

Alaska Head Start Association Awards of Excellence



2023



Table of Contents

Beating the Odds	1-2
Program Policy Council Award	3-4
Administrative Support Staff of the Year	5-6
Home Visitor of the Year	7-8
Leadership Award	9-13
Head Start Father of the Year	14-15
Bus Driver of the Year	16
Mother of the Year	17
Maintenance Staff of the Year	18-19
Community Advocate of the Year	20-21
Corporate Award	22-23
Humanitarian Award	24-25
Assistant or Deputy Director of the Year	26
Assistant Teacher of the Year	27
Content Area Specialist of the Year	28-29
Early Childhood Coach of the Year	30-31
School District Collaboration Award	32
Cook of the Year	33-34
Cultural Awareness Award	35-36
Early Head Start Teacher of the Year	37
Family Advocate of the Year	38-39
Teacher of the Year	40-41
Head Start Director of the Year	42-43
All 2023 AHSA Award Nominations	44

Beating the Odds Award Ryan Benedict



Ryan Benedict came to our EHS program at the Palmer Center in spring of 2021 and enrolled his son Lukas. Lukas was able to start in July 2021. At this point Ryan was transitioning to full guardianship of his son. I remember being impressed with his caring and concern for his son. He did his best to have Lukas to school on time and to meet with his teachers on a regular basis.

“HIS SEEMINGLY BOTTOMLESS WELL OF PATIENCE AS WELL AS HIS KIND AND GENTLE VOICE HAVE BEEN AMAZING TO WITNESS AS HE GUIDES LUKAS THROUGH HIS CHILDHOOD”

Many days he pushed Lukas in his stroller through the snow to get him to school. Ryan also makes sure that Lukas sees the doctor and dentist regularly. I was not surprised when Ryan obtained full guardianship of Lukas! This past year Lukas transitioned to Head Start and just completed his first year as a Preschooler. Throughout the last couple of years I have watched Ryan take responsibility and grow as a parent and a contributing member of our community. His seemingly bottomless well of patience as well as his kind and gentle voice have been amazing to witness as he guides Lukas through his childhood. Today Ryan has a dependable vehicle, is a manager where he works, and has a happy and healthy little boy. He has shown us that it is possible to beat the odds! - Sandy Summit

nomination continued on back...



Ryan started out this program as a single father pushing his son to school each day in a stroller or arranging transportation from others. In the few short years he has been in the program he has achieved his license, purchased a vehicle, and advanced positions in his career all while being a single parent and providing his son with love and care. Despite the odds, Ryan never has fallen behind on his childcare obligations, communication with staff, or missed an opportunity to attend school events to be a positive example for his son. - *Lynsey Johnson*

Program Policy Council Award CCS Early Learning Policy Council



Sarah Thomas & Laura Bartholomew

The CCS Early Learning Policy Council has been “in transition” like much of the world for the last couple of years. However, we have had two individuals who have been rock solid throughout the COVID years and who have remained engaged through some very tough times. Sarah Thomas and Penny Albright were both involved with our Policy Council starting in 2019 and at the time were both CCS parents. In 2020 they both were elected to Policy Council leadership positions (Sarah as President, Penny as Secretary).

“THIS YEAR'S POLICY COUNCIL WAS QUICK TO TAKE ANY AND EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO ADVOCATE FOR THE CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY WE SERVE”

When COVID hit - and as we stopped providing in person services - they kept on “showing up” to provide leadership and to fulfill the PC responsibilities that were needed and necessary. There were multiple PC meetings where Sarah and Penny were the only ones in attendance. Their respective CCS children both graduated in 2020 - however, they continued in their leadership roles as we worked to rebuild our parent governance and the crucial pieces of parent engagement and ownership that is so important to the success of Head Start. Throughout 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023 - they both served as community representatives on our Policy Council - continuing to show up, to lead and mentor the new PC reps.

nomination continued on back...



Finally in the 2022-23 school year we experienced new energy in our efforts to regain our parent engagement and parent governance at CCS. Penny and Sarah were joined by some fresh, new (and current!) parents who have seen the importance of leadership and who have picked up the torch to carry forward. These parents include; Laura Bartholomew, Cole Criswell, Tayva Taylor, George Griffin, Nancy Anthony and Peggy Bryant. This core group did a fabulous job this last school year in stepping into leadership roles at their respective centers, for our Policy Council - and even on our Board of Directors (Cole and Laura). The level of participation and engagement from this group as a whole was incredible. All monthly meetings met quorum requirements, and members were willing to go the extra mile and participate in any way possible. The Policy Council voice was dedicated to supporting CCS through making some challenging decisions with valuable problem solving and processing. This year's Policy Council was quick to take any and every opportunity to advocate for the children, families and community we serve. We are incredibly thankful that Sarah and Penny cared about CCS and our services to children and families so much that they kept showing up and have been so willing and so patient to continue providing leadership. Please join us in honoring the 2022-23 CCS Early Learning Policy Council (and especially Sarah and Penny!) as the AHSA Policy Council of the Year! -Mark Lackey & Tabatha Peterson

Administrative Support Staff of the Year Charity Lawrence



Charity Lawrence has worked in the same role at CCS since January 2010. She comes to work and she sits up at the front and greets all of our parents with a smile. She helps and supports every staff member when asked. Charity is multi-talented with keeping up on all of the files in our building, getting all of the calls that come in to the correct person, entertaining staff with jokes when needed and she even makes the copy machine easy for those of us who may be a little challenged.

“CHARITY IS PLAYFUL WITH ALL THE CHILDREN AND HELPS THEM FEEL SAFE AND WELCOMED”

Charity is so much more than the few comments that I have made. I know that when she is out it sometimes takes three of us to fill her shoes. I look forward to seeing her every morning and I enjoy learning from her. She is a wonderful support to all of us here at WEHS. -Tammy Berdeaux

Charity has been with CCS for close to 13 years and is a wonderful example of the CCS Mission Statement. "Making a difference in the lives and families of young children within our communities." Charity is often one of the first contacts families will make with CCS and the WEHS center. She is the first smile to the children and families as they walk through the door.

nomination continued on back...



When families call the center, Charity is the one to answer the phone, listen to their questions and concerns. If she is not the one who can best help them at that time, she connects them to the right person. She does all of this while also maintaining an warm, welcoming environment that is organized. Charity handles data input, billing information, manages the hard copy files, and still has time to build relationships with the families and children at the center.

At CCS we love to play, laugh, learn, and grow and Charity doesn't miss a beat of that. Charity is playful with all the children and helps them feel safe and welcomed. Charity is ready to share the joke of the day to whoever would like a laugh. Even though Charity is not a classroom staff member she is present at all of the training offered to help support staff and families when needed. She often has online webinars playing at her desk to stay up to date on Early Childhood Education. Don't let her height fool you as she still continues to grow! She has been with the EHS side of CCS since they opened the first 0-3 classroom. She has been able to support the program through many changes and continues to adapt to the next thing that CCS is faced with.

I have been able to observe Charity engage with families, children, staff members, community partners, and lost door dash drivers and her interactions with all of those people have been respectful, helpful, and genuine. Charity is not only deserving of this award, but this award was created for individuals like Charity.

-Victoria Grey

Home Visitor of the Year Jessica Elliott



Jessica is a great Home Visiting educator because she is always thinking outside the box of how to approach educating children and what alternatives there are in our community to support a family who is seeking non-traditional education experiences for their child or children. She is warm, personable, and always willing to help with extra projects for which that agency needs help. - Janel Gagnon

**“SHE IS A JOY TO WORK WITH AND HER FAMILIES
HAVE A WONDERFUL AND VERY ENGAGED HOME
VISITOR THAT GOES THE EXTRA MILE”**

I am nominating Jessica for Home Visitor of the year. Jessica not only loves working with her families weekly but she goes the extra mile when it comes to finding resources and information that they might be needing or have an interest in. She enjoys learning and training and sharing the new information to all who will listen. She has a wonderful talent in creating beautiful news letters for her families to enjoy filled with upcoming events, important topics for the month and information about their community. Jessica works well with her Home visiting team as they collaborate together and come up with better ways to support the families they have and recruit those who will benefit from the Home Visiting Program.

nomination continued on back...



Jessica helps support all of our Family Fun events and comes up with great ideas for family classes as we navigate back into meeting as groups together. She is a joy to work with and her families have a wonderful and very engaged Home Visitor that goes the extra mile. -*Tammy Berdeaux*

Jessica never fails to impress me on her dedication to serving the families she works with. Jessica is always on the look out for a resource that her families could benefit from. Jessica has thrived with working with our families even when things were non-traditional through COVID. Jessica continues to further her education to better serve her families. -*Victoria Grey*

Leadership Award Denise Sturgis



www.ccsalaska.org



I am nominating Denise Sturgis for an award because of many different reasons. Denise dedicates her heart and soul to the employees and the agency. She makes time to professionally guide, mentor and assist every employee, regardless of their title. She brings years of experience in Human Resources to CCS and has fully joined leadership in navigating the challenges of the "Post Covid" Head Start environment we find ourselves in. She has been instrumental in brainstorming creative alternatives to the unexpected challenges we have encountered due to the staffing issues.

"SHE MAKES NO DECISIONS FOR HER TEAM ON A WHIM AND SHE WORKS HARD TO MAKE EACH OF US FEEL HEARD AND SUPPORTED"

I have had the pleasure to work with Denise at CCS Early Learning for a little more than a year and a half and I have witnessed her perform what can only be called miracles. She does it willingly and with a commitment that is inspirational. She has encouraged and empowered me to take on additional education and skill building opportunities. She makes no decisions for her team on a whim and she works hard to make each of us feel heard and supported. My admiration of her professionalism, skill level and overall spirit is difficult to put into words. I firmly believe that Denise is more than deserving of recognition for all of her hard work and sincerely hope that she knows just how valued, appreciated, and admired she truly is. -Michelle Watson

nomination continued on back...



I believe that Denise Sturgis should be considered for the AHSA Leadership Award because she is a tremendous leader in our program here at CCS and is supportive of all staff in any way that she can be. I have only worked for CCS for a short while but over the course of my time here I have seen her work day in and day out to be the most supportive and the most kind supervisor and colleague to everyone here. She spends so much of her time meeting the needs of our organization and often time goes above and beyond what is expected of her. There isn't a day that goes by here at CCS without Denise being pulled in multiple directions by multiple people, and she somehow manages to find the time and ability to support all of those people in their requests. Denise is my direct supervisor and has helped me personally navigate my new role, leading by example and doing her best to ensure that her staff gets what they need from her. She encourages us to not only keep up with work but to make sure we take the time that we need for ourselves and our families. She is a Director that cares about employees as a whole and at the same time is able to make sure that the needs and best interest of CCS are still being met. She is an honest, hard-working, and caring person, and operates an amazing HR department in an organization that I am proud to be a part of. *-Amber Lapka*

Denise has been actively promoting CCS Early Learning staff positions and the hiring process for over 100 new employees in the aftermath of Covid and the staff shortages and turn over in all areas of our community. She has also provided staff advancement through credential tracking and submitting, training, promoting and providing opportunities for staff to further their education and job skills. She has also provided support to her staff, and the staff of the agency that need to build an Independent Professional Development Plan. She also does all that a Human Resources Director does in regards to Agency Benefits, Compensation, and Insurance. She has done all this with a smile for everyone. As a member of her staff I have felt seen and empowered to develop my own goals and plans to grow in and with this agency. *-Michelle Bower*

Denise Sturgis began her career at CCS Early Learning on June 10th, 2021. At that time she received employee number 1159. These numbers are given out in order. The most recent employee number that was given out this week was 1259, there also are additional new employees onboarding who don't have a number yet.



This means that over the past two years Denise has been a part of hiring over 100 employees for CCS. When fully staffed we have 150 total staff members. This amount of turnover, while stressful, and indicative of big challenges that need to be resolved, also speaks to the amazing amount of work that Denise and her team have put in. It is simply A. Maze. Ing. However, this is just the first (but very important) area of leadership that Denise has provided to CCS.

Additionally, Denise stepped into a position that had been occupied by the same person for over 25 years and this person had done an amazing job. Someone who had hired almost all of us at CCS Early Learning and who had strong relationships established. It also was after a year of COVID disruptions, a year of extremely heavy staff turnover and a year of chaos and uncertainty. Denise had big shoes to fill and she had enormous expectations to live up to. She has done a fabulous job of transitioning through those expectations and establishing her own Human Resources department with her own style that is both efficient and effective.

Denise also has hired and trained everyone WITHIN her department Yes, the entire Human Resources Department has come on board since she started - but you would not know that if you walked in today. Denise has supported and trained this HR team and together they have built a department that benefits each and every current and future employee of our organization.

When Denise was hired she had a wealth of Human Resources knowledge. However, Head Start is a different kind of (wild) animal. Denise has dived in with both feet and learned all the intricacies of our organization and all the rules and regulations of Child Care Licensing and Head Start Performance Standards that we have to adhere to. In our agency Professional Development has traditionally lived within HR as well. Denise has had to learn about CDA's and how the process to obtain one works - and how she can assist the many employees who are seeking this credential. She has had to navigate the extremely complicated (and for many months it was actually broken) system of criminal background checks in Alaska. All of this learning and growing and adapting, all while hiring over 100 employees. Wow.



How has Denise done in her learning, her growing, and with the leadership she has provided at CCS? In April of 2023 - CCS had our FA2 federal review. Denise has never been through a Head Start review of any sort before. However, there was not a single finding in any of the areas that Denise was responsible for. We are incredibly grateful for all of the hard work, the very long hours, the many many relationships that Denise has established with new employees, the thoroughness of her department - and most of all for her unwavering commitment to the mission that CCS has. Her leadership is inspiring to me and she is certainly deserving of this award. *-Mark Lackey*

Denise is so welcoming, warm and approachable. She let me use her office all day on my first day to do some of the online training that I needed to complete. I love all the positive quotes in her office! *-Redona Grazio*

Denise is so supportive of her HR staff ensuring they feel appreciated. She is also very supportive of CCS staff, in general, taking the time to listen to their concerns and needs and helping to find solutions that work for the individual and the agency. *-Janel Gagnon*

Denise is both kind and extremely knowledgeable. She advocates for staff and is timely in addressing staff concerns. In addition to being detail oriented, she is able to take a wide-lens view of how best to help CCS as an organization to have effective HR and staffing policies/procedures; she is both able to take care of details and be visionary in her thinking. *-Alora Zulliger*

Denise has made some much needed improvements since she started in HR. She looks to see where our program is needing improvements and makes the changes. I believe she listens to staff concerns and finds ways to make their work life easier. Denise is supportive and easy to talk to when a concern does arise. I enjoy working with Denise and her team. *-Darilyn Byram*

When I first met Denise she had used the term "Awesome-Sauce" and I feel like that is a great term to use to describe her since she had joined the CCS Early Learning Team. Denise holds a lot of responsibilities on her shoulders as the HR Director.



She directly supervises a team of 3 and supports an agency of 150ish employees! While still being 2 years new to CCS she has been able to connect with staff on all levels of the agency, being able to have personable conversation with them, and letting them know that she is here as a support to each of us. Denise has made some incredible changes to the agency that has already had a successful impact on how well CCS Staff delivers services to the children and families. With our enhanced onboarding process our new staff are going into positions feeling more confident and comfortable about the work they are doing and allowing them to build a stronger foundation in the EHS and HS programs. Denise has the heart of a helper which is a great thing to have as part of the leadership team at CCS!

-Victoria Grey

Denise Sturgis came on at a very difficult time for CCS. We were in the midst of covid and a staff crisis. She has been working hard to keep up the hiring process and has implemented an onboarding process that I believe will help in the retention of staff. She has worked with and without a team trying to fill many hats in the last few years. Denise Sturgis is a hard worker and believes in the CCS mission. *-Tammy Berdeaux*

Denise is one of the unique and highly prized HR directors. Yes, she understands the importance of laws, regulations, compliance and much more, but she marries that with truly looking out for the needs of staff. She understands the importance of supporting, encouraging, and coaching employees to professional and personal wellness. CCS is very blessed to have Denise at such a time as this when the employees need much more than simply compliance - they need relationship and support. Denise deserves to be considered for this award.

- Aaron Clements

Head Start Father of the Year Paul Pike

FAIRBANKS NATIVE
ASSOCIATION



HEAD START
0-5



I would like to nominate Paul Pike for Father (Grandfather) of the year. Paul has been involved in our program in several ways over the years both as a spouse to a beloved staff member and a parent to another. Most recently Paul, in his role as grandfather, has found himself taking care of his four grandsons along with his other daughter, Brandie. Paul is the epitome of being a strong male role model.

**"PAUL'S GUIDANCE, TO NOT ONLY HIS OWN FAMILY
BUT ALSO OTHER FAMILIES, IS PRICELESS"**

Paul is now semi-retired and is the main transportation for getting all four boys to school and Brandie to work as a teacher. Paul spends his days now transporting the youngest two to multiple therapies and back to head start. He spends almost his entire day in the car ensuring the children are making it to their meetings and therapies while his daughter continues to work to support his grandsons, her nephews. Paul runs the oldest two to football, school, and all social events. He is the muscle and guidance to the family as he navigates legal systems, resolves social and developmental issues and holds knowledge of how to best be a role model when raising young men in today's world. Paul has advocated endlessly, along with Brandie, for the best interest of the four boys about what is needed to give them a quality head start after having a difficult initial start to life. Paul has often said for years to us as staff and friends, "It is not about us as adults, it is about what the child needs in that moment."

nomination continued on back...



He lives by the value of doing what is best for each child in each moment to one's ability. Paul's guidance, to not only his own family but also other families, is priceless. He spends his time supporting not just his grandsons, but also their friends. He cheers them on and picks them up when they fall down. He advocates to courts, counselors, medical teams, and to us for what they as family feel is best. Paul stresses that it is a privilege to raise our littles and they learn from us. Paul spends time providing guidance and help to all those around him. I have seen both the love the two littles have for their papa when he comes at pickup time and also the love their older two have as well. The older two are head start graduates and Paul played a big part in their early years. Please consider Paul as nomination for Father (Grandfather) of the Year for Head Start.

Bus Driver of the Year

Benjamin Tompkins

FAIRBANKS NATIVE
ASSOCIATION



HEAD START
0-5



We would like to nominate Ben Tompkins as Bus Driver of the Year. Ben has been with our program for nine years and helped to serve in numerous ways. Ben builds lasting relationships with the children and their families. We now have grown, school-age children who come back to see Mr. Ben. Ben brings many years' expertise and works tirelessly to ensure a safe environment for our children, families and staff whether on-site or on the bus route.

“BEN UNDERSTANDS CHILDREN’S NEEDS AND WORKS TO MEET THOSE NEEDS ON THE BUS, IN THE CLASSROOM, AND IN EVERYDAY LIFE”

While he is one of our bus drivers, Ben also works in between bus runs as an assistant teacher in a preschool classroom. With Ben’s prior college education in environmental mining and engineering, the preschool children are doing more STEM activities and learning about building, expanding their structures, and engaging in new ways to do art and other learning. Ben supports the families in our program by helping to transport paperwork back and forth and notifying the advocate team of family needs. Ben works hard to make sure our children and families have their needs met daily, looking for ways to help those most struggling using his empathy and compassion. Ben understands children’s needs and works to meet those needs on the bus, in the classroom, and in everyday life. He role models social-emotional skills and is male support to not just his classroom but other classrooms as well. Ben looks for and finds ways to think out of the box in terms of family needs and how to approach families as a male educator. We know as a program and community how important male involvement is in our community and we are grateful to have Ben as a quiet force in our program. Thank you, Ben, for all your hard work and dedication to our families! -Angi Thomas

Head Start Mother of the Year Melissa Imboden



Melissa goes above and beyond for her children. She is such an amazing mother to six wonderful children. She is a mother, a wife, a student furthering her education, and a member of our policy council. I admire how she gracefully juggles it all. She was always present for parent volunteer days. Every day she would offer a helping hand in our infant room and the babies loved her.

**"SHE JUST HAS A GIFT FOR BEING AN
EXTRAORDINARY MOTHER AND ALL-AROUND
WOMAN"**

She also made herself available for another parent that was taking classes and unable to pick her child up on some days. Melissa would help that parent by picking up her child and dropping him off to her on certain days of the week.

She was always looking for ways to take the load off of others. She is so empathetic to others and compassionate. She is raising such respectful children also. She just has a gift for being an extraordinary mother and all-around woman. I recommend her as an all-star parent of the year. She deserves all the flowers for her passion and dedication. -Robbin Duboise

Maintenance Staff of the Year

Hugo Arcentales



I am writing this letter to nominate Hugo Arcentales for the Maintenance Staff of the Year. He is a consistently fabulous employee, a huge asset to our agency and is so deserving of this award and recognition. He approaches each day with a desire for excellence, while never overlooking an opportunity to lend a helping hand. Many staff look to him for stability in an ever-changing work environment and his peers depend on his natural leadership and guidance.

“HE APPROACHES EACH DAY WITH A DESIRE FOR EXCELLENCE, WHILE NEVER OVERLOOKING AN OPPORTUNITY TO LEND A HELPING HAND”

Working in an early childhood facility it is essential to the health and wellbeing of the children and staff to have stellar janitorial services. Hugo goes above and beyond his call of service taking much pride within his work. Hugo has been at our agency for the past couple of school years now. Hugo’s talents and skills are exemplary. He is one of the friendliest people I know, and he always arrives with a smile on his face and a happy greeting for his co-workers. With our agency this is an entry level position, so we have seen turnover for many reasons. Hugo can often be found assisting a recently hired co-worker, training them in our expectations and holding them accountable that the job is completed to high standards. Despite the overwhelming amount of work that everyone must do, Hugo consistently finds ways to help his co-workers. He often covers when other janitorial staff are on leave or absent. He is quick to respond to requests such as when classroom carpets need to be shampooed unexpectedly or classrooms need to be deep cleaned due to illness.

nomination continued on back...



We have several different locations, and Hugo has worked at multiple locations because of his ability to meet the individual centers' needs that vary quite a bit in size and job requirements. Last school year I personally requested that he be switched to the center I was located at since it was our new EHS facility with four infant/toddler full-day classrooms. Working with such young children we are on the floor throughout the day and need extra cleaning because of the children's ages. I could see such a difference in our center once he was assigned to it since he has an eye for details and is not afraid to put in the sweat equity. Hugo exemplifies what all head start employees should strive to be: kind, considerate, friendly, and helpful. Hugo has never been less than warm-hearted and hard-working and is such a pleasure to work with. He works back-to-back jobs and yet is never too busy to help above his call of duty here KCI. I look forward to seeing his smiling face every day. KCI is incredibly lucky to have Hugo and I hope AHSA will recognize his greatness. Hugo is the ideal candidate because he approaches his job with a strong sense of integrity. He genuinely cares about doing an exemplary job, helping his fellow workers, and providing a service that is integral to the functioning organization. Thank you for your consideration for Hugo to be Maintenance Staff of the Year, Selina Ellis

*Community Advocate
of the Year*
**Saint John's United
Methodist Church**



I would like to nominate St. John's United Methodist Church for the Community Advocate Award for their continued support of our children here at KCI, who are heading off to kindergarten or just need extra support. For the past 13+ years, members of this wonderful Church have delivered 25-30 backpacks stuffed with clothes (socks, underwear, shirts, pants and even shoes), and school supplies to our program for the children in most need going into kindergarten.

“THE WONDERFUL MEMBERS OF ST. JOHN'S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH TAKE ON THIS BEAUTIFUL MISSION TO BRING SMILES TO THE CHILDREN AND GREAT BLESSINGS TO THE FAMILIES”

The wonderful members of St. John's United Methodist Church take on this beautiful mission to bring smiles to the children and great blessings to the families. This allows the family to focus their dollars (if they even have a few extra dollars) on other children needing school clothes and supplies too. Sometimes this is all a child will receive for that first day of school. (We all remember how special we felt with a new outfit or new shoes for our first day of the new school year.) Family advocates are given the task of selecting which families are the most in need of assistance in getting their child ready for kindergarten. (Advocates and Teachers work together on which families need the most help). They connect with the family and get sizes that are then relayed to St. John's liaison Rick Meidel. Every year in August, these wonderful backpacks are delivered for every child on the list. There have been times when we have had one or two extra children in dire need, and they gladly accepted the extra names.

nomination continued on back...



These backpacks and clothes are specific to the child, so the child knows it is just for them. They try to buy things in the child's favorite colors or by theme, like Dora or Paw Patrol. Parents are so thankful and emotional that some will break down in tears, just to know that their child will have a pair of nice shoes or new clothes to start their next journey in life. Yes, the children are happy and excited, but it is the parents' gratitude that really speaks volumes. You can tell that they were stressed over what they would be able to afford and to have that stress lifted is a marvelous thing to behold. It is amazing what a new backpack can mean to a child. They have such pride in it, their eyes light up, the smiles cover their whole face and jumping up and down is a must. KCI staff are aware of which children need extra underclothes and socks and will let their advocate know in case there is extra. St. Johns always brings extra underwear and socks, extra shirts, and jeans in larger sizes so if a family does have older children, they get something too. St. Johns tries to anticipate this need with extra underclothes in a variety of sizes, knowing that sometimes just having new socks or undershirts will help a family. This wonderful program has been a Godsend for so many families and we at KCI feel it is time to recognize their continued support over the many years and tell them just how much KCI and the families appreciate all their efforts to bring love, kindness and caring to our children and families. Thank you for considering this wonderful program that helps so many.

-Ronnie Brown

Corporate Award Shawna Ragan



At KCI EHS and HS, we are beyond blessed to collaborate with the Trinity Family Counseling program for the past several years for Mental Health Support for the agency, staff, and families. I would like to take the time to show my love and appreciation and nominate Shawna Ragan from Eagle River Trinity Counseling for the Corporate award, she is truly one of our assets and we would not be the program we are today without Shawna and what she offers!

"SO MANY FAMILIES LOVE AND HAVE BEEN ABLE TO THRIVE BECAUSE OF SHAWNA GOING INTO THEIR HOME AND WORKING ALONGSIDE THEM"

Each year we re-evaluate our contract services and add more and more it seems as staff always request for more Shawna! We have a big focus on staff wellness and staff retention and Shawna's services play an integral part in those agency goals. She teaches us the importance of self-care, ACEs, and to be Trauma Smart. She sends weekly emails called "You Matter" which always have valuable information and visuals that align mental health work into our classroom work. With the feedback of staff and Shawna this school year we have built monthly in-service days into the full-day programs where staff get to meet with Shawna as a team for their mental health. We find this helps prevent staff burnout and fosters team unity. We go over with Shawna classroom support suggestions for staffing and children since she comes in regularly throughout the school year completing Mental Health Observations in all our classrooms. Staff can reach out any time personally to Shawna for support and it does not even have to be related to work, such a beautiful benefit.

nomination continued on back...



This free resource is something I personally have utilized and would have been lost without and may have even left the ECE field if it would not have been for the support and nurturing Shawna gave me in my time of need. Shawna has gone above and beyond learning extra things such as Conscious Discipline and Head Start practices to align her services offered with our program policies and procedures. She aligned her classroom observation forms to match Head Start Performance Standards, CLASS and most important to us Conscious Discipline use. She offers our families parenting classes about Conscious Discipline and Circles of Security and anything else we may request. You see families come for multiple sessions and achieve certificates of completion, she always has great turnout because she is an amazing and engaging presenter. Shawna works directly with the families we service on an individual basis when requested. So many families love and have been able to thrive because of Shawna going into their home and working alongside them. Shawna presents agency-wide training on topics we request or as things happen within the community that may have affected the staff and or families. She helps us keep a trauma lens and understanding in the services we offer as an agency and in our classrooms. Our agency's mission is "We provide a HEAD START to families with children who need it most" and that is largely done with Shawna's support. She has been able to work with some families' multiple years through many different hardships from OCS, DV, suicide, substance abuse, teen parenting and more. Trinity Family Counseling mission is "Providing compassionate counseling and support to individuals and families. We specialize in working with children of all ages." Shawna does that and so much more! Such a beautiful collaboration we have that I hope will continue for many years. Shawna and Trinity Family Counseling are beyond deserving of this Corporate Award. Thank you for your time and consideration, Selina Ellis

Humanitarian Award Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton School



I would like to nominate "Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton School" for the Humanitarian Award. Over Nine years ago, this wonderful school wanted to do a food drive for Thanksgiving and give the food to our families. Every year since, they help KCI put together baskets with Turkeys, rolls, cranberry sauce, Yams, pumpkin pie, vegetables, stuffing, potatoes, gravy, everything imaginable to make a complete Thanksgiving dinner. Sometimes the teacher will give me an envelope with cash that was collected from the parents to go buy extra turkeys to help more families.

**"THEY DESERVE TO BE RECOGNIZED AND CELEBRATED
FOR ALL THEY DO FOR OUR FAMILIES EVERY YEAR"**

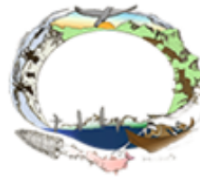
Part of this wonderful event is that each student must write and illustrate a story on being "thankful." What wonderful imaginations these children have. On the day of food delivery, the children come with their stories to read to the children in the classrooms. Our little children just love having the students come in and share their stories and play, read to them, go outside or to circle time with them. This also allows the students to get to know the children that the food will be going to. This is a beautiful way to share the meaning of Thankfulness. Their stories reflect their own meaning of being Thankful and kind, and how to pass it on. I have collected a few of the stories when I could, to share with you. The children understand that they are trying to help families that may not have extra money to buy the things needed for a dinner that celebrates "being thankful." Every year, it is the fifth-grade class that participates. So, every year, a new group of students learn about organizing and promoting this event and about compassion for others.

nomination continued on back...



They will need to make flyers and get the word out about the food drive, when to bring in the food, (non-perishable items only), where to take the donated items, how to store, etc. What a fantastic way to learn about doing projects, build leadership skills, and learn about empathy for others. The number of hours spent each year to pull this wonderful blessing off is extraordinary. The children's energy and enthusiasm are so contagious and what a wonderful way to remember what we are profoundly grateful for. They all expressed the desire to help others and that it felt good to share with our families. The principal, Nicole Branch, the lead teacher Caroline Bradshaw, and parent volunteers then load up their cars with children and food and bring it all to our East center where the family advocates put together baskets according to which families have the most need and will not be able to go and get dinner fixings. All the children help bring in the boxes filled with food before splitting into groups for classroom visits. Even during COVID-19, they collected food and brought it to our center to share with families. What the students do not get to see is just how much food is taken to each center for families that have a need, and can also take-home food to round out their dinners without going back to the store. Every center takes a large box of stuffing, vegetables, cranberry sauce, yams and sometimes extra potatoes and pumpkin pie mix. Every center sets out this extra food and parents are thrilled to take what they need, no strings, just blessings. Parents are happy and share that they were going to have to go back to the store and buy this or that and now they do not have to. It is really wonderful to see this joy and know that young people in our community made this happen. What a true blessing they are. They deserve to be recognized and celebrated for all they do for our families every year. Thank you for your consideration. -Ronnie Brown

*Assistant or Deputy
Director of the Year*
Kristi Walmsley



Tanana
Chiefs
Conference



Kristi is the busiest of busy worker bees in our office. She is project driven, a timeline master, and the best to keep our management team flowing smoothly. Kristi was hired about a year ago as the Assistant Manager pursuing an accounting degree. By the end of the spring semester, she had decided to switch to a business administration bachelor's degree. Working at Head Start changed some of her long-term goals.

"KRISTI HAS A VERY CARING & LOVEABLE PERSONALITY THAT ENHANCES OUR TEAM SIGNIFICANTLY, OR AS WE CALL IT, OUR FAMILY"

Kristi is a natural born leader and is doing a spectacular job of supervising village-based staff, she helps the Head Start Manager with many tedious project-like tasks that takes close attention to detail, and she takes on many "other duties assigned" tasks. Kristi has learned a lot about the early childhood field since starting her position and she continues to grow her knowledge of Head Start and the field. Some of her few major projects that are still growing and evolving are: She has compiled and assembled a strong new hire orientation with the management team, taken on all the Head Start contracts, created the very first site specific year books for families and staff, and has created an onboarding plan that starts from orientation. Kristi has a very caring & loveable personality that enhances our team significantly, or as we call it, our family. -Jennifer Russell

*Assistant Teacher
of the Year*
Lilly Mann



RurAL CAP
Rural Alaska Community Action Program, Inc.



Lilly Mann goes above and beyond her duties as the Assistant Teacher at her Hooper Bay Head Start. She helps out wherever and whenever needed. She subs in the kitchen to help cook and even helps with Maintenance Specialist and janitorial duties when needed. She is always helping out the other Teachers and Teacher Aide with their paperwork and gives them great ideas for activities to do with the children in the classroom.

“SHE SINGS FUN SONGS AND HAS THE CHILDREN SMILING AND ENGAGING ALL DAY LONG”

She is a wonderful Teacher Aide and the children adore her! She plans super fun activities in the classroom such as fun painting and sensory experiences. The children love her fun and interactive circle times as well. She sings fun songs and has the children smiling and engaging all day long. She has amazing attendance and comes to class each day with a smile on her face and a positive attitude. She greets and talks to every parent and is there for them if they ever need anything or have questions about their children's school readiness and learning. Lilly is an amazing team-player and is always willing to help and goes above and beyond her job description of being a Head Start Teacher Aide. We are so lucky to have her teaching our children. She's been with Head Start for over 10 years and we are looking forward to the next 10 years with her teaching the next generation of Head Start children and supporting their families.

-Teresa Hale

*Content Area
Specialist
of the Year*
Kimberly Ross



RurAL CAP
Rural Alaska Community Action Program, Inc.



In Head Start, we recognize the value of leadership at every level, from children orchestrating sociodramatic play to academics promoting best practice policy in Washington D.C. It is my pleasure to nominate a colleague to the Alaska Head Start Association who I believe is deserving of the Content Specialist award. Kimberly Ross serves as Head Start Services Manager for Education, Disabilities, Staff Qualifications and Training, leading a team of nine content specialists who support teaching staff in RurAL CAP Head Start programs in 24 communities.

"SHE APPRECIATES THE WONDER OF EARLY CHILDHOOD AND WANTS EVERY CHILD AND FAMILY TO HAVE HIGH QUALITY SERVICES AND SUPPORTS THAT ALLOW THEM TO FULFILL THEIR DREAMS"

Kim embodies the qualities of strong leadership, holding herself first to high expectations and then exuding encouragement to all members of her team. As a manager, Kim inspires staff to join her in making Head Start classrooms a wonderful place for children and families. She constantly asks, "How can we improve this?" Kim invites input from colleagues and she considers every perspective. Kim's positive energy is contagious. Staff members leave meetings with a sense of purpose, feeling like their batteries were just recharged. As a leader of three content areas, Kim empowers team members to recognize their talents and contribute with confidence to our Head Start program. Whether the need is writing policy, problem-solving technology, supporting professional development, or advocating for a child with special needs, Kim recognizes skills of individual team members and encourages them to take on the challenge.

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



Kim extends her work beyond our RurAL CAP doors, collaborating with other organizations and agencies to ensure that the larger ECE community provides quality services for Head Start families. In her personal life, Kim is a mother, marveling daily at the growth and potential of her daughter. She appreciates the wonder of early childhood and wants every child and family to have high quality services and supports that allow them to fulfill their dreams. Under Kim's leadership, the RurAL CAP Education, Disabilities, Staff Qualifications and Leadership team members carry Kim's commitment to children and families forward with joy, pride, and commitment to that common mission. *-Terri Mach*

I am nominating Ms. Kim Ross because she is an outstanding staff member and person that I greatly admire. She is one of the hardest workers that I know, and she inspires me to do my very best. Although I sometimes call her a workaholic, in a joking way, I admire her tenacity under duress, as well as her positive attitude and can-do spirit. She encourages me and others on our team by her example, and her commitment to serving families in our Head Starts. She has worked the current positions that she supervises, so she really does know all the groundwork and work that goes into our jobs. She makes things as easy as possible for us, and it is greatly appreciated. She is so dedicated to her job, and it really shows. Her colleagues respect her, and count on her to provide excellent work, and she doesn't let them down. I would like for her to be officially rewarded and recognized for her hard work. Please consider her when choosing a person that truly deserves this honor. *-Rebecca Davenport*

Early Childhood Coach of the Year Terri Mach



RurAL CAP
Rural Alaska Community Action Program, Inc.



Terri has so much compassion for her role as a mentor, coach and teacher. She goes above and beyond reaching out to all the teaching staff in our program. When non-teaching staff are interested in learning more about early childhood education, she has reached out to provide coaching for them as well. She does not hesitate to jump right in and assist where she is needed. Terri provides guidance for those she coaches as well as her co-workers. She is passionate about early childhood education.

“SHE OFTEN PUTS OTHERS NEEDS IN FRONT OF HER OWN TO ENSURE THE SUCCESS OF OUR PROGRAM”

She is involved in so many aspects of the program; whether it is coaching, providing team trainings, editing program documents, teaching in the classroom, cooking in the classroom, or cleaning the storage closet. She is team oriented and team kids! I personally look up to her and look forward to her guidance. -*Cynthia Boyer*

Terri has been with Head Start for over 20 years. She has been a HS Teacher, Education Coordinator and Education Coach. She works as an individual and a part of a team to support our site staff throughout the state of Alaska. She respects and understands other's opinions, especially taking different cultures/backgrounds into consideration. She is a kind-hearted person that gives with her whole soul. She often puts others needs in front of her own to ensure the success of our program. Terri is a very patient Coach, taking time to get to know each staff member and working with them to set them up for success. She is passionate about Head Start and strives to ensure Performance Standards are being met.

nomination continued on back...



She has taken it upon herself to be cross-trained in other components in order to have a better understanding of what we do and how to provide quality services to our children and families. She is willing and eager to travel to support site staff in person, even if they aren't assigned to her. She often takes it upon herself to take personal supplies to show the staff how to incorporate cooking and sensory activities into the classroom. She doesn't hesitate to teach, cook or do custodial duties if necessary to have class. She is a role model to her coworkers and site staff. She leads by example with honesty and integrity. She is well respected by everyone who knows her. She advocates for the best interest of staff, children, and families. She partners and collaborates with community members, especially school districts. Terri goes above and beyond in her role as a Coach. She helps guide teachers through the CDA process, including the creation of portfolios and competency statements. She uses her knowledge and expertise to "tier" the teaching staff; assessing their needs and then providing the coaching necessary to help them develop and grow as an ECE professional. She monitors to ensure continuous quality improvement. She approaches challenging situations with ease and grace. She gathers all pertinent information and works with others to find a solution. She is a very gentle, thoughtful, and caring individual. This is especially important when working with vulnerable populations. Overall, Terri is an asset to RurAL CAP and Head Start. -Lynette Cooper

*School District
Collaboration Award*
**Bering Strait
School District**



RurAL CAP
Rural Alaska Community Action Program, Inc.



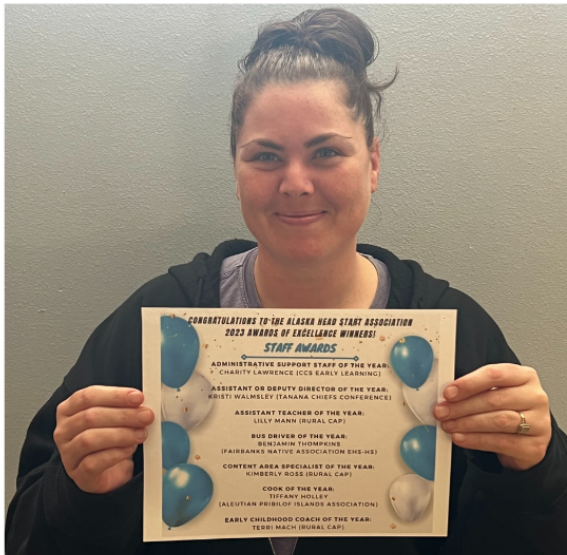
Through a partnership with Bering Strait School District, we are provided a qualified Teacher at our Savoonga and Stebbins Head Start centers. Without this, we would most likely not be able to have a program in these locations. Over the last few years, our communication continues to strengthen because BSSD administration has committed time and energy to this collaboration. This strengthened communication has led to us being able to provide quality services to the children and families in both communities.

"THE USE AND IMPLEMENTATION OF OUR CURRICULUM AND THEIRS ENSURES WE ARE ALL DOING OUR BEST TO GET THE 4-YEAR-OLD'S "KINDERGARTEN READY"

BSSD strives to learn the Head Start Performance Standards to have a better understanding of what we do. This has led to more developmentally appropriate practices in the preschool setting and more meaningful interactions between the teaching staff and children. Over the last two years, we have tried to time our travel to have the RurAL CAP Regional Manager and the BSSD ECE Facilitator visit the site at the same time. This helps us have a unified front with the site staff and provides us an opportunity to network in person. We are able to combine our knowledge and expertise to support the site staff with favorable outcomes. With our collaboration with BSSD, we find that the referral/evaluation/IEP process goes smoother compared to other sites. The Special Education staff do not hesitate to have additional meetings with us to help support a classroom or individual child. The use and implementation of our curriculum and theirs ensures we are all doing our best to get the 4-year-old's "Kindergarten Ready". The local "Big School" administrators are always willing to help, including outside of operating hours, to ensure our facilities are safe and secure.

-Lynette Cooper

Cook of the Year Tiffany Holley



It is our pleasure to nominate a member of our Team that makes a difference in the lives of the children and families we serve. Tiffany and her family were new to the community at the beginning of this last program year, 2022/2023. She volunteered to help in the classroom because we were short a staff person. We encouraged her to apply to be the Cook during that time, and she did. Her volunteering allowed us to stay open so it did not disrupt services for all the children and families.

"HE HAS A SENSE OF HUMOR THAT KEEPS EVERYONE SMILING, ESPECIALLY AS WE NAVIGATE THROUGH THE CHALLENGING TIMES OF THE PANDEMIC"

Tiffany Holley is exceptional because she is willing to help others. It was evident as she signed up her child for the program and immediately began working as a parent volunteer.

A position became open for Cook, and Tiffany applied and quickly became immersed in a CACFP review. She quickly rose to the occasion and helped our program through the review at her site! Tiffany's work ethic, attitude, and extraordinary compliance to the detail in her work area are why we recognize her as the Cook of the Year. Ms. Tiffany joined our program as our Cook in Sand Point Head Start last December 2022; since then, she has been a great team member and, most of all, a wonderful colleague.

nomination continued on back...



Our Head Start Team appreciates her work ethic, concern, and love for all the children along with her nutritious meals every time she serves them. Tiffany plans child nutrition activities with the children and families that allow her to promote health, nutrition, and cooking activities. Her dedication and knowledge of CACFP meal planning and adherence to the federal guidelines made a huge difference. We look forward to working with Ms. Tiffany for an extended period. We are blessed to have her. -*Rayette McGlashan and Marilyn Cook*

*Cultural Awareness
Award*
Marie Schliebe



I am writing to nominate Marie Schliebe for the Cultural Award she epitomizes the Heart work of Head Start. Marie began her Early Education Career with APIA Head Start in 1999 and will receive her BA in Early Education while working as the Lead Teacher at the Unalaska site. She has built strong community ties with elders in the community who are happy to share their knowledge of the land and people. Marie sits as the secretary of her tribal organization, and works diligently to advocate for her tribal members.

**“MARIE’S PASSION FOR PRESERVING HER CULTURE
AND PROMOTING POSITIVE CHANGE IN HER
COMMUNITY IS TRULY INSPIRING”**

The community of Unalaska is culturally diverse and Marie leads her team to meet the needs of all children. One of the events she leads is the annual multicultural celebration where she and her staff honor the diversity of the classroom through celebration and honor to every child’s culture and traditions. Children and families are given the opportunity to share their traditional dress, foods, and language and families join in the Cultural Celebration.

Marie’s dedication to promoting cultural awareness among children is truly commendable. Her efforts have helped create an inclusive environment that celebrates diversity, promotes understanding, and fosters respect for different cultures. She has close ties with her tribe, community and most of all the children and families in her program. Marie is the Lead Teacher at our Unalaska site and has consistently honored the culture and tradition of the children in the program.

nomination continued on back...



She promotes the Unangan Tunuu language in the classroom on a regular basis while honoring the traditional food and culture of the lands and people.

When Marie is not busy with Head Start she works as the Board Secretary for the Qawalangin Tribe of Unalaska. She also volunteers every summer for the tribes Camp Qungaayux, an annual gathering that preserves cultural history and instills ancestral wisdom that youth may carry on. Marie brings the values of the Unangax people by teaching the Unangax values to the children. Values such as Ugigdada – Share, Tutada - Listen, Agitaasiin sismida - Help others, Agitaasitxin iŋamnaasada - Be kind to other people. Her heart is open to the rich culture, language, and the values of the people. She knows and understands the importance of connection to culture and in her work, she recognizes the diversity of the people of Unalaska.

On a yearly basis she has a Cultural Celebration in the classroom where all families share their culture, traditions and food. Children love to share their culture it helps them to have a sense of security and belonging with their classmates. I strongly recommend Marie Schliebe for this award. Marie's passion for preserving her culture and promoting positive change in her community is truly inspiring. I believe she is highly deserving of the Head Start Culture Award. *-Caroline Wolkoff*

*Early Head Start
Teacher of the Year*
**Melanie
Saeteurn**



This nominee deserves this award because she is very ambitious and has a lot of pride in what she does. She is a very kind hearted teacher and over achieving in her work. Melanie has a bright future helping the children grow stronger. I believe she deserves this award. -Mindy Seateurn

**"SHE IS AMAZING WITH THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
AND IS A DEDICATED WORKER"**

Melanie is such a kind and loving teacher. She is amazing with the children and families and is a dedicated worker. Melanie goes above and beyond in her job. As a teacher, Melanie is professional and works well alongside her colleagues. She is a role model and the children and families she helps is recognized. Melanie regularly collaborates with other teachers and staff for lesson plans, curriculums and documentation. She is a leader and is loved by many. -Solomona Sooalo

*Family Advocate
of the Year*
**Victoria
Gonzalez**



I am honored to nominate Victoria for the prestigious Family Advocate of the Year award. As a compassionate advocate, she consistently goes above and beyond to support our families and ensure their well-being. Her exceptional dedication, networking skills, and commitment to staying up to date on available resources make her an invaluable asset to our community. This essay aims to highlight Victoria's outstanding contributions and the reasons why she is deserving of this esteemed recognition.

“BY GOING ABOVE AND BEYOND TO SUPPORT OUR FAMILIES, SHE CREATES A NURTURING AND EMPOWERING ENVIRONMENT WHERE THEIR WELL-BEING IS PARAMOUNT”

Victoria's compassion for our families is evident in everything she does. She deeply cares about their well-being and goes the extra mile to provide support during challenging times. Her empathetic nature enables her to connect with families on a personal level, offering them a sense of comfort and understanding. Whether it's a crisis or a daily concern, Victoria handles every situation with grace and care, ensuring that families feel heard, supported, and valued. Her dedication to going above and beyond in meeting their needs truly sets her apart.

One of Victoria's remarkable achievements is her ability to secure networking resources that greatly benefit our children and families. Recognizing the importance of comprehensive care, she proactively sought partnerships with organizations such as Therapeutic Health and Home.

nomination continued on back...



By bringing physical therapy and occupational therapy services directly to our center, she eliminates the need for parents to take time off work to accompany their children to appointments. This initiative not only alleviates the burden on families but also ensures that our students receive the care they require to thrive.

Victoria's networking skills and determination have opened doors to invaluable resources that positively impact the lives of our families. Victoria's commitment to staying informed about available resources is exemplary. She understands that crises can arise unexpectedly, and having access to timely and relevant information is crucial. She actively seeks out and maintains knowledge about community organizations, support services, financial assistance programs, and more. This allows her to swiftly provide our families with the resources they need in times of crisis, ensuring they receive the necessary support and guidance.

Victoria's proactive approach to resourcefulness demonstrates her dedication to empowering families with the tools to navigate challenges successfully. Victoria's ability to handle crises with grace and care is truly commendable. She remains composed and compassionate when supporting families during difficult times. Her calm demeanor and empathetic approach provide a sense of reassurance and stability, helping families navigate through crises more effectively. Victoria's unwavering support, combined with her resourcefulness, enables families to find solutions and regain a sense of hope. Her exceptional crisis management skills make her an invaluable ally for our families in times of need.

In conclusion, Victoria exemplifies the qualities of an exceptional Family Advocate. Her compassion, dedication, networking skills, and commitment to staying informed about available resources make her an ideal candidate for the Family Advocate of the Year award. By going above and beyond to support our families, she creates a nurturing and empowering environment where their well-being is paramount. Her partnerships with therapeutic organizations, proactive resourcefulness, and graceful crisis management demonstrate her unwavering commitment to the success and happiness of our families. It is with great enthusiasm and admiration that I nominate Victoria for this esteemed recognition, as she continues to inspire us all with her exceptional advocacy and compassionate care. *-Catherine Greydanus*

Teacher of the Year

Kylie Shuneson



Kylie Shuneson has worked with us in her role as a Head Start classroom teacher in our New Stuyahok classroom since the Fall of 2019. She started her position at Head Start after years of working for Southwest Region School District as a kindergarten teacher. Kylie brought a wealth of skills with her to her current Head Start teaching position and we have been so fortunate to have her in this role for four years.

"KYLIE'S HEART FOR CHILDREN, AND HER COMMITMENT TO MAKING SURE EACH CHILD'S NEEDS ARE MET, IS CONTINUALLY EVIDENT"

Kylie is an excellent communicator, has great interpersonal skills, and her strong leadership has enriched our early childhood program at Head Start. Kylie's heart for children, and her commitment to making sure each child's needs are met, is continually evident. When Kylie began her position at Head Start, we knew there may be an adjustment period between being teaching kindergarten and Head Start. Her adjustment was made smoother by her willingness to accept direction, participate in coaching, and make needed changes to her practice to adapt to a new setting and population. In the past few years, I have seen her grow in her competency in the preschool setting as she has taken on new challenges and pushed herself out of her comfort zone. Kylie's interactions with children are always warm, compassionate and fair. She is able to see each child as an individual, treating them according to their own unique needs.

nomination continued on back...



Likewise, Kylie prioritizes building relationships with each of her student's families and caregivers. She stays in regular communication with families, and is willing to adjust her schedule to meet with them on a regular basis.

Kylie has invested time, energy and resources in becoming a vital part of her community of New Stuyahok. Kylie is not one to back down from a challenge! The past few years she has been part of a collaboration pilot program with Southwest Region Schools and our BBNA Head Start program, teaching a full day of preschoolers: Head Start in the morning, district PreK in the afternoon. As you can imagine, this is an exhausting endeavor, but Kylie's ability to organize and manage her time, staff and resources has created a successful, model program. As stated before, she brings strong leadership skills to this position, successfully managing two (and sometimes more) teacher aides. She has always found the strengths in her colleagues and ensures that everyone has a space to contribute and participate. Kylie's approachable and personable style make her a joy to work with. The past few years have presented unprecedented challenges to our Head Start programs. In a time that is characterized by constant change and uncertainty, Kylie has added strength and stability to our Head Start program. When days become turbulent, we know that we can count on Kylie to remain consistent and steady. -Kate Berkoski

Head Start Director of the Year Mark Lackey



www.ccsalaska.org



I have never worked with somebody as committed to advocating for the well-being of children and their families, committed to doing right by one's employees, and committed to the success and perpetuity of Head Start than Mark Lackey, Executive Director of CCS Early Learning. I marvel daily at his unflagging dedication to mission.

"I AM GRATEFUL THAT MARK IS ON OUR TEAM AS HE NAVIGATES ALL OF THE TWISTS AND TURNS THAT COME TO OUR PROGRAM"

His persistent advocacy efforts in Washington, D.C., Juneau, and locally here in the valley on behalf of his own agency, CCS Early Learning, but also on behalf of Head Start all over the state, in concert with others, I believe is what contributed to the successful movement of proposed budget increases for Head Start from one state legislative branch to the next. Mark has an uncanny ability to see the whole picture of how the success of early childhood care and education - the success of Head Start - directly impacts the lives of all in our community and state. He is resolute and articulate in his delivery of this message as he deftly reads a room, and somehow, even with the gravity of the message, he manages to deliver it speckled with moments of levity and a little twinkle in his eyes. I would love to see Mark Lackey recognized and honored by his peers for all that he has done for children, families, and head start this past year. -Janel Gagnon

nomination continued on back...



Mark Lackey the Executive Director of CCS deserves this award. I feel the positive attitude he has carried over the last few years, even when he himself may not have felt it at times was extremely appreciated for those of us who work for CCS and look for guidance. Times have been hard but Mark deals with the obstacles that come his way that effects all of us by including our board members and staff in conversation. I wonder sometimes if he gets to sleep. :) When he talks to groups of people on behalf of the Head Start Program we never forget that we are here to serve families and children that are in our community. We walk with them and encourage them and cheer for them as we ourselves learn. There are a lot of great people that work along side of Mark and he has connected with so many community partners that make our program that much stronger. I am grateful that Mark is on our team as he navigates all of the twists and turns that come to our program. For me I believe that Mark believes that what we are doing makes a difference and fights for our children and families and I am thankful I am on his team. -*Tammy Berdeaux*

Mark is most deserving to be recognized for an award by the AHSA. He has dedicated his career to Head Start in Alaska, while continuing to advocate for Head Start across the nation. He has joined the National Head Start Association Board and served as a Chair for Region 10 to ensure that Alaska is fully represented in topics affecting all Alaska programs. Beyond his advocacy for programs, he has also advocated for our CCS staff wellness programs to help our employees feel supported and well. Mark leads with empathy first in all his interactions with the community and employees. He attracts talented people around him in all his community work and within the CCS Early Learning teams. The last 3 years have been exceptionally stressful with the pandemic, especially devastating for early childhood programs, however, I can attest that Mark stays grounded and makes decisions that are thoughtful and considerate of community, children, parents, and staff needs. He has both a great business mind coupled with an incredible social service brain (a rare gem). Despite being incredibly short-staffed, turnover in leadership positions, and the many other issues that CCS has faced over the last 3 years, he continues to be a champion of optimism and hope that things will get better and we can make it happen. For all the encouragement that he gives to those around him, please honor him with this encouragement of being awarded the Director of the year. He is the most deserving in my opinion. -*Aaron Clements*

All 2023 AHSA Award Nominees

Alexia Cook-Griffeth	FNA Head Start Parent Policy	Michelle Schilling
Alfreda Dock	Council	MJ St. John
Alia Heck	FNA JOM /Tribal	Moriah Hunt
Angela Niggl	Gussie Olanna	Nelly Stone
Angeliz Rodriguez	Helen Larson	Neva Lancaster
Angie Pagan	James Nicholai	Pan Thao
Annie Shade	Jason Tulik	Patricia Gilbert
Ariel Timo	Jennifer Hoffman	Pavlo Sazhniev
Ashley Woods	Jennifer McClure	Peggy Bryant
Brandon Doty	Jennifer Pitzke	Rachelle Maillard
Brandon Niggl	Jocelyn Stone	Robbin Duboise
Brandy Berdeaux Doty	Joel Antes	Robert Brown
Carley Huston	John Strongheart	See Thao
Carly Berdeaux	Kaladi Brothers	Selina Ellis
Casandra Gallagher	Kathy Johnson	Shawna Ragan
Charlene Olanna	Kelsey Loyd	Sonya Lincoln
Chris Beisel	Kristen Mayo	Summer Keelan
Christi Morgan	Krystal Howard	Tabatha Peterson
Christine Stone	Lana Arsenault	Tammy Berdeaux
Cindy Bergstrom	Laura Trainor	Tana Heussner
Cole Criswell	Lauren Patton	Teresa Hale
Corrine Lefanof	Lekanof, Corrine	Teta Harris
Crystal Bird	Linda Duke	Tracy Neves
Crystal Morris	Lindsey Rushing	Victor Betances
Cynthia Boyer	Loretta Bradford	Victoria Grey
Darilyn Byram	Marianne Fanger	Walter Chastain
Desiree Davison	Marilu Nunn	Wendy King
Dina Contreras	Mary Long	Whitney Gobbi
Eric Joe	Massa Amik	
Flora Matthias	Megan Faraci	
FNA Head Start Facilities Team -	Melissa Charlie	
Eric, Mark, David, DeShawn	Mercedes Gomez	
and Darren		