



Alaska Head Start Association Awards of Excellence



2024



Table of Contents

Beating the Odds	1-2
Head Start Mother of the Year	3-4
Head Start Father of the Year	5
Assistant or Deputy Director of the Year	6-7
Bus Driver of the Year	8
Content Area Specialist of the Year	9-11
Early Head Start Teacher of the Year	12-13
Home Visitor of the Year	14-15
Community Advocate of the Year	16-17
Leadership Award	18-19
Program Policy Council Award	20
Early Childhood Coach of the Year	21
Cook of the Year	22
Administrative Support Staff of the Year	23-24
Assistant Teacher of the Year	25-26
Corporate Award	27-28
Humanitarian Award	29-31
Maintenance Staff of the Year	32-33
Teacher of the Year	34-36
Family Advocate of the Year	37
Head Start Director of the Year	38-39
All 2024 AHSA Award Nominations	40

Beating the Odds Award

Cody Keyes



I am honored to nominate Cody for the Beating the Odds Award, recognizing his remarkable journey and resilience as a Head Start parent and educator. Cody's story is a testament to his strength, determination, and unwavering commitment to his child and community. Cody's background in the construction field came to an abrupt halt when he received a medical diagnosis that made it impossible for him to continue in this line of work.

“HIS JOURNEY IS A SHINING EXAMPLE OF WHAT CAN BE ACHIEVED THROUGH HARD WORK, DEDICATION, AND A COMMITMENT TO PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH”

Facing this challenging setback, Cody sought out opportunities to redefine his path and provide stability for his family. This led him to our center, CSELC, where he initially enrolled his child in our services.

While learning about our programs and services, Cody saw a unique opportunity not just to be involved in his child's education but also to pivot his career. He enrolled in our teacher training program, aiming to gain new skills, earn an income, and most importantly, become the best parent he could be. This decision was particularly significant as Cody was navigating a difficult divorce and was uncertain about his future co-parenting arrangements.

Cody's dedication to his personal and professional development has been exemplary.

nomination continued on back...



By immersing himself in our teacher training program, he ensured he could see his son daily, regardless of custody arrangements, and simultaneously equipped himself with the tools to be a more intentional and effective parent. His efforts culminated in earning his Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, and he is now a valued Teacher I at our school.

Throughout his journey, Cody has not allowed his circumstances to define him. Instead, he has transformed adversity into an opportunity to grow and thrive. His perseverance and resilience are inspiring to all who know him. Cody's story is a powerful reminder of the impact that determination and a supportive community can have on individuals and families.

Cody embodies the spirit of the Beating the Odds Award. He has overcome significant challenges, embraced new opportunities, and become self-sufficient, all while maintaining a strong, nurturing presence in his child's life. His journey is a shining example of what can be achieved through hard work, dedication, and a commitment to personal and professional growth.

For these reasons, I wholeheartedly nominate Cody for the Beating the Odds Award. His story is not just one of overcoming hardship, but also one of incredible growth and contribution to our community. - *Marianne Fanger*

Head Start Mother of the Year Jessica Merrill



Jessica is Mother of the Year in my eyes as I have seen on multiple occasions where she gives her all to her children. Jessica is a mother of 2 amazing little girls. Jessica has attended as many parent classes offered by CCS as she could. She recognizes and appreciates the importance of the family partnerships between school life and home life.

"HER LOVE AND KINDNESS FOR HER FAMILY AND OTHERS SHOW IN HOW SHE COMMUNICATES EVERY DAY..."

Jessica is a busy Mom on the go but tries to spend as much time as she can at the center at drop off and pick up to strengthen that connection with her daughters and their teachers. She might be running late here and there but those extra moments spent for a warm hand off helps make the day a little easier for all involved. Jessica is also a strong advocate for herself, her children, and the children enrolled at CCS. Jessica has been a very active parent on the WEHS Parent Center Committee and in the Mom's support group. Jessica is often observed interacting with other parents at the center and during family events, offering advice and encouraging parents to participate in the family engagement opportunities. Jessica does whatever she believes will be best for herself and her family. Her patience, energy and efforts do not go unnoticed which is why I believe she is so deserving to be recognized for the amazing Mother she is by being awarded Mother of the Year. - Victoria Grey

nomination continued on back...



Jessica is such a dedicated and caring mother, her capabilities know no bounds. Jessica has consistently kept up with the latest research in child development and applied it to her everyday life. As a current head start sub and a rockstar parent, Jessica has shown her love, dedication and empathy to all children, not just her own, but the work she does with her children deserve an award. Jessica attends almost all family fun nights and classes CCS offers and is always on the lookout for new opportunities for her kids to learn something new. Jessica is a wonderfully kind and honest person as well who has a glowing soul and a beautiful family. - *Serena Heck*

Jessica is an amazing mom and such a great example for those around her. I have known Jessica from the time she was in the CCS Home Base Program and then years later moving into one of the centers. She is very involved with the CCS family functions such as PCC, family fun events, and our moms support group. Jessica communicates well with her children's teachers and CCS staff about any needs for her child and family. Her love and kindness for her family and others show in how she communicates every day with her wonderful outlook on life that she shares with everyone. I am sure that like all of us she has had many struggles in the past years, but she continues to provide encouragement and support to other parents and staff when she sees a need. Jessica Merrill would be a great Mother of the Year. - *Tammy Berdeaux*

Head Start Father of the Year Victor Betances



Victor deserves the Head Start Father of the Year award because he is consistently working towards improving the lives of his children. He is a single dad who works hard to ensure his family's needs are met. Furthermore, Victor has generated personal growth in many areas of his life. These healthy shifts have fostered opportunities for his children to receive the support they deserve. Victor is an advocate for his children and I am excited for what the future holds for this family due to his dedication and eagerness to always improve. - Aja Hensley

“VICTOR IS A HARD WORKER WHO IS MAKING SURE THAT HE IS NOT ONLY THERE FOR HIS CHILDREN, BUT SETTING GOOD EXAMPLES FOR THEM AS WELL”

Victor has overcome many obstacles in his past that have brought him to this moment. Victor has shared some of the experiences he has from his past from not making great choices, being shot, and time spent away from his children. Now he is a small business owner and a single father of 2 young children. Victor might seem like he is always on the go, but it is clear through his actions how he loves and cares for his children. Victor makes sure to take the time to share little moments with his children, from sharing a Valentine's breakfast with his daughter, to picking out the right book to bring home with his son. Victor is a hard worker who is making sure that he is not only there for his children, but setting good examples for them as well. - Victoria Grey

Assistant or Deputy Director of the Year Tammy Berdeaux



Tammy Berdeaux has not only dedicated almost 10 years with CCS, She has dedicated over 25 years into working in fields with children and families. Currently she holds a masters degree and only continues her education and growth each year. She is a wonderful asset to have in your corner and to have worked with us. The difference she makes in the lives of these children and their family is beyond beautiful. She is always 100 percent dedicated to helping any and all children. She is beyond deserving of this award. - *Carly Berdeaux*

"SHE IS CALM, RELIABLE AND A FIERCE PROTECTOR AND ADVOCATE OF WHAT IS RIGHT"

Tammy is one of the most skilled individuals to work in an Early Childhood Education program. She has the ability to adapt to all things that can happen. The kitchen needs coverage, Tammy's cooking lunch. A child is having a difficult time, Tammy is in the classroom co-regulating with them. A staff member needs guidance, Tammy is on standby with her words of wisdom. A family is in need of support, Tammy is ready with a resource. When looking at all the things that Tammy can do and has done, she could be considered an Early Childhood Hero. It is so easy to follow her lead and guidance not because of the title she holds, but by the way she connects and interacts with others. Tammy supports children, parents, families, and staff wherever they are at and as they work towards what success means to them. We are incredibly lucky to have Tammy on the CCS Team! - *Victoria Grey*

nomination continued on back...



Tammy B is a joy to work with. She is calm, reliable and a fierce protector and advocate of what is right. Tammy has helped me and our Family Partnership Team as we faced changes and strange times and new challenges...always willing to be flexible and understanding. I could always count on Tammy to let us know if we were pushing too hard or changing things too fast, she would speak up for those who did not. She is a fantastic supervisor, one of the most caring and supportive supervisors I have worked with. Her Team knows without a doubt that she will stand with and for them, and probably bring meaningful gifts, snack and jokes to the meeting ;) - *Summer Keelen*

Tammy is the Family Partnership Coordinator at CCS. She is great at her job. She fills in as director when the director is out of the office or out of town. She goes above and beyond for all the workers under her. She is very deserving of this award. - *Elisabeth Meeks*

Tammy is awesome! She's always willing to help! She does a great job enrolling children and getting to know families. She always stops and talks to every employee in this building. She sometimes has a great selection of candy on her desk. - *Corrine Lekanof*

Bus Driver of the Year Guy Sandlin



www.ccsalaska.org



He genuinely cares and it shows. We appreciate him so much! Bus drivers have such an important and technical job that sometimes the heart gets lost in the overwhelm of rules and safety and timelines...Mr Guy is one of the drivers we have been blessed to work with who is able to keep our mission of supporting children and families at the forefront and value and honor relationships first.

- Summer Keelan

"HE GENUINELY CARES AND IT SHOWS. WE APPRECIATE HIM SO MUCH!"

We love having Mr Guy as our bus driver , he is very courteous , reliable and a super safe driver ! - *Jennifer Reynolds*

Mr Guy was a very reliable and safe driver for CCS Early Learning this year. He was great with children and families and always put the safety of children first. He was a great communicator and worked well with all of the CCS Early Learning staff. Our families felt very confident having him transporting their children to and from school! - *Cindy Bergstrom*

Mr Guy was always a reliable bus driver who engaged with families and children. The kids looked forward to seeing him every day. He took the extra time and care to get to know families and their needs, to accommodate wherever he could and to give the children who needed it the extra care, connection and time.

- *Kristen Mayo*

*Content Area
Specialist
of the Year*
Patrick Cockrell



www.ccsalaska.org



Pat has worked for CCS Early Learning for 23 years in a variety of positions - a classroom teacher, our very first Early Head Start Center Coordinator - and he currently serves as our Data and Compliance Manager. Pat assists our entire team by making sure that our data tells the story of our work! He is a Child Plus super user and over the years has helped many other Alaskan programs who needed some help in using this program.

“PATRICK IS ALWAYS CHEERFUL AND HELPFUL AND NO QUESTION IS AN INCONVENIENCE”

He is always willing to help our team - and provides ongoing training, oversight, and assistance for anything related to data and compliance - and in reporting to all of our various funders. Pat truly is a “Content Area Specialist” and we encourage AHSA to recognize him for his long and ongoing work to support Head Start success in our state! - *Mark Lackey*

Pat goes above and beyond for CCS. He steps into every building when needed and helps with transitions like it's a breeze. He is always positive and outgoing. Pat loves this company and the children we serve. He understands the families and what it takes to be a member of the CCS Team. We would not survive without Pat! - *Brandy Berdeaux-Doty*

nomination continued on back...



Patrick knows all of the very fine details of working in Child Plus. He is able to collect data that we are able to use to better our program. Recently he has been helping in a position (FPC) that is not his usual position. Pat has gone above and beyond helping in this area. He is very knowledgeable and organized. I know I can call Patrick to help me with anything Child Plus or data related and he would be able to help me. Pat knows Child Plus inside and out! He has helped me countless times with reports and understanding data. I do have to ask him to slow down so I can understand him and take good notes. LOL. He has made some changes that make work easier for the rest of us. He also helps me to understand CACFP requirements. I think Pat is very deserving of this award. - *Darilyn Byram*

Patrick is our Data Compliance Manager and he has been invaluable in keeping all our centers up-to-date on what is needed and when. He regularly sends out reminders and lists of health and education events that are due. He also works one day a week each month at each center and assists with anything we need, especially data input. He is also over the CACFP data and center reviews. Patrick is always cheerful and helpful and no question is an inconvenience. He is an integral part of the Program Management Team developing and revising forms and systems to make the work at the centers smooth and manageable. Patrick has had many positions at CCS Early Learning over the years and is well known and respected. - *Cindy Bergstrom*

Patrick (Pat) is beyond helpful in so many areas at CCS. His place within the agency is invaluable and we all have a strong appreciation for Pat. Pat is considered a master in many areas possibly including the Jedi Arts. When stumped with a problem or in a situation where we need clarification on CACFP, ERSEA, Disabilities, or Health and Education, Pat is one of my first calls to get an answer. This year Pat has gone above and beyond helping in all of the centers and keeping the agency on track and in compliance with all of the data that he works with. Thank you Pat for all that you do! - *Victoria Grey*

Pat has been with the company for many many years and is the "go to" guy when it comes to anything ChildPlus or CACFP related. Is full of knowledge in these areas and what he is unsure about, he makes sure to find the answer in a timely manner. - *Charity Lawrence*



Pat is always very helpful when I have questions regarding my position and rules I need to follow. - *Corrine Lekanof*

Pat is our Data and Compliance manager here at CCS Early Learning but has done so much more this year. 2 centers lost their Family Partnership Coordinators and he filled in for these centers to help with their jobs. He was essential at my center while I did not have a FPC. He worked hard to help with new enrollments and getting our records up to date. He also set in on interviews and helped our teachers with family issues. He supported me, as a Center Coordinator, helping me understand more about FPC responsibilities while helping teach me how to use Childplus. We at Wasilla appreciate all the support he has given us this year.
- *Linda Duke*

Pat is amazing! He knows the answer to every question I have, or he knows how to find the answer, or who to ask. He is our Child Plus whiz (real title Data and Compliance Manager). He wears so many hats it's hard to keep up with all that he does. He monitors all the CACFP reports for the agency. He helps us all with our monthly reports. He also monitors all of the enrollment data on Child Plus. In addition, he sends us reports to help us keep on top of all our health and disabilities requirements. He does many reports for our CEO and Programs Director to help with writing the grants as well. He is so helpful and always says, "No problem, that's what I'm here for." He is very dedicated to Head Start! He deserves this recognition. - *Redona Grazio*

Early Head Start Teacher of the Year Sam Nyx



www.ccsalaska.org



Sam is a well researched, up to date and intentional teacher who strives to provide the absolute best care for all children. Sam has this incredibly natural and welcoming way with people that create an atmosphere of love, acceptance and understanding. Sam has some of the best teaching practices I've ever seen and is more than deserving of this award. - *Serena Heck*

"SAM HAS THIS INCREDIBLY NATURAL AND WELCOMING WAY WITH PEOPLE THAT CREATE AN ATMOSPHERE OF LOVE, ACCEPTANCE AND UNDERSTANDING"

Sam was meant to be an Early Head Start Teacher. Sam has been a champion for children in his classroom this last year. Sam was the one consistent teacher for his classroom for months while waiting to get new staff hired and onboarded. Sam would continue to show up everyday and give his all to the children enrolled in his class during that staffing shortage. Sam kept his classroom a safe place for his children to learn and grow in. Sam continues to work on his professional development to learn more about Head Start and Early Childhood Education. Sam does an outstanding job balancing the classroom paperwork and being present with the children and families he works with. Sam is an excellent advocate for children and their families. - *Victoria Grey*

nomination continued on back...



Sam is an incredibly calm, caring and compassionate teacher. His awareness of his students' needs for creative outlets and support is obvious to anyone who witnesses his implementation of his craft. He is humble and does not seek recognition, nonetheless, he is an excellent example of how to be fully present with children in a classroom. His ability to modulate energy in the room is seamless and his presence with students is clearly consistent as he is able to support big emotions from little people in their moments of distress and excitement. Sam's quiet demeanor is like a superpower with children hearing his words and responding without resistance more often than seen in most EHS classrooms. - *Kayleen Hetrick*

Home Visitor of the Year Stefanie Ostlind



www.ccsalaska.org



Stefanie is a great asset to our companies. Daily working Hands on with our kiddos and helping with parents through pregnancy and after birth. She goes above and beyond and cares deeply about her passion in helping families. I just recently got the honor of being put on her caseload as I am expecting my first child. Getting to be hands on and see in person with myself all she does makes me extremely grateful for ALL the families she helps. - Carly Berdeaux

**“STEFANIE IS ONE OF THE MOST DEDICATED
EDUCATORS AND FAMILY SUPPORTERS I HAVE
EVER MET”**

Stefanie is passionate about the CCS Mission and the families we serve. Stefanie has done an amazing job at sharing the CCS Mission and programs through a variety of different recruitment opportunities Stefanie has a high level of dedication to the home based program. She has been working with a full caseload of prenatal mothers, infants, toddlers and transitioning 3 year olds and she goes above and beyond to be a huge support for each family. Stefanie prioritizes building connections with her families to build a strong working relationship to best foster the development of young children. Stefanie is always looking for opportunities to expand her knowledge and experiences to offer higher quality of services to the CCS Families and the community. Stefanie is a loved and valued member of the CCS team and she is cherished by her home visiting families. - Victoria Grey

nomination continued on back...



I want to recognize Stefanie Ostlind for the nomination of Home Visitor of the year. She is so enthusiastic about her families and CCS that you can't help but to smile when you hear her talking about how wonderful the program is to anyone she feels might benefit from its services. That energy goes into her day as she goes out and meets with the families in our community and works with them to navigate the joys and hardships that come up in daily life. Stefanie has walked beside many families as a Home Visitor in our community. She enjoys providing activities that the families can do together especially sensory art and getting messy. She listens and likes to problem solve with families. She helps them learn how to advocate for their children and themselves. She sits with them and shows them how to fill out paperwork, she explains things that are not always easy to understand and she also knows that she is learning right alongside her family. She enjoys learning about different cultures and shares the information she learns with others when she can.

Stefanie helps out in our community to support her families with the many different resources that are available and tries to stay on top of the many changes that are always taking place in early childhood. She is a great team player and a wonderful friend. She cares a lot about all of those around her and loves to meet new people. If you seem to be lost or just sitting quietly and Stefanie is around just be prepared to meet someone new and have a wonderful conversation about CCS Early Learning Head Start and the Home Base Program. For all these reasons she absolutely should be recognized as the AHSA Home Visitor of the Year!

- *Tammy Berdeaux*

Stefanie is one of the most dedicated educators and family supporters I have ever met. As a Home Visitor, she balances the roles teacher, facilitator and advocate perfectly. She cares deeply for the children and families she works with. I have had the pleasure of working with Stefanie as she supports children transitioning from EHS to HS. She meets the family where they are, she is non-judgmental and she is dedicated to finding support in our centers, community and within the family's own circle of support. Stefanie jumps in wherever help is needed. She is flexible, kind, knowledgeable and caring! Her entire heart goes into every moment she shares with the families she works with. - *Summer Keelen*

Community Advocate of the Year *Janel Gagnon*



When I think of a Community Advocate - I think of someone who is passionate about a cause, someone who lives and breathes and shares with the entire community how important this cause is to the success and health of the community. And when I think of people who are Community Advocates that I know or have known in our world of Head Start, Janel Gagnon is at the very top of the list.

**"...HER TIRELESS WORK HAS BROUGHT TO LIGHT
WHAT HEAD START IS AND HOW IT HELPS OUR
COMMUNITY IN ALL GENERATIONS AND CULTURES"**

Janel joined our CCS team in August of 2022 as an Associate Educator - working directly with our children and families in classrooms, on the playground, and as a bus aide. She approached us very quickly after her employment when a new position at CCS was created - Community Outreach Manager. In her interview she communicated how much that she had LOVED her classroom work - but that she simply had underestimated how physically demanding this work was. However, she communicated so passionately that her experience in the classroom had given her such an amazing understanding of how important and how successful our work was for child/family support and growth - she wanted to share this with the entire world! She was hired and her Advocacy for CCS and Head Start, which was already very strong - blossomed!

nomination continued on back...



In her new role she took over much of the Community Outreach for CCS Early Learning. Anyone who has been a follower of our Facebook or Instagram accounts over the past two years have seen her community advocacy in action. However, social media was just the tip of the iceberg in #tellingtheCCSstory. She has been a fierce advocate in chamber of commerce settings, in Rotary meetings, and in her day to day interactions with individuals and businesses in our community. She has helped CCS to re-engage in parent leadership training - helping our parents to fulfill the potential that they have in being our most important advocates and ambassadors. Her incredible passion and alignment with our work has exponentially increased the number of financial donors that support CCS Early Learning, but more importantly she has increased the community awareness, connection, and ownership for the important program and services that CCS provides. We couldn't think of a more deserving person to be honored with the AHSA Community Advocate award! - *Mark Lackey*

Janel has worked tirelessly promoting Head Start in Alaska and the stories in our community about Head Start and its impact via social media, community events and meetings, and in conversations throughout our community and Alaska. She has used social media platforms to bring every day stories of our children and their families to our community and Alaska. Her advocacy has reached so many, and a lot of her work starts with a conversation and kindness. She is a cherished treasure in our community, her tireless work has brought to light what Head Start is and how it helps our community in all generations and cultures.

- *Michelle Bower*

Janel has many strengths and being a community advocate is definitely one of them! Janel is fantastic to work with and has such a positive spin on things. Janel has an incredible skill of taking a community concern and capturing the importance of it all and sharing it with others. Through this she raises awareness, support, and hope throughout the community. Janel has done an outstanding job on educating others about the head start funding deficit and encourages community members to support the head start mission. Janel might be on the CCS Team, but her hard work and energy supports all the children in Alaska.

- *Victoria Grey*

Leadership Award Aaron Clements



www.ccsalaska.org



Aaron Clements has been a community leader in the Mat-Su for many years. Before joining the CCS team, he served as the Executive Director of a local outpatient behavioral health clinic for 6 years. In this role, he led this organization in their efforts to transform into a sustainable, nationally accredited program that continues to serve our community to this day. Since joining the CCS team (at about the same time COVID did...) Aaron has not stopped helping to lead CCS through and to recover from that storm.

“HE PERSONIFIES OUR MISSION OF MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES AND FAMILIES OF YOUNG CHILDREN IN OUR COMMUNITY”

As our Operations Manager he has oversight of all our facilities, our transportation program, our procurement, and all of our contracted work. He was the first person to step into this newly created Leadership position and he has excelled in it! All of our centers and the contractors and vendors that he works with know that if they have an issue or a problem - Aaron will come up with the very best solution he possibly can. However, my reason for nominating Aaron is not due to how well he does his assigned duties - it has everything to do with how much effort he puts into LEADERSHIP for CCS Early Learning that is over and above what his job requires.

Aaron is an optimistic visionary - who works extremely hard to make these dreams come true!

nomination continued on back...



He personifies our mission of making a difference in the lives and families of young children in our community - and he pours himself into this work. Aaron serves as one of the 5 people on the CCS Early Learning Senior Leadership Team - and he is incredibly active and effective in this role. I can think of many examples of Aaron working together with this team to provide support and assistance - even if the work was primarily outside of his responsibilities. He has been a huge supporter and partner with our Finance Team, our Human Resource Team, and our Programs Team. And, as Executive Director I can't tell you how much he has supported me in my work and how much he has contributed to the overall success of CCS Early Learning.

He is the first person to think outside of the box when we are tackling a new problem. He also is a beautiful example of someone who fully understands that dreams only come true if you put a voice to them, if you work diligently for them - and if you ask others (especially funders) to join you in your vision of success! On countless occasions Aaron has come into my office and said, "I've got an idea, do you have a moment?" Many of these moments have resulted in amazing new opportunities and improvements for CCS programs, services, and have provided benefits to our employees in ways that otherwise would not have happened.

Finally, perhaps the most important quality that a true leader exhibits is the ability to care for and provide support to the individuals they work with and work for.

Aaron is incredibly skilled in building and maintaining individual relationships with our CCS employees, our CCS families, and with all of the outside entities that he interacts with. If you were to ask any of these people to describe him a host of relational words like kind, compassionate, helpful, patient, reliable, thoughtful and supportive would be used. He truly is a leader that wants to assist others and help them in any way that he can. I am incredibly thankful for the leadership that Aaron has shared with CCS and provided to me. Please join me in recognizing him as a leader in our Alaskan Head Start programs! - *Mark Lackey*

Aaron is an outstanding operations director and an all around amazing person.

Aaron is co-chair of the safety committee & the wellness committee at CSS.

Aaron's actions and advocacy for staff shows that he cares about CCS Staff just as much as he cares about the CCS Mission. Aaron is happy to help out in all areas of the agency and is our go to when we need someone to dress up as a beloved cartoon or holiday character for family events. Aaron is a natural leader and has a strength of building connections with people. He is often seen with a smile on his face while engaging with staff, families and children. Aaron goes above and beyond to make sure our staff and our facilities are taken care of to provide high quality services. - *Victoria Grey*

Program Policy Council Award **TCC Policy Council**



TCC Head Start wants to recognize the Policy Council for their dedication to the program.

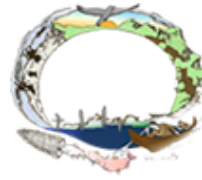
Since the pandemic hit, building a Policy Council has been difficult, the current elected PC has served for two years now. In the current school year, the program was unsuccessful to elect a new Policy Council, by default, the previous year's group still has to serve.

**“THEY HAVE ALWAYS BEEN RESPONSIVE TO NEEDS
AND CHALLENGES, AND ALWAYS SUPPORTED NEEDS
OF THE PROGRAM”**

All five of the members have supported the program no matter the request. They have always been responsive to needs and challenges, and always supported needs of the program. Jessica Shaw, Eric Filardi, Anne Esmailka, Kayla Albert, and Christie McMillan have been wonderful members & the program wants to recognize them for their support & dedication.

- Jennifer Russell

*Early Childhood
Coach of the Year*
**Katrina
Nunemann**



Tanana
Chiefs
Conference



I nominate Katrina Nunemann. She fills so many roles in our Head Start program. We do not work in the same town, so I am probably unaware of all the work she really does. What I do know of is quite a lot. I am sure there is more. She is my coach, and she always makes time for me. She has to reschedule sometimes and work around her very busy day but she always finds time to help coach me.

**"SHE FILLS SO MANY ROLES IN OUR HEAD START
PROGRAM"**

She takes classes just like the rest of us, coordinates our learning and education along with coaching. She does a ton of data entry. Travels to various Head Start sites when needed. I expect to see her frazzled when I meet with her, but she always keeps her cool even when she has clearly had a demanding day. She is greatly appreciated. - *Jessie Burfoot*

Cook of the Year **Rachelle Santos**



It was the winter of 2023 when we embarked on a search for a cook at our Unalaska Head Start site. After careful consideration and a few months of selection, a lady from the other side of the world graced us with her presence at the perfect time. Ms. Rachelle Santos, hailing from the Philippines, brought a unique blend of love, care, and enthusiasm for working with children.

“...HER ABILITY TO ADAPT AND LEARN IS TRULY INSPIRING AND A TESTAMENT TO HER DEDICATION TO HER WORK”

Her journey with us officially began on March 3, 2023. She seamlessly embraced her role, navigating our policies and procedures, adhering to CACFP rules and regulations, passing all facility monitor reviews, and studying to obtain her National Food Manager’s Certification. Despite English being her second language, her ability to adapt and learn is truly inspiring and a testament to her dedication to her work.

It’s an honor to nominate Ms. Rachelle for the Head Start Best Cook award. Her unwavering passion is evident in her willingness to step in and help when we are short-staffed. Her presence has been a true blessing to the children and families in the Unalaska Community and our APIA Head Start Team.

- Marilyn Cook

*Administrative
Support
Staff of the Year*
Nina Saechao



I am writing to nominate Nina Saechao for the Administrative Support Staff of the year award. Her exceptional commitment and outstanding performance in her position have consistently gone above and beyond her job description. Nina has regularly demonstrated exceptional customer service, creating a welcoming and positive atmosphere for both co-workers, children and their families and guests.

"HER EXCEPTIONAL TEAMWORK HAS ABSOLUTELY CONTRIBUTED TO THE OVERALL SUCCESS OF OUR AGENCY"

Her ability to handle a diverse range of tasks with a calm and professional demeanor is truly commendable. Whether it's managing phone calls, handling inquiries, or addressing concerns, she consistently exceeds expectations. One of the most remarkable aspects of Nina's performance is her proactive approach to problem-solving. On numerous occasions, she has anticipated potential challenges and taken proactive steps to mitigate them, showcasing an impressive level of foresight and dedication to ensuring smooth operations. Problems with Child Plus, My Teaching Strategies, copy machine, phones, internet, she takes the time to help when and where she can. She is very approachable and often helps because staff are comfortable in asking her questions and for support.

nomination continued on back...



Nina's job description has changed in her time with our agency because of her talent and our programs have expanded and changed. She works so fast, so efficiently, it's truly amazing her data entry expertise. These actions not only showcase her commitment to excellence but also highlight her willingness to go the extra mile to contribute to the success of our team. This year I got to see her in action receiving and inputting the hundreds of applications we needed to verify for placement and waitlist. It was amazing to see her get dozens of applications in. In the blink of an eye everything was entered in and then more applications came and those got entered too!

Nina consistently demonstrates a positive attitude and an eagerness to assist colleagues, fostering a collaborative and supportive work environment. Her exceptional teamwork has absolutely contributed to the overall success of our agency. Nina exemplifies the qualities of a dedicated and exceptional team member. Her outstanding performance, proactive approach, and commitment to excellence make her a deserving candidate. Her supervisor was on leave for part of this school year and Nina stepped up supporting their role in their absence and helped train others to cover her front desk duties. Once the Administrative Specialist position became vacant so many staff encouraged Nina to apply, and we are ecstatic she did and was able to interview then be promoted. With all she did as Administrative Assistant we know her being in a leadership/supervisory role now will have even more of an impact for our agency and community. I wholeheartedly recommend Nina for this award, as her contributions have undoubtedly had a significant and positive impact on our teams and the overall success of our organization.

Thank you for considering my nomination. - *Selina Ellis*

*Assistant Teacher
of the Year*
Hlee Vang



Ms. Hlee has worked with KCI for about 18 years. Her commitment is astounding, and she inspires me to work with children for as long as she has. She cares for the children in her class and is welcoming to all. She shares her Hmong culture with staff/children and appreciates the diversity in the classroom. She takes the initiative in everything she does. There has not been a time Ms. Hlee needed reminders as she has been on top of her work and duties.

“HLEE’S NURTURING AND CALM DEMEANOR WITH CHILDREN ALLOWS THEM TO TRULY FEEL LOVED AND SAFE IN HER CLASSROOM”

She is the first one to work every day despite her living farthest away than everyone in our center. She is a steady, consistent presence for her team and for the children and families in Head Start. Her selfless acts show how dedicated she is to her work. - *Toni-Marie Hollister-Lagai*

Hlee’s nurturing and calm demeanor with children allows them to truly feel loved and safe in her classroom. I witnessed this firsthand many years ago when my own daughter was a toddler in her classroom. Hlee was the **ONLY** person my daughter would go to when I dropped her off in the morning. It gave me great comfort and assurance that my daughter felt safe and loved by her teacher so that I could leave and go to work. I know countless others have felt this same love, assurance, and care from Hlee over the 18 years she has dedicated to Head Start.

nomination continued on back...



Hlee shows up everyday to serve with compassion, patience, persistence, and love. She does with no expectation of accolades or rewards. It is from a heart that truly believes the mission of Head Start. We are so lucky and honored to work alongside her. Without reservation I also nominate Hlee Vang for Assistant Teacher of the Year. -*Katrina Ahlfield*

Corporate Award Providence Nurse Family Partnership



It is with great pleasure and enthusiasm that I nominate Providence Nurse Family Partnership for the Corporate Award, recognizing their outstanding and unwavering support in collaboration with our KCI Home Visiting Programs.

“THIS HANDS-ON INVOLVEMENT HAS FOSTERED A SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND SOLIDARITY, SHOWING FAMILIES THAT THEY ARE NOT ALONE IN THEIR JOURNEY”

Providence NFP has demonstrated an exceptional commitment to fostering a healthier, more supportive community through their innovative initiatives, substantial contributions, and active participation in our program. Through their collaboration with KCI, they have provided valuable knowledge and skills, empowering families to make informed decisions about their health and well-being. Their employees have participated in various KCI and community events, providing mentorship and guidance to parents enrolled in the shared programs. This hands-on involvement has fostered a sense of community and solidarity, showing families that they are not alone in their journey.

The collaboration with Providence NFP has been marked by a strong, synergistic partnership. Their team has worked closely with our Home Visiting Team to identify areas of need and develop targeted solutions.

nomination continued on back...



This collaborative approach has ensured that our services are both effective and responsive to the evolving needs of our community. The impact of support has been profound and far-reaching. Families enrolled in the Providence NFP have reported improved health outcomes, greater confidence in parenting, and enhanced overall well-being. The success of our program, bolstered by their support, must also be recognized. They are always referring families to KCI and a big part of why our Home Visiting programs are fully enrolled for the first time since the pandemic. We always look forward to doing Meet & Greet with their staff and potential new families or seeing the workers attend our monthly Group Connections and Advisories.

In recognition of their extraordinary efforts, unwavering support, and profound impact on our community especially to KCI, I wholeheartedly nominate Providence Nurse Family Partnership for the Corporate Award. Their dedication to their families and supporting EHS, HS & PAT programs exemplify the very essence of corporate responsibility and community partnership. We are deeply grateful for their contributions and look forward to continuing our impactful collaboration for many years to come.

Thank you for your consideration. - *Selina Ellis*

Humanitarian Award The Community Diaper Pantry



I am honored to nominate The Community Diaper Pantry for the Humanitarian Award. This remarkable organization has consistently demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the well-being of our community's most vulnerable members—infants and young children. Through its tireless efforts to provide essential supplies and support to families in need, The Community Diaper Pantry has made a lasting impact on countless lives.

“THE COMMUNITY DIAPER PANTRY IS NOT ONLY CHANGING LIVES BUT ALSO INSPIRING OTHERS TO JOIN IN THE MISSION OF MAKING OUR COMMUNITY A BETTER PLACE FOR ALL”

The mission of The Community Diaper Pantry is simple yet profoundly impactful: “Supporting Alaskan Families with diaper needs” to ensure that no child goes without the basic necessity of clean diapers. The organization recognizes that access to diapers is a critical component of child health and well-being, and it works diligently to bridge the gap for families facing financial hardship. Since its inception, The Community Diaper Pantry has distributed thousands of diapers, wipes, and other essential baby supplies to families in need. The positive impact of these efforts cannot be overstated. By providing these critical resources, the organization helps to alleviate some of the stress and financial burden that many parents face, allowing them to focus on providing a nurturing and supportive environment for their children.

nomination continued on back...



One of the most remarkable aspects of The Community Diaper Pantry is its dedication to fostering a sense of community and collaboration. It started as a dream, transformed into a shared community vision, funding was acquired, and expansion services came to light. The organization works closely with local businesses, schools, healthcare providers, and other non-profits to ensure that resources are distributed efficiently and effectively. These partnerships amplify the reach and impact of The Community Diaper Pantry, creating a network of support that benefits the entire community. The organization also places a strong emphasis on education and advocacy. By raising awareness about the issues of diaper need and poverty, The Community Diaper Pantry encourages community members to get involved and make a difference. Through educational workshops, volunteer opportunities, and community events, the organization empowers individuals to contribute to the cause and support their neighbors.

In response to research and assessment, The Community Diaper Pantry demonstrated remarkable innovation and resilience. Recognizing the increased demand for diapers and other essentials, the organization swiftly adapted its operations to ensure continued support for families in need. Through contactless distribution methods, fundraising campaigns, and community engagement, The Community Diaper Pantry not only maintained its services but expanded its reach to assist even more families during this critical time.

Most childcare centers require parents to provide diapers for while in care, without these babies can't go to daycare and parents can't go to work. A child who is sick due to poor diapering or one who is not allowed to attend daycare because their parents can't afford diapers is deprived of a learning environment which leads to long-term impacts. The Community Diaper Pantry is here to help prevent that. For our EHS Center-Based classrooms and Head Start programs we can provide diapers, wipes and even pull-ups. We do not provide it for our Home Visiting families though. Since we are also closed for weekends, holidays and extended breaks we knew any of our families could need and benefit from diapering support and built a collaboration with The Community Diaper Pantry. Every month we have a list of families we are servicing and The Community Diaper Pantry Van delivers hundreds of diapers, wipes and pull-ups for us to distribute.

The Community Diaper Pantry exemplifies the spirit of humanitarianism through its unwavering dedication to improving the lives of children and families in our community.



Its tireless efforts, innovative approach, and commitment to collaboration and education make it a deserving recipient of the Humanitarian Award. By addressing a fundamental need with compassion and generosity, The Community Diaper Pantry is not only changing lives but also inspiring others to join in the mission of making our community a better place for all. I wholeheartedly endorse The Community Diaper Pantry for this prestigious award and am confident that its continued work will bring about even greater positive change in the years to come.

Thank you for your consideration. - *Selina Ellis*

Maintenance Staff of the Year Eric Joe



RurAL CAP
Rural Alaska Community Action Program, Inc.



Eric is the heart and soul of the Mountain Village Head Start! He goes above and beyond to ensure that the building is safe for all children to learn. On top of his routine maintenance duties, Eric has embraced his tech savvy skills to support community members and parents with creating email addresses to apply for jobs, and also helps other staff members with paperwork submission and other online tasks.

"ERIC IS OFTEN TIMES REFERRED TO AS SUPERMAN!"

Eric has also been intentional to get to know each child in the program and spends as much time as possible in the classroom to be a father figure role model to the kids. He wants to be the best he can be for each child so he initiated partaking in the CDA certification process even though it is not a job requirement for his role. - *Becca Harris*

Eric Joe has gone above and beyond for the Head Start program in Mt. Village. He not only keeps the building clean and sanitary, but he also hauls water several times a week for his team and children, he steps in the classroom, kitchen, and assists the family advocate when needed. Eric is patient and kind when helping new applicants apply for positions or new families enrolling in the program. He is currently in the process of obtaining his CDA to get a better understanding of child development.

nomination continued on back...



He helps all his team members with their paperwork and meeting deadlines. We can rely on Eric to take the lead on many new initiatives and appreciate Eric's open communication with us and his team on site. Eric is often times referred to as Superman! - *Tundra Paulsen*

Teacher of the Year **Kristen Phillips**



RurAL CAP
Rural Alaska Community Action Program, Inc.



It is my pleasure to nominate Kristen Phillips for the Teacher of the Year award. Kristen joined the Homer HS team in September 2023 with a bright smile, enthusiasm, and energy. At the time of Kristen's arrival, Homer HS had only a Cook, one part-time Teacher Aide, and a roster of 20 children whose parents feared that the Duration Program that they depended on for childcare may not open.

"THE WAY THAT SHE CARES FOR AND ENCOURAGES SO MUCH GROWTH, BOTH MENTALLY AND SOCIALLY, IS A GIFT TO ALL OF THE CHILDREN"

Kristen immediately put her knowledge and experience to work, transforming Homer's classroom into a beautiful space to inspire children and guide their learning through intentional, well-designed activities. On September 18th, the doors opened for children and families and Kristen continued to pour her love and energy into the program. Kristen recognized children's need for active play and took them outside every day of the program year, regardless of weather, for child-directed, creative play. She set up activities for them to observe, measure, compare, sort, classify, and experiment. She added literacy to every learning center with books, signs, and writing materials and inspired a love of books with her dynamic reading style. Children often say, "read it again" and they ask Kristen to read with them during center choice time. Kristen engaged children with singing and movement and gave them appropriate leadership roles.

nomination continued on back...



Head Start and all of our policies, screening, assessment, and curriculum tools were new to Kristen. She delved into Creative Curriculum and quickly learned how to use TSG for assessment, ASQ and DECA for developmental screening, and learned all online systems along with SharePoint and Teams for communication and collaboration within our agency. Kristen familiarized herself with HSELOF and AELG and easily merged her knowledge of child development with these new frameworks.

Kristen was new to Alaska, but quickly created a “school family” and built relationships within the ECE community in Homer and beyond. Kristen greeted children and families each morning, holding babies to support families as they helped their children transition to school. She communicated daily with families, sending text messages or emails with photos so working parents were able to see their child’s skills and progress; and she joined Homer Early Childhood Coalition to stay informed about community events to share with families. Kristen collaborated with KPBSD and SPBHS to access services for children in S/L, OT, and behavioral health. In January she enrolled in coursework to earn a Behavioral Health Aide credential to better understand and support children’s mental health and she applied to the University of Alaska where she will pursue her BA in ECE next fall.

Kristen demonstrates incredible work ethic. Throughout the year, she arrived early to shovel snow, sand icy walkways, transfer mittens from drying racks to cubbies, set up the classroom, and fold blankets that she washed and dried the previous night. As snow melted, Kristen started trimming rose bushes and sharing her vision for making the outside space more beautiful and welcoming. She organized classroom storage spaces to improve access and efficiency. Each day at 8:15 sharp, Monday through Friday, Kristen opened the front door to welcome arriving children with her bright smile, enthusiasm, and energy. The community of Homer is grateful for Kristen’s tremendous contributions to the Homer Head Start program where children and families thrive. - *Terri Mach*

Kristen has brought the Homer Headstart Program to life for every child who attends. Even in the midst of being short staffed all program year, she took the initiative to work with her team to enhance the creative curriculum and created several week studies that were highly interactive, developmentally appropriate, and made kids so excited to come to school every day. There have been no active supervision concerns because they have done such a great job keeping everyone excited and engaged!



Her leadership, ownership of the classroom, and dedication to every child, including successfully supporting 9 students with an IEP, has exceeded standards and has set each child on a positive learning trajectory in every area of development. - *Becca Harris*

Kristen has been a breathe of fresh air as a preschool teacher. She is knowledgeable, kind and a veteran preschool teacher. She brought so much life and love to the Homer head start program. The program was ran smoothly and my child learned so much from the semester he was at the Homer head start. She went above and beyond for her families and made everyone welcome. Kristen deserves recognition for her talents as a teacher and her ability to teach our children. - *Jennifer Cabana*

Ms. Kristen has gone above and beyond what any educator I have ever witnessed does. The way that she cares for and encourages so much growth, both mentally and socially, is a gift to all of the children. Every day she shows up fully ready to handle the chaos and joy that envelopes the room. Each child that I have seen interact with her has left the conversation with more knowledge, confidence, or self-worth than they started it with.

To be one of Ms. Kristen's students is to be deeply loved, and it's impossible to not see what an amazing affect that has on her students. If I could keep my daughter in her class for the rest of her education, I would.

RuralCap has found an amazing gem with Ms. Kristen and my family wishes her all the best - *Ciara Walker*

Family Advocate of the Year **Louise Huffman**



Louise brings strong assets to the Family Advocate role, and our group is incredibly fortunate to have her as our Family Advocate. She is very dedicated and hard-working. Louise covers a few sites in our Head Start program, and when needed, she helps her fellow Family Advocates at other sites. Louise is a great resource and help to all staff and departments. She is always readily available when assistance with families and forms is needed.

**“LOUISE IS A GREAT RESOURCE AND HELP TO ALL
STAFF AND DEPARTMENTS”**

This year, she has taken on extra duties such as covering in the classroom as an aide when classrooms are short-staffed to help ensure that class is being held. When new Family Advocates are hired, she is a big help in training and showing the ropes, and she is very supportive. - *Roberta Katongan*

Louise has worked with Head Start for 18 years! We are grateful for her dedication to the children and families in our region, the stability she gives to the Family Advocate Team, and the leadership she consistently displays. She is also a role model to her peers and community members as she recently received an Associate of Applied Science in Early Childhood Education Degree. Children, families, and staff all feel very supported by Louise when she is working with them. - *DebTrowbridge*

*Head Start Director
of the Year*
Katrina Ahlfield



Katrina Ahlfield stepped into her role as Executive Director and Head Start Director at Kids Corps Inc in May of 2023. Prior to this she had worked in a variety of roles at Kids Corps since 2005. Her transition into this leadership position has been incredibly successful as she has moved forward both in leadership with her grantee and her community - as well as in a leadership role for the Alaska Head Start Association.

**“HER LEADERSHIP AND TENACITY IN EDUCATING
DECISION MAKERS AND ADVOCATING FOR ALL
PROGRAMS RESULTED IN THE FIRST SUSTAINABLE
INCREASE IN STATE HEAD START FUNDING SINCE 2010”**

Like all Alaskan grantees Katrina has faced some big challenges. Staffing has been difficult to maintain, and enrollment has been challenging. In addition, she has been working extremely hard to navigate some big operational changes with the Anchorage School District - and attempting to resolve some big facility issues. However, Katrina has faced this head on dealing with each of them with optimism and in a problem solving manner.

In addition, the success that the Alaska Head Start Association experienced this past year in Juneau can largely be attributed to the leadership and the hard work that Katrina put in. She made THREE trips to Juneau this spring - one with Head Start Directors, one with Head Start parents, and a third trip with Early Childhood Education advocates.

nomination continued on back...



She also hosted Anchorage legislators for tours at KCI sites and educated them about the important work that Head Start and Early Head Start programs do in our state. Her leadership and tenacity in educating decision makers and advocating for all programs resulted in the first sustainable increase in state Head Start funding since 2010.

Please join me in thanking Katrina for her advocacy and her commitment to Head Start in Alaska by recognizing her as the 2024 Head Start Director of the Year!

- *Mark Lackey*

Katrina has been an amazing director who has confidently stepped up to her position with experience and insight about how Head Start works. She is very knowledgeable about our State and Federal needs and has been very active with advocacy over the past year! As Head Start directors, we are very pleased to have Katrina be a part of our Alaska director's team. We are proud of her.

- *Deb Trowbridge*

Katrina has truly been a ray of light for our Alaska Head Start Association (AHSA). Her willingness to help, collaborate, and cheer us on has made an incredible difference in our work and the lives we touch.

She always brings a positive energy that uplifts everyone around her. Whether it's rolling up her sleeves to tackle a challenge or offering a word of encouragement just when it's needed, she embodies the spirit of teamwork and leadership. Her commitment to our mission is inspiring, and she consistently goes above and beyond to ensure our success.

In every way, Katrina is not just a director but a mentor, a supporter, and a true leader who makes AHSA a better place for all of us. - *Marianne Fanger*

All 2024 AHSA Award Nominees

Aja Hensley	Elizabeth Locklar	Louise Simon
Alexia Cook-Griffeth	Elizabeth Mayrand	Margaret Olson
Alia Heck	Emily Casey	MariaJose St. John
Aliya Maiden	Erick Hanson	Mark Lackey
Alora Zulliger	Fairbanks Native	Marry "Grace"
Amber Szmyd	Association Headstart	Garchitorena
Angie Niggel	Forieta "Maria" Emmons	Mary "Fran" Chester
Barbara Melissa Acovak	Gregory Eversole	Matilda Alirkar
Becca Harris	Hayley Bell	Mike Sullivan
Bianca Monte De Oca	Jacquie Wood	Mona Star
Brandon Doty	James Gullett	Ms. Stacy- Pioneer
Brandon Niggel	James Nicholai	Classroom
Brandy Berdeaux-Doty	Janet Vincent	Myriam Agosto
Candy Miller	Janice Uisok	Neil Villaneuva
Carly Berdeaux	Jennifer Hoffman	Poly Chico
Carly Huston	Jesse Burke	Renae Ngyuen
Cassandra Bailey	Jessie Burfoot	Reyna Fernandez
Charlene Hanson	Kaley Ann Acovak	Rizielle Acierto
Chase Lawe	Kat Widener	Robin Robertson
Cindy Boyer	Kathy Johnson	Rocio Reyes
Corrine Lekanof	Kayci Christoforatos	Rylee Flint
Crystal Bird	Kayla Reed	Sarah Newton
Crystal Miller	Kellie Armstrong	Shelly Titus
Crystal Phillips-Bartee	Kellie JoLee Armstrong	Sherie Hamilton
Daniela Rodriguez	Kerry Hahn	Suhail Pena
Darilyn Byram	Kristen Mayo	Suzy Rhodes
Darlene Ortega	Lana Arsenault	Tana Heussner
David Bergstrom	Lauren Patton	Tana Heussner
David Stepp	Lillian Gengler	Tatyana Kalinina
Davina Sunkel	Lily Naef	Taylor Centner
Denae Hamilton-young	Linda Duke	Terri Mach
Denise Pacheco	Lisa Nuyen	Tonya Omta
Dina Contreras	Lisa Shove	Tracy Neves
Dorothy Henry	Logan Perala	Valerie Gill
Elisabeth Meek	Lori Markkanen	Wendy Elliott King
Elizabeth "Beth" Klein	Lorraine David	Whitney Gobbi