

# Alaska Head Start Association Awards of Excellence 2020



December 2020



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FAIRBANKS NATIVE  
ASSOCIATION



HEAD START  
0-5

## Head Start Father of the Year Niko Thompson



I would like to nominate Niko Thompson for Father of the Year Award for AHSA. Niko is an incredible dad.

Tragedy and hard times have happened for Niko and his daughter in the past few years. Working through agencies and resources Niko has strengthened his skills as a father and has overcome these life changing events. We at Head Start could not be more proud of the work he has put in and continues to put in. He actively participates in all parent teacher conferences, home visits, phone calls and meetings as needed.

**"WE AT HEAD START COULD NOT BE MORE PROUD OF THE WORK HE HAS PUT IN AND CONTINUES TO PUT IN"**

Niko is known to switch his work schedule to make sure his daughter is at events and her needs, hopes and desires are met. Niko actively sought out and participated in parenting classes such as Circle of Security and partnered with family advocates and education team to help support him as his daughter learns self-regulation and the ability to process things.

Niko is quick to sit and eat breakfast or help other children in the Head Start classroom when he visits. Niko has found his voice with us as his daughter's first and best teacher and always speaks up in the best of interest of his child in meetings with us and collaborative meetings with others. He seeks out books to help with new ideas and takes the time to read through and reference them. He provides feedback to us if the suggestions and resources we provided are working or not.

nomination continued on back...



Niko tells us stories of his daughter "directing" or "teaching" them at home the Head Start way when it comes to dining and rules.

You can tell in his voice and face how proud he is of her and the skills she is learning. What we notice is that his daughter has the same look and sound when she talks of her dad to teachers and staff.

As a team at Head Start, we can't wait to see the heights his family will fly to because of his love and dedication; please consider him for Father of Year. -Angi Thomas





## Home Visitor of the Year Christi Morgan



Christi Myers has been my saving grace during this Pandemic. Christi is our Home Visitor through FNA. She is always guiding me as a parent to find new ways to help my child stay active. We interact with each other through zoom, she encourages me, keeps my motivation level up. Christi is always sending me links, e-mails, calls with different sorts of activities to keep my child engaged. It keeps my child active in a fun learning environment. Since FNA home visitation has been off limits due to the pandemic, Christi has always been kind, respectful, helpful, resourceful, and just an incredible person overall.

**"SHE GOES ABOVE AND BEYOND TO MAKE SURE  
WE HAVE EVERYTHING WE NEED"**

We are incredibly blessed to have Christi. My son adores her. He is always waiting for Christi at the door, asking when she will come back. He is always looking forward to our zoom meetings. He always makes sure Christi is added to family events (even though she doesn't know ) that's how much my son adores her. Since she is basically family to us. We have grown to adore her. She has been an incredible help.

We are beyond thankful for Christi for always helping us with our needs. She is always there for us every step of the way. She goes above and beyond to make sure we have everything we need. She always helps us find solutions to every problem. A wonderful encourager, loving person, and just the best human.

Thank you Christi for being there for us! -Jackelin Saavedra



## Administrative Support Staff of the Year Janet Milner



I am nominating Janet Milner for her exemplary performance as our Administrative Support Staff.

This is her second year with Head Start and she has been a very quick learner. She is very dependable and rarely misses work. She is very organized and efficient. She gets all assignments done in record time and sometimes has me, as her supervisor, looking for additional work for her! Janet is very positive and personable. She is the first face our staff and families see when they arrive at Head Start. She greets everyone by name and notices something special about each person all the time!

**"SHE GREETES EVERYONE BY NAME AND NOTICES  
SOMETHING SPECIAL ABOUT EACH PERSON  
ALL THE TIME"**

She has a great rapport with all the families in our program. Janet helps in the classrooms and on the bus whenever she is asked to, and is always positive and cheerful no matter what the task. Because of her ability to get things done, on numerous occasions she has assisted me in developing binders or files for tasks assigned to the Program Team. Just to mention a couple, she set up binders for our Self-Assessment and our Classroom Resource Binders.

She also sits on our Wellness Committee and keeps our Meadow Lakes Center informed of upcoming events and in-service activities, and often volunteers to do different things for this committee. Our Center keeps a sheet of "Kudos" noticing when they see others doing something positive or above and beyond the scope of their work and Janet often contributes many of those kudos for fellow staff members, noticing and thanking them for their hard work. When I have to be away from the office, Janet keeps me up-to-date on what is happening and checks in if something is needed. Janet is a delight to work with. She is truly an asset to our program.

-Cindy Bergstrom



## Community Advocate of the Year Jasmine Dirkes



I would like to take the time to nominate Jasmine Dirkes for the community advocate or humanitarian award.

Jasmine started out as a parent at CCS serving on both their parent committee and policy council's. She later went to work as bus driver for CCS. Over the past 10 years she has driven school busses for CCS as well as Kids Corp. Bettering the lives of the children and families with her bubbly compassionate attitude, singing with the kids telling them stories just to name a few. But that is not why I'm here to nominate her today.

### "JASMINE HAS A PASSION FOR HELPING THE STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES"

Jasmine is a massive advocate for not only many Head Start programs around Alaska but in the lower 48 as well, by doing everything from handing out informational packets, talking to families about the programs, decorating her car and bus with enrollment info, doing parades and handing out flyers to even driving families to apply for services on her own time. She has connected families with head start programs all over Alaska as well as in other states. When drivers have moved she's helped connect them with other programs so they can stay connected. And This is just the beginning.

She has attended rallies, and legislative meetings, written hundreds of emails and letters about budget cuts. Jasmine also spends 100s of hours donating her time as a volunteer with multiple head start programs. She is the first person I think of when thinking head start and I have never met a person so passionate about something. -Jervea

I want to nominate Jasmine Dirkes for the community advocate or the humanitarian award. As long as I have known Jasmine, she has spent a lot of her free time attending functions for CCS.

[nomination continued on back...](#)



For example, Jasmine spent several hours into getting ready for this thing where the fire department had a truck there, and Jasmine had a table that she spent her own time to put together an activity for the kids to be able to put together their own school bus. She drove a bus down so that the kids could get on and see the bus and interact with it.

Jasmine has spent the time to get to know the kids and know what helps with student management. She knows them just by seeing their names. She does her best to make each year a smooth transition year to year. Jasmine has a passion for helping the students and their families. She has spent hours getting the word about funding and enrollment into the general population.

If you ask any of her employees where her heart is, they would tell you that her heart is with the community. She helps drivers when they move as much as she can. She does the best she can to help the drivers that are moving with getting in touch with various resources and what not to help them succeed.

I can honestly say that Jasmine is the most caring and deserving of either of these awards. There is not another person that could ever deserve it more.

Sincerely,

Colleen McCracken





## *Beating the Odds Award*

### Mary Jimenez



This young mom has overcome many battles. Not long ago she got her children back from OCS and has gone back to and finished school. She is now supporting her family, working as a massage therapist. She is a great mom and her children come to us happy!

-Wendy

### **"SHE IS A FANTASTIC WOMAN AND ROLE MODEL"**

Mary is raising her children on her own, and has overcome a lot of struggles with three children under the age of three. Her twin boys have suffered many medical issues. She is successfully working hard to complete college on top of raising her family. Her children regularly attend and happily participate in school. The children are happy to be back with mom and have transitioned well. Mary is dedicated to having her children in school and then commutes to Anchorage, an hour drive away to go to school herself. She is a fantastic woman and role model and deserves this award. – Patricia Gilbert



## *Family Advocate of the Year* Sharon Bulawa



I am nominating Sharon Bulawa for Family Advocate of the year because of the great work she is doing with the families we serve. Sharon is not new to Head Start. She worked as a teacher for CCS Early Learning a number of years ago - and was a great teacher. However, she has now completed two years in the position of Family Advocate and has truly found a position that is obviously one she loves doing. She has been a strong support for the families at Meadow Lakes Head Start. She makes initial contact with all the families and then a midyear follow up, and regularly follows up as individual families need support or assistance.

**"SHARON IS A GREAT TEAM PLAYER, ALWAYS WILLING TO HELP WHEREVER NEEDED"**

She assists many families linking them with resources and will go with them to complete paperwork or assist them in making calls. Many families seek her out just to touch base, say hi, or follow up on previous contacts.

Sharon is also very involved with the children in our program. She spends time each week in each of our three classrooms. She is a natural with children, getting on their level and engaging them in activities or play. Sharon assists the Family Partnership Coordinator in preparing Family Events monthly. She often preps materials and sets up the room for events. Sharon is a great team player, always willing to help wherever needed. Sharon is dependable and reliable. She can be counted on to complete all tasks she is required to do or initiates. She is an amazing asset to our program. -Cindy

Sharon loves working with families and learning about her community so she can share her knowledge with others. She is the sunlight in so many families and coworkers lives and always has time to listen. She is an example for me to continue to learn and grow. -Tammy



## *Assistant or Deputy Director of the Year* Tabitha Peterson



Tabatha is a very compassionate person and is willing to help in any given situation. She is always thinking forward and what could we do to better help our families as well as the staff. She is a positive person and has a "can-do" attitude.

She has an overall understanding of Early Head Start/Head Start policy and procedures and helps staff develop that same understanding. She is open to questions and comments and never belittles or laughs at suggestions or comments.

**"SHE IS AN EXCELLENT LEADER AND INSPIRES STAFF TO ACCOMPLISH WHAT IS NECESSARY TO COMPLETE WHATEVER PROJECT IS PRESENTED"**

When materials are needed, Tabatha is always ready and willing to find the necessary resources, supplies, and equipment to complete the job or request. She is an excellent leader and inspires staff to accomplish what is necessary to complete whatever project is presented. She makes coming to work not work at all but enjoyment to be working together as an agency. - Lynn

Tabatha Peterson has worked for CCS Early Learning for 8 years, and has quickly moved into a leadership position. She originally started working for CCS Early Learning as a classroom teacher, moved on to become a Family Partnership Coordinator, then a Center Coordinator, then she took a tour of duty as our Mentor Coach/Trauma Smart Coach and a year and a half ago she was promoted to the position of Program Director.

nomination continued on back...



In Tabatha's current position she supervises all of our Center Based and Home Based services. Her time in this position has been characterized by change, change, and more challenging change. Luckily her work and training in Trauma Smart has served her very well! She does a fabulous job of making sure that she thoughtfully leads staff forward - fully understanding that all this change is hard - while approaching each challenge as an opportunity for growth and improvement. Her ability to prioritize, her strong communication skills, and her team building approach to leadership have been an amazing asset to CCS Early Learning.

During this time of COVID when there is no "right" decision - Tabatha has done an amazing job of staying on top of research, assisting us in adopting new safety guidelines, and calmly leading her team and our agency through this storm.

Please join me in honoring and thanking Tabatha for her contributions and hard work by recognizing her as the AHSA Assistant or Deputy Director of the Year. -Mark





## *Early Head Start Teacher of the Year* Erin Barrows



To say Erin should be teacher of for the year for EHS is an understatement. I have seen her level of professionalism since she began working at EHS. Her desire and ability to learn by going into the community is note worthy. She visited the physical therapist my daughter goes to, learning what works, with the guidance of the therapist with my daughter and applying this not only to her but to the other students as well. Erin is always on top of what needs to be done. She let's parents know what is coming up and encourages participation in the EHS program. She is a strong factor in EHS being family.

**"ERIN IS ALWAYS VOLUNTEERING HER HELP  
AND LOOKING FOR RESOURCES THAT WILL HELP  
OUR FAMILIES"**

As EHS is family she does what I would consider unexpected since COVID-19 became a barrier. Along with doing the home visits, my daughter loves them, she does a bed time reading for the kids on both Monday and Tuesday nights at 7pm using zoom. She has also posted readings on FaceBook. Erin has also worked individually with students because they miss her so. My daughter has spent one on one time with Erin and she, my daughter, is ecstatic. I know her classmates and how much they love their teacher, and when they get to see her in any format they are all ecstatic to see Ms Erin.

I can think of no better candidate for EHS Teacher of the year than Erin Barrows  
– Richard Savageau, EHS parent

I would like to nominate Erin Barrows Early Head Start Teacher if the Year Award. Erin has been with KCI 3 years, including two as an Early Head Start teacher.

nomination continued on back...



I'm so glad she transferred from our preschool because she is a perfect fit to work with infants and toddlers! Many staff, families and outside people such as our Mental Health Consultant have told Erin that she has a great personality and teaching style for our EHS age group.

Her families are highly involved in the classroom and program because she relays the message of them being important. She has built great relationships with all the EHS families and children. For example, when she had a child who attended Occupational & Physical Therapy and she went with the family to an appointment so she could see what the child was working on.

We started a new Master Teacher position this year and Erin was hesitant to apply since she is a full-day teacher and is in the classroom a majority of her day. With encouragement from her peers and myself she applied and was accepted to be a Master Teacher. She was already mentoring the other KCI EHS Teacher in program requirements and KCI EHS AT with her I/T CDA. She really wanted to be an asset for her mentees and really individualized her mentoring which helped her grow.

Erin is always volunteering her help and looking for resources that will help our families. During these past few months since Spring Break due to Covid-19 we have had to offer virtual services and deliver items to our families. Erin recorded herself reading stories, hosts zoom story meetings during the day and for bedtime for all the EHS families and FaceTimes with the families per their request. She monitored the families ensuring they know she's still here for them. She made art kits, food kits, diaper kits and delivered them to families.

Erin takes pride in her work, is great about giving input and feedback to enhance our program services and has definitely impacted many staff and families in her 3 years in Kids Corps. Thank you for your consideration, Selina Ellis



## *Assistant Teacher of the Year* Emily Cunningham



Emily has been with our agency for multiple years now and has worked at multiple sites since she is such an amazing supportive Assistant Teacher. 19-20 is the first school year I got to work directly as Emily's supervisor and the first year we combined EHS & HS as a birth-5 center in Mt. View where Emily is assigned to work.

Emily never missed work; she had a great work ethic which really helps with the continuity of care. Due to teacher turnover, Emily stepped up and was covering as preschool teacher for the first two months of school.

**"HER DEMEANOR AND CALMNESS HAS THE KIDS  
CONNECT WITH HER IN A WAY NO  
OTHER STAFF HAS"**

She completed Meet & Greet with the families and the first round of Parent/Teacher Conferences. She completed the 45 day requirements and helped support onboarding the new teacher.

We had 4 returning families and they were so excited Emily was still their teacher! One had a younger sibling who was really emotionally struggling at the start of the school year. Emily worked with him building his confidence, helping him make friends and helping with potty training. Initially the family was considering withdrawing the child and waiting until he was older but due to the progress they saw him make with Emily they kept him in our program and he is now thriving!

Emily shined in our CLASS observations and Mental Health Classroom observations. Her demeanor and calmness has the kids connect with her in a way no other staff has. It's amazing to see!

nomination continued on back...



Emily isn't afraid to address conflict and doesn't hesitate to have those hard conversations with families. She is great at setting boundaries while still having empathy. With her work experience and being a mom herself the families respond well to her.

We met with HR after winter break because Emily was ready to step up her professional development. She enrolled into college classes and encourage other staff to join her!

Emily is very deserving of the Assistant Teacher of the Year Award, I could go on and on about her wonderfulness and dedication to early childhood!

Thank you for your consideration,  
Selina Ellis CD





## Leadership Award Selina Ellis



I believe Selina Ellis deserves this award by the outstanding work she does and how dedicated she is to seeing her parents, students, and even the siblings of families succeed. She shows very high levels of leadership by the resilience she has when it comes to challenges and getting things done. If there was anything I ever needed even within short notices she was able to get it done with no hesitation. She is an amazing example of a leader not only within Kids Corp but within the whole community!

Markeitah Henry,  
KCI parent

**"HER TEACHING SKILLS AND WILLINGNESS TO GET DOWN IN THE TRENCHES WHEN THAT'S NEEDED HAVE EARNED HER UNIVERSAL RESPECT AND CREDIBILITY"**

Starting as a regular volunteer in son's Head Start classroom 15 years ago, Selina immediately impressed staff with her natural teaching skills and enthusiasm. They encouraged her to apply for a substitute assistant teacher position (we always need those). Fortunately for a generation of children and families, she did indeed apply, and even more fortunately for Kids' Corps, we hired her in November of 2005. Selina quickly became a super sub: hungry to learn, eager to apply her skills, reliable, steady. That tends to happen with Selina when she encounters a new challenge: she quickly masters the ropes and soon becomes a role model and leader.

From super sub, to super Assistant Teacher, to super Teacher, to super Center Director....Well you get the picture. Along the way, along with working and raising a family, she earned her AA and BA in early education. Her professional ascent was rapid because she was, and is, extremely skilled, as hard-working and reliable as they come, an exemplary colleague and co-worker and a powerful advocate for children, families and Head Start.

nomination continued on back...



For many years we had an Early Head Start partnership with the Anchorage School District's Crossroads High School for parenting teens. (Our EHS classrooms were located in the same building as the school.) For most of those years Selina was the director of that center. Her work there was, no exaggeration, life changing. She led her team to create a community where families (who some might have called "hard to reach") participated in everything Head Start has to offer. She has celebrated graduations, new jobs, & educational milestones with dozens of parents who in some cases had already been counted out by their own families. I have heard from parents years on about how their time at EHS with Selina and her team was a turning point in their lives.

Selina does not shy away from conflict—she can engage very skillfully in difficult conversations—but she also never gives up on people. She exudes encouragement and positive energy while remaining firmly anchored in the need to support parents and staff in practical problem-solving. She has the vision to see potential in staff and families, potential they themselves might not see, and takes joy in their achievements.

So, looking through my leadership checklist...

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Shows the way by walking the walk—Check.

Selina is a great role model. Her teaching skills and willingness to get down in the trenches when that's needed have earned her universal respect and credibility.

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Has a vision—Check. Selina embodies Head Start's heart and soul.

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Challenges herself, her team and her organization to be better—Yep. She picks her spots, and when she talks, people listen.

.

Empowers others—Check, see above

.

Encourages others—Check, see above. Selina is a genius in expressing appreciation for others about things that are important to them.

Head Start is full of leaders from all walks of life. It is my honor to join Markeitah in nominating Selina as one of those very special leaders deserving consideration for this award.

*-Dirk Shumaker*



## *Teacher of the Year* Hazel Hall



Dear AHSA award of excellence committee, It is with great pleasure that I nominate Hazel Hall for the 2020 teacher of the year AHSA award. In addition to performing her job at an exemplary level, Hazel demonstrates an extraordinary commitment to the families and children we serve. She has been with KCI Head Start for 3 years now. Even though this is our first year working together as supervisor and teacher, I can clearly see why she was promoted to a master teacher. Hazel takes it upon herself to provide exceptional support and resources to new and returning staff. She discerns quickly their individual needs and moves efficiently to provide key information, recommendations, or direction.

**"TEACHING IS SOMETHING SHE IS PASSIONATE ABOUT AND SHE HAS AN AMAZING, NATURAL ABILITY"**

Recently this year, Hazel took it upon herself to support a substitute teacher who was in the process of getting her associates degree in early childhood education from University of Alaska Anchorage. Hazel took the substitute teacher under her wing and showed her how to create a lesson plan using creative curriculum, set up classroom environment per fidelity/CLASS and run a smooth and interactive circle.

Hazel has one of the best circles I have ever seen over my 12 years working in preschool with KCI Head Start. Hazel has a natural ability to adjust her circles to meet the different needs of her children; they are always interactive with music, rhymes, learning the alphabet, numbers and new words. Sometimes you would think that her preschool kiddos are school age children when you see and hear every child participating and interacting. The early childhood education professor at the University of Alaska Anchorage was so amazed at how Hazel ran her circle that they personally requested Hazel to be a guest speaker in their class on the topic of running a successful circle. During these hard times, parents and their children are eager to see/connect with Hazel through Zoom, Facetime, private educational YouTube link that Hazel takes her time to film & put together for families or a simple phone call.

*nomination continued on back...*



She try's hard to connect weekly with all 20 of her children and even dedicated a day out of the week just to help prepare her 6 children out of 20, who are going off to kindergarten next year. Her classroom in itself has the most parent/child participants I've seen so far, because she shows compassion, support and most importantly she makes learning fun. Hazel Hall is just an outstanding person with a big heart and a staff I enjoy working with. I would love if Hazel were to be picked for the AHSA Teacher of the Year award. This might sound cliché, but Hazel is a one in a million, from leading and inspiring her colleagues, including myself, to create a strong sense of what it means to be a team.

Sincerely,  
Julie Vang  
Center Director

Dear Alaska Head Start Association,

I have been working with Ms. Hazel for about two years and during this time I've witnessed how much she loves her job. The dedication, time and love that she has towards the kids are admirable. During a real fire drill, Hazel was on lunch, but heard the fire alarms and calmly came right into the classroom and helped evacuate the children safely and quickly. There was still snow outside and the kiddos didn't have their coats and all the blankets were used or deteriorated, so Hazel took off her own coat and covered 1-2 children with it. After seeing her extra reach of compassion, it made me proud to have her as my teacher. To see how she works and teaches her classroom is something that a lot of us admire and try to emulate as well. Thanks to Ms. Hazel, I have learned to let go of a lot of fears and have learned to have more confidence in myself, because she has always been there for me and for many other teachers. Ms. Hazel is very deserving of the AHSA teacher if the year award. She is more than a teacher- Ms. Hazel has been a friend, who without anything in exchange is always willing to help. She is my friend and I will always appreciate the lessons I've learned with her.

Sincerely,  
Laura Brown  
Assistant Teacher

Dear Alaska Head Start Association,

I would like to nominate Hazel for the Alaska Head Start Teacher of the year award. Even though I just started working with Hazel as one of her assistant teachers this 2019/2020 school year for 7 months, I know she is special. Transitioning as an AT from ASD to KCI was a little different, but Hazel made everything more at ease. She is helpful, open to any suggestions for activities in the lesson plans and makes collecting child documentation easier for the AT's to understand, especially since English is not both her AT's first language. Even though Hazel has lots of work she needs to do, she still manages to help others, which is very nice and she still get her work done. I hope to learn more from Hazel.

Sincerely,  
Xiong Thao  
Assistant Teacher





Dear Alaska Head Start Association,

I am taking this opportunity to nominate Hazel for the Alaska Head Start Association Teacher of the year award. During her three years working at KCI, I've seen Hazel is an amazing teacher who works to instill a love of learning for children in everything she teaches. She's a great example to all those who work with her and is willing to pass on her knowledge to others. I remember two years ago, when a teacher had left and the Assistant Teacher was pulled to step up to take over the teacher's position. Every day that AT would struggle & cry with all the paper work, including documentation. It was her first time in a lead teacher's role working on lesson planning and how to enter documentation. Ms. Hazel wasn't resistant at all and she stepped in right away without anyone asking and helped that AT learn how to lead a classroom at her own pace and build her confidence until the school year is over. Hazel is patient, kind, and nurturing towards the children in her care. I've seen Hazel treat each child like they are her own and makes them feel special every single day they are with her. I've seen that Hazel did a wonderful job of making sure the children were safe at all times. Hazel did a wonderful job of effectively communicating with parents and staffs. She's was able to keep her classroom organized and the students under control while still making the atmosphere fun and exciting every day. I am happy to nominate Hazel, my colleague, my friend for the Alaska Head Start Association Teacher of the Year award.

Sincerely,

Thong Lor

Teacher

Dear Alaska Head Start Association,

As a first-year teacher, I had many struggles but Hazel was always there for me when I needed help. When I first met her, she was very welcoming and kind. I could tell instantly that she is passionate about her job and loves to help everyone. During my first week, she went out of her way and helped me set up my classroom and taught me how to do lesson plans on My Teaching Strategies. She always asks if I need any help and gave me lots of great resources even when I didn't ask. She knew exactly what would be helpful for a first-time teacher and gave me lots of great advice. A few months after meeting her, she deservedly got promoted and became my master teacher. I was thrilled that I got placed with her because I already knew she would be helpful to me. Now that she is my master teacher, she was able to come observe me and model for me on how I can improve my CLASS scores. She continues to check up on me weekly to see how I'm doing and if there's anything she can help me with. I admire her work ethic and how she is able to balance being a great teacher for her classroom and still be able to help me along with other teachers. I have no idea what I would have done without her and appreciate all her hard work!

Sincerely,

Alexis Costello

Teacher



To AHSA Committee,

I would like to nominate Miss Hazel Sunshine for the AHSA teacher of the year award. My twin girls have been in Miss Hazel's Head start preschool class for two years now. Since entering her classroom, they have learned and grown in more ways than I could have imagined. Miss Hazel truly treats every child in her classroom as her own. I know that she spends hours and hours outside of the classroom planning and fretting over her students and how can she improve. She spends her own money to make sure there are always exciting toys and trinkets for the children every Friday in their "treasure box". Teaching is something she is passionate about and she has an amazing, natural ability. She speaks softly and kindly. She listens intently to their thoughts and questions. Her patience is admirable. I have spent many days volunteering in the classroom and I watch in wonder at her simple and clear way to teach her students bigger words and concepts. Even more important to me than their academic and motor skills development is the social/emotional skills Miss Hazel teaches in her classroom. She teaches kindness, respect, listening skills and breathing exercises to control their big feelings. One of my favorites of these lessons is how to say no or stop when someone is offending you. They say, "Stop, I don't like that. It's hurtful when you \_\_\_\_, it's helpful when you \_\_\_\_." I know many grown adults that are incapable of explaining their feelings in this simple yet clear way. My girls have always struggled to use their words to communicate their feelings, desires and even needs. It can be a very frustrating thing. But after more than a year of watching and learning from Miss Hazel and modeling her behavior they use this same pattern to communicate with me, themselves and other children. It has been a total game-changer in our family. And that's what Miss Hazel is all about. She changes lives one family at a time by simply loving them. I am forever grateful for the impact that Miss Hazel has had in our lives and I hope that she can be acknowledged publicly by receiving this award for her great efforts and sacrifice.

Sincerely,

Jessica Hill

Mother of the twins

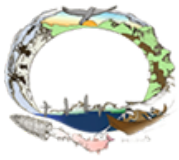
Dear AHSA Committee,

I would like to nominate Ms. Hazel Hall for the Alaska Head Start Association Teacher of the year award. This is my son's second year in her classroom and I can say that he has learn and grown so much. Since my son started in her classroom from 2018-2020 school year, he has been able to manage his energy level and attention span more. My son's strong sense of affection and social emotional learning had a lot to do with the fact that Ms. Hazel really focused on their social emotional well-being and helping to guide the children with labeling their feelings. Ms. Hazel is an excellent teacher, who makes the children feel welcome every day and most importantly makes me as a parent feel welcome along with his grandmother who picks him up occasionally. My whole family know that Ms. Hazel has worked hard in preparing my son and others for kindergarten and it shows within his confidence and love of school (not wanting to miss a day). It would be a great pleasure for Ms. Hazel to win this award for her outstanding and caring personality. Thank you for taking your time to read our letters of love and support for this wonderful teacher.

Sincerely,

Diana Julieta Henriquez

Parent of Ian Henriquez



Tanana  
Chiefs  
Conference

## *School District Collaboration Award* Alaska Gateway School District

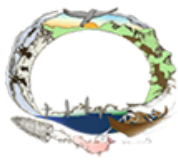


AlaskaGateway School District (AGSD) has been a true advocate and partner for TCC Head Start for many years. The Superintendent, Scott McManus, and Early Childhood Program Coordinator (and former Head Start Teacher), Pam Gingue, both support Head Start in any way possible: From hiring teaching assistants, providing free classroom space, helping with the food program, and supporting enrollment, and working through issues, they have gone above and beyond.

**"THEIR UNWAVERING DEDICATION TO  
EXCELLENCE FOR THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES  
IS WHAT SETS THEM APART"**

With no hesitation, AGSD has always stepped up and partnered with Head Start, to include school graduations; providing classroom learning materials; reading programs for kids in each of the rural sites we share; and assistance in helping get another classroom opened in a new community within their District. Their support does not stop only with space or food: they have also extended internet access to families that need help in virtual learning. This partnership in the Upper Tanana Region is invaluable. We truly value their support through the years, and their unwavering dedication to excellence for the children and families is what sets them apart.

Thank you, AGSD! -Jennifer Russell



Tanana  
Chiefs  
Conference

## Maintenance Staff of the Year Roger Manuel



Roger Manuel is a hard working Tanana Chiefs Conference Employee. As a member of the Facilities Department, he was hired to help any department within the company. Head Start would like to recognize him as the Maintenance Staff of the Year though because of his extraordinary efforts to assist our department.

### "IT'S ALL FOR THE KIDS, THEY DESERVE IT"

On an almost daily basis, Roger can be found going out of his way for us from assisting the company Expeditor by moving large amounts of freight delivered to Central Office; transporting freight to the local airlines for delivery to any one of our 17 villages; packing up supplies and moving them to storage in the middle of winter; driving 5 hours one way to deliver furniture to our furthest road system village; or hauling trash.

What stands out though is the attitude with which he does every one of these tasks. Yes, this is his "job", but he does it cheerfully, with a "Can-Do" attitude, and most importantly, with a smile or kind word. He recognizes and acknowledges how hard all of us in Head Start work, and is happy to assist us by sharing his heart for the children, frequently saying as he hauls away another shipment....."It's all for the kids, they deserve it!" We are fortunate to have such a great co-worker alongside us in our mission. Roger is a well deserving honorary Head Start Maintenance Staff of the Year employee! -Jennifer Russel



## *Bus Driver of the Year* **Mary Gibson**



Although Mary Gibson had been our Bus Driver at RurAL CAP Tok Head Start for the past 5 years, her career with Head Start's began decades before. Ms. Mary began as a Cook Aide. She then added on the responsibility of Janitor as well so she was able to get more hours. Eventually Ms. Mary became a Bus Driver. In 1996, she was certified as Bus Driver Trainer in Barrow and did that for 6 years. In Nome, she worked for another Head Start and was there for 10 years. She was a Teacher Supervisor when she left. Ms. Mary graduated from Kotzebue High School, and she earned her Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential.

### **"THE CHILDREN FEEL SAFE AND LOVE RIDING THE LITTLE BUS"**

Ms. Mary not only completed the National Indian Park & Recreation Management Training Program through Oklahoma State University Arts & Science Extension successfully completed a Public Management Program through the State of Alaska.

Ms. Mary has helped cover on in the classroom and on the playground when needed, as well as provided childcare during parent meetings. She has even shared her Native language with our classroom. Ms. Mary is an amazing baker and has even donated several fresh loaves of bread to the Parent Committee raffle basket.

Our monthly bus drill are amazing. Each month, two new students are selected to have the responsibly of holding the ends of the walking ropes. All the children gain confidence and learn what to if there is ever an emergency. The children feel safe and love riding the little bus. When one of students got off the bus she gave Ms. Mary a hug and told her, "I love you".

For the past year, Ms. Mary has warned us that she will be retiring on her birthday 2/16/2021. She said her CDL will be expiring on that date and she will not be renewing it. We are so happy that she just agreed to finish out the next school. We appreciate her dictation and feel that she is very deserving of the AHSA Bus Driver of the Year Award. -Carrie Beeman





## Head Start Mother of the Year Shiela Carl



Sheila is an active parent for both Head Start and Early Head Start. She heads up most if not all of the fundraising for our programs in Akiak. She also sets up most if not all of the extra activities associated with our program. She has been an active parent from her first child who is now 7 years old and in elementary. She continues to be involved with a 4 year old in the head start program and a 2 year old in the early head start program. – *Shawna*

**"HER HEART IS FOCUSED ON OUR WHOLE  
COMMUNITY BUT MOST OF HER HEART GOES TO  
THE CHILDREN"**

Shiela Carl has been a parent in our program for 7 years, and has been one of our strongest most active supporters. She is also the tribal administrator for our community. As busy as she is she makes time first and foremost for her children and their education. She volunteers in the classroom and makes the parent committee meetings happen, even if she is not in the village she joins on the phone. Even she travels for work all the time she is involved in our every day needs here at the head start. When we are in need of something she gets parents involved and starts the fundraising and gets what we are in need of, or something some children are in need of. Her heart is focused on our whole community but most of her heart goes to the children. She has three girls and they have all been involved in our program since they were born. She works with her girls at home with the letters of the alphabet, colors, shapes and our cultural subsistence activities. She is involved in most of the committees in Akiak and our children's most avid supporter. We are blessed to have one of the strongest supporters for children in our community. – *Margene*



## Content Area Specialist of the Year Lavonne Dryden



Our Head Start program is a family and when you think of Lavonne you would think of her as our Auntie. She has worked for RurAL CAP Head Start just shy of 32 years and is still going strong. Lavonne at the moment is a Regional Manager, but she has held many roles in our program. In fact, Lavonne has held just about EVERY position in our program. She started with us as a parent and substitute, and has been a bus driver, TA, Teacher, site director, Regional Manager and Program Manager.

### "SHE RESPECTS ALL THOSE SHE WORKS WITH AND WE TRULY RESPECT HER"

She has had the opportunity to visit most of our 24 sites. Lavonne carries so much of our historical knowledge and continues to help us improve by reminding us what has worked in the past and what needs to be done for the future. Since she has worked in many components and content areas of the program Lavonne knows many of our staff personally and is a constant voice for those who work directly with our families and children. She is an amazing advocate for our teachers and site staff always reminding others to take their thoughts and opinions into mind when making decisions. Lavonne is an expert in many of our content areas, but she has become also our transportation expert. Helping staff achieve their CDL, working with bus companies like First Student and others to get our bus drivers trained and certified. She is aware of our inspection schedules and has now become well versed in bus seat restraints. She also provides the transportation training annually to our transportation staff. Lavonne is a caring and loyal leader. She respects all those she works with and we truly respect her. She leads with her heart and head. Always remembering how staff feel, but also knowing what is best for the program. She has seen expansion of our programs and has seen when we had cuts to our program and lost sites and slots. Lavonne was one that helped carry us forward through those times and helped us remember why we are here and to remember the children we still serve.

nomination continued on back...



We are so lucky to have Lavonne in our family. She brings such a wealth of knowledge and history that could never be replaced. We are truly thankful for her and hope that you take this nomination into real consideration. Lavonne is the Regional Manager for our site. She goes above and beyond every year in her duties to ensure that each of us at our site have the correct information to function successfully throughout the year. She also has other sites she manages. She is always available to each staff member at each site throughout the year as well as thru the summer. She is professional and down to earth. She has also been in our shoes as she has worn many hats in her years at working for RurAL CAP. I commend her for her hard work to her staff and to the agency. She is a cancer survivor and still puts her staff needs above her own. Lavonne definitely deserves recognition for her hard work. Even with the Covid-19 she was in touch with her staff in her sites to check on them and available to talk to them at anytime. She is enjoyable to work with. I look forward to another successful year with her. - *RurAL CAP HS/EHS Team and Cynthia Boyer*



## Corporate Award Anchorage Downtown Partnership



RurAL CAP and our Child Development Center/Anchorage Head Start would like to nominate the Anchorage Downtown Partnership for the Alaska Head Start Association's Corporate Partner of the Year. Our Child Development Center (CDC) is located on E 5th Avenue and is within the Downtown Improvement District (DID) which is managed by Anchorage Downtown Partnership, Ltd. The Downtown Partnership provides programs and services that benefit not only our center, but also our children, families and staff.

**"THE SAFETY AMBASSADORS HAVE BECOME  
A VITAL PART OF MAKING DOWNTOWN  
ANCHORAGE, AND AS A RESULT OUR CENTER,  
A BETTER – AND SAFER – PLACE"**

From hosting events, to keeping downtown Anchorage clean and safe, the Downtown Partnership supports our center. When there is NOT a pandemic, our center takes walking field trips to Peratrovich Park for Music in the Park and Music for Little Ones. Our kiddos LOVE these events that are sponsored by the Downtown Partnership. That are sponsored by Anchorage Downtown Partnership. We encourage our parents to attend the Holiday Tree Lighting ceremony, Movie in the Park and Live After 5 events with their children– which oftentimes you can find our staff and their families enjoying as well!

Not only does the Downtown Partnership support a vital downtown environment, their Maintenance Team provides clean up services throughout the Downtown Improvement District, including graffiti removal, sidewalk sweeping, weed abatement and trash pick-up. They are a great partner with our own efforts at keeping our center, and surrounding property, a clean and healthy environment.

nomination continued on back...



The greatest service that the Anchorage Downtown Partnership provides to us is their Safety Ambassadors. As the “eyes and ears” of Downtown, Safety Ambassadors (SAs) serve and assist local businesses as they patrol the streets on foot and by bike. Safety Ambassadors provide a helping hand by intervening with youth at risk, disorderly/suspicious behavior, panhandling or other nuisance behavior, public drinking/inebriates, and suspicion of drug dealing or drug use. As Beans Café and Brother Francis Shelter have closed and/or moved services due to COVID-19, there has been a sharp increase in the number of homeless individuals who spend the day and evening in the lot adjacent to our center. Our staff call the Anchorage Downtown Partnership multiple times daily to report large groups, or suspicious activity, and the Safety Ambassadors are quick to respond! They are also wonderful to our kiddos, stopping by on their regular patrol to say hi, or give safety tips, if we are out on the playground. The Safety Ambassadors have become a vital part of making downtown Anchorage, and as a result our center, a better – and safer – place.

The Anchorage Downtown Partnership’s programs and services helps our Anchorage Head Start and Child Development Center provide a safe, healthy and rich experience for our children, families and staff. -*Kristin Ramstad*





## *Cook of the Year* Everette Jamestown "Gunner"

Gunner was hired as the HS cook in 2016. When he started in Angoon, he spent most of his time in the kitchen learning the CACFP food program and preparing nutritious meals for the children. He had limited time and did not have opportunities to interact with the children in the classroom very often. But with his fun personality and infectious laughter the children coaxed him from the kitchen into the classroom for visits. Gunner has completed ServSafe Managers Certification and maintains all the CACFP trainings required throughout the school year. The beginning of the 2019-2020 school year Gunner went above and beyond by helping in the classroom to ensure the children received the best school experience possible.

**"HE IS A VERY GOOD COOK AND THE KIDS LOVE HIS FOOD, EVEN THE FINICKY EATERS WILL EAT"**

When staff would be absent, he would leave his busy kitchen to help the Lead Teacher, Reanna Kookesh-Booth. He quickly changed roles and became a Teacher Aide/Cook due to short staff in the program. Even when an aide was hired, he continued to support the teachers in the classroom.

Grocery shopping can be challenging in a village. Gunner used a variety of resources to ensure the freshest food was available to the Angoon children. He would order food from the closest city, Juneau and have it shipped over via small planes, and have larger orders sent on the ferry or barge system. When he was in Juneau for work related events, he would take time to shop for the program and transport the food back to Angoon.

Reanna stated, "Gunner is a great team player, he works well with the kids. He is a very good cook and the kids love his food, even the finicky eaters will eat. He is very quiet and doesn't like the spotlight, but he is very friendly and caring."

With no complaints and little notice, Gunner came off his summer break to ensure the electrician (who flew into town) could get into the building to install a new sanitizer.

We really appreciate Gunner for taking on additional work hours and duties to ensure the Angoon Head Start program ran smoothly. -Lisa Pennoyer



## Head Start Director of the Year Sarah Newton



I met Sarah as my supervisor in 2009 at FNA Head Start. She always showed professionalism, kindness, and positive attitude. Coming from another country, having language barriers were intimidating when interacting with others, but Sarah always welcomed me with a smile and made me feel better. Years had passed and once again we are working together, she is now the program director of ThriveAlaska. I can honestly assure I had never worked for someone who is invested and dedicated to keep our work environment safe and healthy. She cares for everyone, families and staff. There is never a harsh word, or too busy to listen to what we might have to share. I strongly believe that Sarah Newton deserves this recognition. I'm 100% sure I'm not the only one sharing this sentiment. Thank you Sarah for always trusting and caring for all of us.

*-Erika Copeland*

### "SHE CARES FOR EVERYONE, FAMILIES AND STAFF"

Sarah is a great pleasure to work with. She has a smile on her face and a positive attitude every single day. She is dedicated and committed to Head Start and all the benefits it provides for children and families. She is very highly regarded by staff because she cares about them. She is kind, caring, loving, thoughtful, open-minded, optimistic, passionate, playful, dependable beyond words, compassionate and extremely collaborative. Sarah is team oriented and involves everyone when making decisions that affect staff. She is extremely hard working and will work as many hours as needed to get the job done. She is the ultimate professional and I'm lucky to know her and to work alongside her. She communicates very well and tries her hardest to keep everyone in the loop. She's extremely trustworthy and follows all the hundreds of state and federal regulations and standards! Sarah is adaptive and flexible and willing to meet needs in any creative way possible. She's very supportive of our families and encourages their participation in our program from employment, to policy council to Board member, to participating in family fun nights (although not during COVID). She led the program with grace through the pandemic and was instrumental in opening our doors for families in June! I am proud to work with Sarah and proud of her many accomplishments!! -Alicia Berka



# All 2020 AHSA Award Nominees



Angi Thomas  
 Lauren Patton  
 Alexia Griffeth  
 Kadie Rifedi  
 Naomi Kerce  
 Charity Lawrence  
 Kathy Johnson  
 Kodiak Salmon Seiner's Association  
 Dirk Shumaker  
 Amia Smith  
 Amy Hogue  
 Tiffany Ocel  
 Alicia Fields  
 Becky L McFarland  
 Makia Daniels  
 Fairbanks North Start Borough  
 School District Transportation  
 Department  
 Lynette Cooper  
 Cody Omta  
 Deb Harbison  
 Angeliz Pagan  
 Ron Drover  
 Neva Lancaster  
 Alia Heck  
 Tammy Rice  
 Luke Smith  
 Carly Leondakos

Erin Monarch  
 Mark Lackey  
 Anna McDonald  
 Nicole Pingayak  
 Jessica Fox  
 Rebecca Buckles  
 Mercedes/McKinley Sight  
 FNA  
 Miss Beth  
 Davina Sunkel  
 Mercedes Gomez  
 Ashley Burgess  
 Ms. Nicole  
 Polly Chico  
 Shirley Holmberg  
 Elizabeth Locklar  
 Leona Semaken  
 Tara Hastings  
 Jerri Lomax  
 Wendy King  
 Jennifer D.  
 Fawn Charles  
 Jerrilin Broussard  
 Willow Andersen  
 Gisselle Garcia Placencia  
 Jessica Teague-Beach