in her life, Donna knew she wanted to teach young children as a career. She began taking classes at Mt. Hood Community College and obtained her Associates Degree in Early Childhood Education from the University of Alaska—Southeast. Donna is a gifted educator in and out of the classroom.

Approximately twenty-three years ago, Donna wrote, "I believe children learn through play and hands-on experiences..." and still today her infectious creativity encourages children to use their imaginations. Many times, she can be seen on the playground with a group of children encircling her as they all intently, yet gently, examine a bug or worm. She facilitates careful exploration then reminds the children to return the creature back into its natural environment. During this year's first week of school, Donna let the children lead their own learning and together they transformed the classroom into a fire department. Donna encouraged the children to dress in firemen gear, build their own fire trucks, witnessed the group choose one child as the lead fire marshal (coincidentally, his dad is a fireman).

Donna encourages the love of music, movement and poetry, ultimately her enthusiasm draws children and once-students-now-parents, again, unwittingly into her lessons. For a teacher to gain a child's trust and awe is amazing. But igniting and relighting the love of learning for Wrangell Head Start families is a beautiful power Donna holds within her heart. She has once noted, "...a program that fosters an environment set-up to promote problem-solving skills [can lead] toward [children] managing their own behaviors." I believe Donna's creative-based teaching style, builds our children's self-worth and self-esteem.

Yet, from a management perspective, Donna has consistency ensured a stable teaching team. She is a team player, often able to adapt to changes that arise without the program. She has been a Teacher Aide/Bus Driver. When the community's and parents' need for a bus changed, so did Donna's position; now, Donna is a Teacher Aide. When the need to assume more cleaning tasks arose, she took those duties on with a serving spirit. At the start of 2018/19 school year, the Lead Teacher needed to tend to unexpected personal matters and Donna supportively stepped into the Lead Teacher role. Whatever and whenever Tlingit & Haida Head Start needs help, Donna answers the call.

Gunalchéesh, Donna, for being a beautiful part of the Tlingit & Haida Head Start family for the past 27-years. -Amber Frommhertz

# *Cultural Awareness Award*

## **Victoria Johnson**



Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (Tlingit & Haida) Head Start is pleased to nominate Victoria Johnson for the Cultural Awareness Award. Victoria has brought joyous, hand-on experiences to Tlingit & Haida Head Start (HS) classrooms for seven-years. Her enthusiasm for life, her love of learning and teaching, and her passion for Tlingit culture is easily embraced by Head Start teachers and children.

Victoria has sparked the love of Tlingit language and culture in the lives of our young HS children and teachers. She comes with knowledge that she has gathered from our Elders and openly shares these gifts with the children and teacher. Each week Victoria visits the classrooms to support the children as they learn about their moiety, clan relationships, language, songs, drumming and art.

Victoria has also taught HS children about the value of culture by teaching them how to grow their own foods. She has worked side by side with HS children and teachers to plant Tlingit potatoes and vegetable in our community garden. Parents, teachers and children worked side by side preparing the ground, planting, harvesting and enjoying the fruits of their labor.

Victoria has brought Tlingit head band & bib kits to HS family nights to teach parents how to create their own regalia for their children. These headbands and bibs were used for performing and during end of the year ceremonies. She would often be asked to take the lead as children drum, dance and singing a traditional Tlingit entrance song into these special events.

Victoria has been teaching Tlingit culture for over 20 years in a variety of way. She started teaching at a summer culture camp this opened the doors for her to Juneau school district Indian Studies Program teaching children kindergarten through High school. Presently she is working at Goldbelt Heritage Foundation (GHF). In this she has had opportunities to continue to learn more about the language from our Elders. She states, by working with HS teachers, I learned what kind of language was needed, by translating some songs from English to Tlingit, and lessons to help keep the Tlingit perspective of the language. GHF mission is to have a Language Pathway in the Juneau School District from Pre-school – 12th Grade”.

A quote from Stacy Roberts, a Lead Teacher, “Victoria has shared a lot of cultural knowledge with our students and their family members. She encourages unity, awareness, language, stories, respect, and dedication with our students in our classroom. Every Thursday the students welcome her into our classroom with joy and excitement. Our students have learned a lot of language through songs, repetition, stories, and the silliness Victoria adds to her lessons with us. We are blessed to have her come into our classroom weekly or join us on our Turf for Tots Field trips”.

At Tlingit & Haida Head Start, we love Victoria and hope you consider her for the Cultural Awareness Award. -Amber Frommherz

# *Teacher of the Year*

## **Heather Ayd**



Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (Tlingit & Haida) Head Start is pleased to nominate Heather Ayd for Teacher-of-the-Year. Heather has been with Tlingit & Haida Head Start for three-years. This upcoming school year will be Heather's fourth and final year with us; as an active duty Coast Guard family, they will be transferring from Juneau, AK to their next station. Though a temporary transplant to Southeast Alaska (SE AK), Heather has been warmly received by her Head Start staff and families.

She arrived as a seasoned early childhood teacher who worked in various programs correlating to her husband's duty stations across the east coast. Heather started at Tlingit & Haida with an early childhood framework that honored the child's parent as the first teacher. Though Heather was new to Juneau, new to SE AK indigenous cultures, and new to Head Start, Heather knew her best resources in setting up her class were her teacher aides and her parents. Whether Heather knew it or not, at that time, she was subscribing to culturally-relevant and place-based resources which, I believe, set teacher-family relationship off on a reciprocal partnership.

Heather's second year was the first time most transportation services were removed, being housed in an elementary school set out-the-road I expected her class enrollment and attendance would suffer. Typically, our Head Start families prefer stand-alone classes so being in a school district building added a layer for the families to penetrate in order to participate. However, parents would request her class specifically; word of mouth travels fast and folks were lining up so that their child could have Ms. Heather as their child's teacher.

She and her team have worked to make defined learning centers rich in literacy and culture. Her students sign-in and answer the Question of the Day by Pocket of Preschool each day. Questions ranged from identifying their feelings, "Do you feel happy today?" to introduce letter recognition, "Does your name start with the letter A?" She notes that, "[students] catch-on quick" and learn that their voice matters. Heather and her team evolved the Question of the Day to fit her students. They incorporated Tlingit language for yes and no. They also translated the activity so that her Spanish-speaking child/family could participate as well. By the end of the year, her student knew how to sign their name and developed a strong understanding of voting and, later, graphing.

Heather is Tlingit & Haida Head Start's best curriculum developer. Unfortunately, when Heather assumed her classroom, our program-issued curriculum was not in the best of shape. That reality coupled with the fact that she knew her students needed activities that challenged their cognitive abilities led her to Teacher Pay Teachers. Heather and her team customized supplemental activities grounded in the student's immediate interests. Her most popular week was the time the class discovered dinosaurs. Despite the fact that dinosaurs were not a huge SE AK reality, she followed the children's interest. Her classroom now has binders upon binders of vetted themes and activities worthy-enough to reintroduce the upcoming school years.

Heather's families have a very high volunteer rate relative to the program. This is due to the fact that Heather has been able to secure family helpers to attend local fields to the local soccer turf each month, DIPAC fish hatchery and beach days. Even as she arranged guest speakers, such as our locally-famous story teller, Brett Dillingham, parents are invited so they co-experience literacy development with their child. Many parents offered their skills to build the most beautiful

dramatic play centers throughout the year—from a gingerbread house, to an igloo, then restaurant, play house, ice cream shop, greenhouse, and butterfly house. Heather’s ability to engage families has led to a very active Parent Committee which is minimally facilitated by Heather! Over the years they have teamed to hold car washes and bake sales to help fund holiday family fun nights.

Although, I am not Heather’s class every day, I am positive her students (and families) had a blast but learned a lot. I am able to see the rich lesson plans, beautiful pictures shared with families, review the [assessed] gains, and hear the praises from parents. I hope to experience more and excited to see what she, and her team, will bring next year. With honor and gratitude, I nominate Heather Ayd, Lead Teacher of MRCS Head Start, for the Teacher-of-the-Year award.

Gunalchéesh/Háw’aa/Gracias/Thank you, Heather, for your all early childhood dedication! -Amber Frommherz

# *Content Area Specialist of the Year*

## **Jennifer Russell**



Jennifer Russell has been with TCC Head Start for 3 years as the Education and Disabilities Coordinator. Jennifer came to us through the University of Alaska Fairbanks with a Master's degree in Education. She is currently pursuing her Doctorate in Education with an emphasis on Indigenous studies. Jennifer has brought many new ideas to her position, and has been responsible to ensure all staff, whether center based or home based are using the curriculum and assessment tools to fidelity. Jennifer has also collaborated with one of our school districts to provide guidance and support for their preschool teachers using the same tools.

Jennifer is always a teacher at heart; she is more than willing to help teach others, and she continues to instruct in her position as adjunct faculty at the University.

One of Jennifer's passions is to incorporate more culture and culturally appropriate activities into both our center based and our home-based programs. This has been achieved by incorporating the 22 Athabascan Values into our family activities and socializations.

Jennifer had a steep learning curve when she joined Head Start due to all of the Performance standards; but she is embracing her new position and striving to learn as much as she can about the dual roles in Education and Disabilities. She is an advocate for children in trying to secure both Part C and Part B services and to ensure they are received through the Infant Learning Program or through any one of our seven school districts.

Jennifer is a hard worker, and an encourager. She is kind and generous with her resources, her time and her talents. It is a privilege to recognize a co-worker whom I have come to know and respect, and who is now the Acting Head Start Manager! Congratulations, Jennifer on this well-deserved award! -Jill Ridenour

# *Maintenance Staff of the Year*

## **Bert Sega**



We have an amazing Facility and Transportation Specialist Mr. Bert Sega I would love to nominate as Maintenance Staff of the Year to thank him for all his hard work and dedication. He has been with us these past two school years and has left his stamp on the agency in many positive ways. He started as a parent in the program and that is the best part of Head Start is our ability to hire parents.

Our locations are all over Anchorage from East to South side of town and have multiple program options, 4 being directly in Anchorage School District Elementary Schools. We rent most of our facilities so we work with Bert and the property owners. Some locations such as mine had janitorial services built into our rental agreements whereas most have KCI Janitorial staff that Bert supervises. If we are short staff on Janitorial, he steps in whenever needed. I always joke with Bert that just between the 2 sites here in Mt.View we could guarantee him job retention no problem because of all the maintenance needed!

With Bert being a parent of the program, you can tell he cares more than most would because he never does the bare minimum. He is thoughtful and considerate always asking for our input and feedback of services. He has gone above and beyond, from pulling the staff toilet and replacing it to cleaning the drains. Although these are things we normally contract a plumber for, he took it upon himself in spite of his busy schedule in order to get the job done faster and save KCI money. This thought process led to Bert acquiring a power washer that we are getting a lot use out of and saving money by washing our own buses and outdoor play areas. He also built a shed for one of our ASD sites to help with storage issues. I love that Bert checks regularly with me about cleaning our classroom carpets, and about the janitorial service. He has worked many late nights and weekends too, putting sweat equity ensuring my facility is clean and safe for the children and staff.

Bert's official title is Facility and Transportation Specialist so he wears many hats. He picks up our lunch daily from our contractor and delivers to several off sites. He also delivers inner office mail we send throughout the agency with lunch delivery. He monitors our busing system. He collects copies of fire & earthquake drill reports monthly for MOA inspection. He conducts KCI Safety/Sanitation Checklists at all centers 3 times a year. He provides information to management regarding compliance issues at each center. He consults with MOA Child Care Licensing Specialist to ensure compliance and provide information as requested. He ensures all centers meet MOA fire code regulations and provides follow up as needed. This is no easy task since many of our rentals are in older buildings and we have limited control over water temperature or other factors that could lead to non-compliances based on MOA standards.

We use the computer system Child Plus where we place work orders for Bert to complete. I just logged in and since he has started here, he has completed almost 150 formal requests! Because of his skill, dedication and belief in our mission, we are seeing high quality maintenance across the agency. He is truly deserving of Maintenance Staff of the Year Award, I do not know what we would do without his smiling face and big heart! Thank you for your consideration, Selina Ellis CD/FA.

# *Family Advocate of the Year*

## **Jessica Loaiza**



Jessica C. Loaiza started her journey at FNA Head Start 0-5 on 3/12/15 when she enrolled her precious child. Since day one she was always willing to work in partnership with the Educators and Support staff to best meet the needs of her child. Jessica did a job search with her Family Advocate and was very interested in becoming an Educator at Head Start. I recall when Jessica has applied for an Associate Educator position at FNA Head Start 0-5, she got hired on 8/17/15 and not only I got the opportunity to know her as a parent but had the pleasure to work with her. Jessica started working on her Professional Development Goals, obtained her CDA after 6 months of hire and got a promotion for a Primary Educator Position then became a Family Advocate.

I became her supervisor in August 2017, when I came on board to McKinley Site Ms. Jessica was very welcoming. She took the initiative of guiding me through their routines and even introduced me to the families and children she serves at that point. I rely on her in many tasks because she is always hands on learning, communicates positively with others and have great problem solving skills. Ms. Jessica is a reliable person who is always willing to learn and strive for the best while partner with others to meet the needs of the families we serve. If a situation arises Jessica promptly communicates to her supervisor, coworkers, then goes above and beyond to achieve positive results.

Jessica is currently a Family Advocate that goes above and beyond her duties by partnering with Educators and Families to help children transition from Early Head Start to Head Start smoothly. She has been working very hard to learn her new role in our program. While covering in classrooms Jessica uses teacher talk throughout the day to communicate effectively with her peers about the children and class needs. She also uses Active Supervision because she recognizes that Educators need to have children safe at all time by positioning strategically themselves to make sure they have children in sight and sound but can also respond quickly to their needs (watch, count and listen the children at all times).

I am pleased to nominate Ms. Jessica C. Loaiza for the AHSA Family Advocate of the Year Award. As someone who worked and supervised her closely; I have seen numerous cases of her ability to build positive and strong relationships with children, families and staff that will impact them lifelong. I have for quite some time been inspired by her consistency and hardworking attitude like when she volunteered to aid two Associates develop their lesson plans as a team using Creative Curriculum. Her desire to cultivate professional growth by joining the Alaska Seed Registry (SEED) to track professional development and becoming part of the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development to enhance her skills through their eLearning platform. She is also always willing to work in partnership with the Family Advocates, Education Staff, Education and Disabilities Coordinator, Family Wellness Consultant and her Supervisor to meet the needs of the children and families served.

She has been working with FNA Head Start 0-5 for over 2 years and has worn many hats within our organization. Currently Jessica C. Loaiza is a hardworking single mother, a Head Start Parent, an FNA Head Start 0-5 Family Advocate and a UAF Student. Through professional development Jessica is going to become a powerful and successful leader in the Early Childhood Field. In the event that AHSA is looking for unrivaled applicants with record of accomplishment for this award Jessica C. Loaiza is a brilliant decision. She has reliably shown a capacity to meet people's high expectations every time. - Francisca Charriez-Miranda

# *Head Start Mother of the Year*

## **Natasha Hadnot**



I would like to nominate Natasha Hadnot for mother of the year 2019. I have had the honor and privilege of being Natasha's family advocate for the past 3 years while her family has been stationed here in Fairbanks at FT WW.

Natasha's energy along with her bouncy, happy, lift everyone up and keep smiling attitude lights up our Head Start. When the Hadnot family moved here Natasha literally knew no one. She actively engaged us at Head Start to get her children enrolled in our center based and home based options. Natasha jumped right in to help in the classroom and kitchen. She spent hours learning about Head Start even sitting and reading the then 2000 plus performance standards and child care licensing rules so that as a volunteer she knew why and what the procedures were as a parent.

I have watched as Natasha has tackled trainings and deployments with the power of Super woman. I have watched her acknowledge how hard it is for her at the same time lifting up other families.

I stood in awe this past year while she was pregnant with twins and watched Natasha go out on post and recruit for our Head Start program. When you talk with her, you can tell her passion for her family, children and our program are unstoppable. She literally took me by the hand after one of our home visits and took me to each of the neighbors and younger military families she was talking to in regards to Head Start program and sat down with us. She supported each of these families as they enrolled not only in our program but other programs and resources in town.

Natasha is an active parent who attends every event, cheers the loudest and longest not only for her children but all children.

She has been working the past 2 years as a crossing guard at her local elementary school to help support her family as they prepared to welcome their twins. When Natasha was sent to Anchorage for medical care, her main concern even when in flight was to contact me to excuse her child from school. As we address issues that she needed, her concern was making sure that her children and husband, who was away at training, be supported. She kept telling me she was fine even though I knew she left with the clothes on her back, no ID and was in the hospital hundreds of miles from family and friends.

I have watched Natasha grow so much as a parent, not only in parenting skills but as a super mom. She jumps at the opportunity to serve others and help others. She is first to engage a new family at social events and to welcome everyone. If being busy with 5 children 2 who are twins and under a year old with special challenges; Natasha also finds the time to serve in various positions in the community; she currently is serving her 2nd year on our Policy council.

As her advocate I have had the privilege of watching Natasha grow in her leadership skills and her ability to execute plans and ideas. She is always willing to work hard and open to suggestions. I have watched her take on school district services for her children, engage and support her child's Head Start teachers and advocate in the best interest of her children. Recently the twins have had some medical challenges and Natasha asked what to do after repeatedly vocalizing to the doctors her concerns and not getting the results she wanted or needed. We came up with a plan for her to research the options available for the possible medical problem and to physically go in to the doctor with what she wanted and how she wanted it done. I watched as she advocated to the doctors the reasons why she and Daytric felt the way they did and the choices they made. I watched her use resources available to her and jump hoop after hoop to get the best care for their twin boys. The best part was when other medical professionals validated and told Natasha she was right along.

These few examples of who Natasha is as a Mother and wife do not do her justice. I cannot write enough to tell you how much she has grown , the world is open to her and her dreams.

Please except my nominations for Natasha for Mother of the year! -Angi Thomas

## *Head Start Director of the Year*

### **Katrina Nunemann**



I am pleased to nominate Katrina Nunemann for the Alaska Head Start Association Director of the Year Award. I have known Katrina for 9 years and have always found her intelligent, compassionate, efficient and resourceful. She is always willing to work in partnership with others to meet the needs of the children, families, staff and community partners. Her skills do not end with office work, she also projects a warm, joyful attitude to our families and coworkers. If any resource is needed and you ask Katrina she goes above and beyond to provide you useful reliable information that will not only benefit one child but the whole family or the whole Early Childhood Division.

Katrina has worn many hats in our organization, she started as a Home Base Coordinator, then she became the Family Partnership Coordinator and currently she is been our Early Childhood Division Program Director for over a year. She has made many changes in our program to benefit everyone. She is a true believer of research based practices, using National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning Center (NCQTL) suites & Early Childhood Learning Knowledge Center (ECLKC) for staff professional development. She always uses Head Start Performance Standards as well as current reliable researches to take data informed decisions for our program. She strives to have a quality program and she has partnered with Learn & Grow who is Alaska's Quality Recognition and Improvement System (QRIS) and with the Alaska System for Early Education Development (SEED). She is always encouraging all the Managers and Coordinators to work with their staff in their Professional Development and the use of the resources provided by the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development (DEED) because she understands that the more knowledge the staff possess the better services they will provide to our future generations.

Katrina works very hard every day to ensure we are in compliance with many regulations. She writes grants to secure funding needed to continue providing services to 303 children in the Fairbanks North Star Borough while she also oversees around 78 employees. During the month of May Katrina was working on a grant on top of that she was making sure all our classrooms had coverage, staff needs were met, attend Policy Council Meetings, she covered for a Site Manager when absent and she also cooked for 52 children and staff while the cooks were on training. I have witnessed how she is always willing to support the program regardless of her huge work load with a positive attitude.

It is a pleasure to work with someone who is always willing to share knowledge, someone who works with passion and is reliable. I have witness how she resolve conflicts and handle difficult situations with remarkable patience and admirable tact. In the community, she goes out of her way always advocating for the children and families we serve. She loves people, works very hard, and always lift the spirits of those around her. I strongly believe that this characteristic represents all that is good within Head Start and I am delighted to nominate her for the Director of the Year Award. - Francisca Charriez-Miranda

# All 2019 AHSA Award Nominees

Gara Bridwell	Makia Daniels
Renee Kauffman	Selina Ellis
Sandy Summit	Jennifer Pitzke
Summer Frank	Ashley Burgess
Alicia Field	Alaska Center for Children and Adults
Amethyst T.	Ginger Ameigh
Lizbet Hernandez	Devon Barber
Elizabeth Locklar	Jessica Lingley
Rebecca Patapoff	Wells Fargo
Jordon Izan	Dina Contreras from Salmon Room
Kadie Refredi	Charlotte Miller
Clara Bird	Jeremy Agee
Jolene Dempsey	Jessica Fox
Cindy Inouye	FNA Facilities crew - Eric Fitzgerald, Darren Wright, David Stepp, and Mark Dorland
Tundra Paulsen	Kimberly Huntington
Cook Inlet Native Head Start	Mai Yia Yang
Sao Vang	Bonnie Monson
Shirley Farmer	Ben Schwister
Cynthia Inouye	Jerri Lomax
Lynette Cooper	Ilina Saucedo
Vida Conway	Mai Yia Yang
Destiny Payne (Softa)	Jeanny Manilay
Karl Greer	Nicole Kofoid and The Savageau's
Frani Guttin	Toni Rae Osiecki
Sheree Titus	Mary Willey
Rebecca Larson	Rebekah Jackson
Ariel Miller	Poly A Chico Aceve