



Congratulations to the Alaska Head Start Association 2021 Awards of Excellence Winners!

Parent Awards	Name (Head Start Program)
Beating the Odds Award	Citshiab Moua (Kids' Corps Inc.)
Head Start Father of the Year	Keith Charlie (Tanana Chiefs Conference)
Head Start Mother of the Year	Lenora Gilila (RurAL CAP)
Program Policy Council Award	APIA Head Start Policy Council: Tabitha Johansen, Chair (APIA)
Staff Awards	Name
Administrative Support Staff of the Year	Poly Chico-Acevedo (FNA EHS - HS)
Assistant or Deputy Director of the Year	Summer Keelan (CCS Early Learning)
Assistant Teacher of the Year	Alia Heck (CCS Early Learning)
Bus Driver of the Year	Kristie Bass (RurAL CAP)
Content Area Specialist of the Year	Tundra Paulsen (RurAL CAP)
Cook of the Year	Jeremy Agee (FNA EHS - HS)
Early Childhood Coach of the Year	Amber Calles (Kids' Corps Inc.)
Early Head Start Teacher of the Year	Brianna Ketzler (Tanana Chiefs Conference)
Family Advocate of the Year	Aliya Maiden (FNA EHS - HS)
Head Start Director of the Year	Anne Shade (BBNA)
Home Visitor of the Year	Tammy Berdeaux (CCS Early Learning)
Maintenance Staff of the Year	Chloe Falkner (RurAL CAP)
Teacher of the Year	Courtland Pannebaker (Kawerak, Inc.)
Community Awards	Name
Community Advocate of the Year	Mac Transit (FNA EHS - HS)
Corporate Award	Three Bears Alaska (RurAL CAP)
Humanitarian Award	Ketchikan Public Library (RurAL CAP)
School District Collaboration Award	Aleutians East Borough School District (APIA)
Other Awards	Name
Cultural Awareness Award	Wanda Cover (FNA EHS - HS)
Leadership Award	Cindy Bergstrom (CCS Early Learning)

Alaska Head Start Association Awards of Excellence 2021





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Beating the Odds Award Citshiab Moua



It is my honor and privilege to nominate Citshiab Moua for the Beating the Odds award for many reasons, but most importantly for her adaptability, her hard work and dedication to herself and her beautiful daughter. Citshiab is a teen parent we have been working with the past two school years in our EHS program. She attended KCI as a child and got re-acquainted with Head Start when her Head Start teacher recognized her during a presentation about our services at a local high school.

"HOW GREAT THAT SHE WAS A HEAD START CHILD HERSELF AND BECAUSE OF THAT SHE KNEW WHAT SHE NEEDED FOR HER OWN CHILD! "

Citshiab co-parents and after the presentation at the school she and her partner toured our EHS facility. They applied for their infant daughter and got into our EHS Home-Based program with the hopes to transition into our EHS Center-Based once their child was of age and there was an opening since both parents were schooling and working.

Citshiab was doing great at school and on target to graduate. Then COVID-19 hit and disrupted her plans. So instead of going in person seeing and connecting with her peers and friends everything was virtual. There were no sports, no gatherings, a complicated virtual school schedule to follow and temporary closure of in person services for her daughter.

When our EHS center based services reopened in July of 2020, her daughter was at an age where things like teething, immunizations and allergies were creating Covid-like symptoms that required her to stay home from EHS. This made completing her senior year even more challenging at times. She was also working full time and dealing with the complicated schedules and dynamics of co-parenting. Still, she persisted through it all, and with support and encouragement from her friends and Head Start, she graduated this spring.

Citshiab has been Beating the Odds and continues to grow as a parent and an individual. How great that she was a Head Start Child herself and because of that she knew what she needed for her own child! -Selina Ellis



Early Childhood Coach of the Year Amber Calles



I was so excited to see the new category this year for Coach nominee! Our Coach Amber Calles has been with us the past couple school years. This school year Amber had to revamp her whole coaching process since we had virtual services and not all staff worked onsite all day. She came up with solid Coaching cohorts that met in person at different locations. She had to meet individually with many staff for coaching due to work hours, FML, staff being out sick and many other reasons. Amber was always understanding of even started zooming staff into the group coaching to keep with continuity.

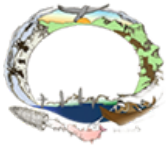
"AMBER IS SUCH A GREAT ROLE MODEL FOR SELF-CARE AND PROGRAM ENGAGEMENT"

She supported them with their goals and videotaping whenever requested. She checked in regularly with us supervisors and gave us updated handouts after coaching sessions and goals.

Amber is such a great role model for self-care and program engagement. She does things like proof read letters of interest from staff who are applying for a higher level position, create a staff bulletin board where she would pose a question of the week and a beautiful "Wish you well" board, organize a "meal train" for an employee who had been in a serious accident, etc. She has great relationships with so many staff because she shows interest and follow through, and most importantly because she shows she cares.

Amber is team player who is always offering a hand with the unglamorous projects too, like organizing curriculum kits or cleaning—something we had to do a lot of in the past year. Amber helped fill in when and where she could, even covering one of our offsites as a Center Director for a week during an emergency. As a PD Specialist she has provided vital support to several staff in completing and achieving their CDA.

Amber is an amazing Coach who has earned consideration for this honor. -Selina Ellis



Tanana
Chiefs
Conference

Head Start Father of the Year Keith Charlie



Keith Charlie is the proud father of 5 children. He is also the Tribal Administrator for Minto, Alaska, a small community of 210 community members located 3 hours north of Fairbanks. As a Tribal Administrator, Keith has to manage a full staff, as well as ensuring all village maintenance gets done; writing grants; attending Tribal Council meetings; monitoring budgets; and all the "other duties assigned".

He is an active Head Start parent, and attends as many of the home visits with his two youngest boys and his wife as he can. Prior to Covid-19 Keith attended socials and volunteered his time and resources.

**"OF ALL THE HONORS KEITH HAS OBTAINED, THE
ROLE OF HUSBAND AND FATHER IS THE ONE HE
CHERISHES THE MOST"**

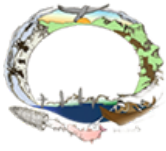
He is also a Head Start partner, and transports many packages and mail to our second floor Head Start office so our staff can sort and disperse to families.

Covid-19 restrictions were especially burdensome for the small interior villages in the Tanana Chiefs Conference Region, and Minto was no exception. In addition to his regular Tribal Administrator duties, Keith added being on the Minto village Task Force for Covid-19 protocols.

Keith stands out as Father of the Year to TCC Head Start because in spite of having a lot of different responsibilities, Keith takes an active role as a parent, is one of his children's first and most important teachers, and all the while continues to be a positive role model, promoting a sober and wellness oriented lifestyle, to include coaching youth basketball teams.

In 2016, Keith was honored with the Patti Hyslop leadership in sobriety award for setting a positive example in the native community of Minto and in the interior of Alaska. In 2017, Keith was an Arctic Remote Energy Networks Academy (ARENA) participant, as well as being honored to receive a Native American 40 under 40 Award. Of all the honors Keith has obtained, the role of husband and father is the one he cherishes the most, and we are proud to nominate him for this Award in hopes that he can add the title of Head Start Father of the Year to his growing list of accolades!

-Jennifer Russell



Tanana
Chiefs
Conference

Early Head Start Teacher of the Year

Brianna Ketzler



Over this last school year, Brianna has really been a bright star. She has been innovative, creative, and has worked with every parent in their own unique way. She took time to learn new technology as she built a website for the Nenana Early Head Start, created a Facebook group specific to her families, as well as just picking up the phone to have a genuine talk with a parent.

"BRIANNA MAINTAINED EXCELLENT COMMUNICATION TO ENSURE QUALITY SERVICES WERE BEING PROVIDED TO FAMILIES"

She has been the "What if" or "Why" staff person who helped Administration think through a mitigation plan, and thought of the reality of operating a center based program during a pandemic.

Brianna took a leadership role when her center needed a spokesperson, or a liaison, to help make decisions, or pull the team together for a meeting. Brianna maintained excellent communication to ensure quality services were being provided to families.

Brianna and her team in the Nenana EHS classroom was the first classroom to successfully re-open to children in April 2021, and as a result she and the team helped pave the way, she and the team paved the way to help calm fears for parents, as well as staff in other communities, giving them the confidence boost they needed.

-Jennifer Russell



Program Policy Council APIA Head Start Policy Council Tabitha Johansen, Chair



Our APIA Policy Council this year was outstanding! We only had one returning PC member that remained on the council from the previous year and this brought about a sense of apprehension as we worried about someone who would provide us leadership.

"THESE POLICY COUNCIL MEMBERS HIT THE GROUND RUNNING AND OUR FEARS WERE QUICKLY SUBSIDED AS WE WATCHED HOW DEDICATED AND ACCOUNTABLE THESE PARENTS WERE! "

However, these policy council members hit the ground running and our fears were quickly subsided as we watched how dedicated and accountable these parents were!

Being a Policy Council member, takes a large amount of time and is a great commitment. There are monthly PC meetings as well and monthly Parent Committee meetings. All PC meetings are done through teleconferences.

APIA nominates APIA Head Start Policy Council, Tabitha Johansen, Chair, for the AHSA Policy Council of the Year!

Thank you for your consideration.

-Beverly "Bonnie" Mierzejek



School District Collaboration Aleutians East Borough School District



APIA School District Superintendent
Patrick Mayer

The Aleutian Pribilof Islands Head Start Program would like to nominate the Aleutians East Borough School District for the School District Collaboration award. For the last 15+ years, AEBSD has been a true advocate and partner in Child Find, Administrators and Kindergarten and Pre-K Staff.

AEBSD works with our Head Start program to ensure all developmental screenings are completed and reviewed prior to the 45-day deadline as required by Head Start.

**"WE TRULY VALUE THEIR SUPPORT THROUGHOUT THE
LAST 15+ YEARS AND THEIR DEDICATION TO
EXCELLENCE FOR THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES! "**

Without these collaborative efforts, our students with possible developmental delays would not have scheduled observations and the necessary referrals. Concerns regarding special needs children are resolved in a timely manner with a single phone call, email or face to face meetings between the AEBSD Special Education Staff and the APIA parents and staff.

In addition, APIA has been invited to the AEBSD Kindergarten classrooms for a "Transition Lunch" activity for all of our graduating preschool children, their families as well as our Staff. This way a smooth transition of children and families is ensured from Head Start to Kindergarten.

The Aleutians East Borough School District has worked collaboratively with our program to ensure we are providing quality preschool services within our communities of Sand Point and King Cove. We truly value their support throughout the last 15+ years and their dedication to excellence for the children and families! APIA respectfully submits this nomination to recognize their commitment and efforts! -Beverly "Bonnie" Mierzejek



Assistant or Deputy Director of the Year Summer Keelan



CCS Early Learning program has a lot of newly hired Family Partnership Coordinators in various locations under the CCS umbrella. Summer Keelan, Family Partnership Coordinator, has been very supportive to all the newly hired FPS's. She is always there to help and train the new FPC's, she is a natural leader, and also an advocate for the CCS program.

Summer is friendly, always giving her knowledge, and never hesitates to give a helping hand no matter how much she has on her plate.

"SUMMER IS DEDICATED TO SUPPORTING EACH AND EVERY FAMILY THAT WALKS THROUGH OUR DOORS EVEN WHEN THEY DON'T QUALIFY FOR THE PROGRAM"

To me, without her support as a new CCS Family Partnership Coordinator, I wouldn't have known more than I do now if it wasn't for her. Thank you Summer for your help and support to make CCS Early Learning Program the best it can be!!

Summer started her CCS journey as a parent and then soon after became an employee, working her way up into a leadership position as the Family Partnership Coordinator for the Wasilla Head Start Center. Summer is dedicated to supporting each and every family that walks through our doors even when they don't qualify for the program. She is instrumental in building systems that have children and families at heart. Summer is the first to ask the hard questions that prompt reflection as well as ensure accountability and accuracy. Her passion for the work she does energizes those she works with. Summer is a true walking example of how Head Start makes a difference in the lives of children and families.

-Marita Kameroff



Assistant Teacher of the Year Alia Heck



Alia has worked for the agency for many years, she started as a substitute and then as an Assistant Teacher. She is very dependable, flexible, and helps with many solutions for the center to prevent problems; she is always thinking ahead and is very proactive. She was very helpful to me on learning how this center worked when I became the Center Coordinator at Wasilla. Since I have worked with Alia I have seen her evolve into one of the best teachers in our agency.

"SHE WORKS HARD ON HELPING CHILDREN CALM THEMSELVES, DEEP BREATHING, AND HOW TO SOLVE PROBLEMS WITHOUT TOTALLY FALLING APART"

She has stepped up twice to cover as the lead teacher for several months in a classroom while we searched for a new teacher. She has always taken it on as a learning opportunity. When the new teacher was on board, Alia helped her learn our procedures and routines in the classroom and on home visits. New teachers have always been very excited to work with a teacher assistant of this caliber and one commented that he had been in Early Childhood for 23 years but has learned many things from Alia. Alia teaches by example in many areas such as how to stay calm, how to have the children problem solve, plus many ways to work with difficult children.

Through the years, Alia has worked with some very difficult behaviors very successfully. She works hard on helping children calm themselves, deep breathing, and how to solve problems without totally falling apart. If they reach the fall apart stage, she is patient and calming, getting them out of their trauma to become solution orientated.

nomination continued on back...



I heard many times Alia asking a child what their back-up plan was going to be if they could not get what they wanted right now. She allowed them to problem-solve and come up with their plan with a little guidance from her. She has learned many skills. Furthermore, when Alia chooses a goal from CLASS and works on developing that skill, she works on it. I remember doing an observation and saying you are great at self-talk and parallel talk, she told me, well of course she is better at that because she had worked on that goal all this past period. It works, setting goals and working on them.

This year with COVID-19, Alia helped make sure we were sterilizing and sanitizing the right way. She and her co-workers came up with ways to individualize sensory materials and how to keep up the sanitizing for all projects. She was very helpful during staff meetings on sharing what was working and not working for their room. During training, I love having Alia in those groups because she is great at sharing how it works in her classroom giving other teaching staff different ways to think about the subject or new ideas on how to help build skills with children. She enjoys learning and sharing new skills or experiences she has learned.

When a new sub or Assistant Teacher needs training on the bus or classroom, Alia is the one I always go to and ask if she would mind training them. She is always willing to help people learn the right ways to do their jobs. She remembers to tell them all the little hints on what they may come up against in releasing children off the bus or other possibilities on the job. She helps them in learning to follow the lead of the teacher or assistant in the classroom. If they are in the center more than once she is a good follow-up person for them on how to do their jobs.

She was called on again this year to step up and be the teacher for the last few months of the year. She did this with grace and flexibility, to allow the other teacher to attain her goal. She rode the bus, set up the classroom and was in the teachers role. I think she will be moving up in our organization very soon. She obtained her Child Development Associate (CDA credential several years ago and will be graduating soon with her Associate's degree in Early Childhood. She is a truly inspirational leader. -Neva Lancaster

Alia is a very positive influencer. She's recently stepped up to cover as a teacher for the remainder of the year. -Corrine Lekanof



Home Visitor of the Year Tammy Berdeaux



I want to recognize Tammy for the nomination of the Home Visitor because I feel she goes above and beyond in her work with our families at CCS.

Tammy is amazing in her work! When a child ages 0-3 or a pregnant mama is enrolled with her, she embraces not only them but their family, too. Tammy takes the time to know who they are, respects where they come from, and walks beside them in their current needs and personal journey.

"HER ABILITY TO BE AVAILABLE, TO LISTEN, AND TO SHARE HER WORDS WITH KINDNESS AND GENTLENESS ALLOWS THE FAMILIES TO TRUST IN HER GUIDANCE"

Tammy provides her time, resources, materials, and activities, while giving space and grace to the family as they embark on the direction and goals that they set with her.

Her ability to be available, to listen, and to share her words with kindness and gentleness allows the families to trust in her guidance. With the year of COVID and personal difficult circumstances for Tammy, this year came with many challenges; however, Tammy was able to remain steadfast.

She stayed committed, was creative in providing and delivering materials, activities, and resources, as well as continuing the engagement with and for the families. Tammy is a blessing for CCS! -Sharon Bulawa



Leadership Award Cindy Bergstrom



I am nominating Cindy because she is AMAZING! As a Center Coordinator for Meadow Lakes CCS she has been our Rock in her leadership! Cindy's ability to overcome obstacles and remain steadfast has been a key in the success of navigating through the 2020/21 school year. We not only had COVID as an issue all year, but we also had a flood within our building in March. Cindy has been committed, strong, and compassionate through all of this.

"NO MATTER WHAT TERRIBLE ISSUE WAS AT HAND, SHE ALWAYS HANDLED IT WITH GRACE AND AS ONE OF THE MOST PROFESSIONAL HUMAN BEINGS I HAVE EVER MET. "

Her heart for caring not only for us as her staff but also for the children and families within our program is wonderful! Regardless of the challenges put before her she was able to guide us all through a successful year!

Through the many and constant changes as well as the tons of questions we all had for her she was able to respectfully and kindly address the needs of all. There were times in which her heart was heavy (and a few tears) with the choices and decisions that needed to be made to ensure all were safe and protected but through the ups and downs we could find her encouraging and supporting us all.

Cindy created an atmosphere of connecting, fun, laughter, and hope in spite of all we had to do and change in accordance with the COVID mandates. She allowed us grace as we shared the many emotions throughout the year and provided space for us to be in the moment of what we were experiencing. Cindy is a blessing and I am thankful to work under her leadership at Meadow Lakes Center! -Sharon Bulawa

nomination continued on back...



I first met Cindy when I was a Head Start parent. I spent most of my day while my child was in class doing various tasks and projects around the Meadow Lakes Center. Cindy was always welcoming and each morning I was greeted with a smile and warm welcome.

As more time passed I had the chance to watch Cindy interact with the students, families, and staff on a daily level. She always gave each and everyone of us the same respect and support regardless of being a parent, head teacher, or Executive Director. No matter what terrible issue was at hand, she always handled it with grace and as one of the most professional human beings I have ever met.

As more time went on she encouraged me to take steps towards becoming a substitute, I was reluctant to do so. I did not have the same confidence in myself as she did in me. Over time she showed me I was capable of more than I let myself believe. I did become a sub! She gave me all the support I needed to be successful in my new role as a substitute, and in doing so I gained more knowledge and training to better myself not just as a new employee to Head Start, but a better mother to my own children and has profoundly changed the core of who I am.

I am now lucky enough to be an associate educator at the Meadow Lakes head start under Cindy, and even years later Cindy is still the heart of Center and in my opinion the reason our team can be so strong to support our families and are able to support them in such a high quality. -Kristen Mayo

Head Start Mother of the Year Lenora Gilila



"SHE HAS DELIVERED ALL OF OUR HOME VISIT, HEAD START CLASS, AND GROUP SOCIAL PACKETS FREE OF CHARGE ALL YEAR. "

Lenora is the post master at our local post office.

She has delivered all of our Home Visit, Head Start Class, and Group Social Packets free of charge ALL year.

We've had to send weekly packets through our local post office due to the ongoing pandemic and she wouldn't take payment for any of the 37 packets that we brought over every week for 20+ weeks.

She is also a mother of a current head start student. -Shawna Williams



Bus Driver of the Year **Kristie Bass**



"THE CHILDREN LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING HER EVERY DAY!"

Kristie is fun, energetic and works with the monitor to build positive relationships with all of the children they transport.

Kristie is safety-minded and helped install all new 5 point harness systems on the bus. She also loves to decorate the bus.

Mrs. Kristie loves bling and glitter and often wears a fun hat, scarf or pair of printed pants that match the season we are celebrating.

Mrs. Kristie changes her bus schedule to adapt to the needs of the program and never complains. The children look forward to seeing her every day!

-Janice Smith



Content Area Specialist of the Year Tundra Paulsen



Tundra started her journey with Head Start as a parent in the program and has since moved through the program as a teacher, interim center director, Family Service Coordinator, and now as a Regional Manager supporting 6 rural Alaskan Head Start programs and staff.

She is dedicated to serving her team and being their biggest advocate.

"SHE TREATS HER TEAM AS FAMILY AND WOULD DO ANYTHING TO ENSURE THEY HAVE THE TOOLS AND RESOURCES TO DO THE BEST JOB THAT THEY CAN"

I hired her as the Family Service Coordinator knowing she had more to give to the program and our families and I hoped she would move into the Regional Manager role after completing her degree. She did everything that I knew she would and she continues to amaze me with her desire to do the best she can for her team.

Most of all, Tundra reminds me constantly that we do this work for the children and families in our programs and they, above all, should be receiving the best effort we can provide.

She treats her team as family and would do anything to ensure they have the tools and resources to do the best job that they can. Her path from being a Head Start parent to being in Management is commendable and her love of the work she does makes you want to step up and do more, too. -Beth Klein



Maintenance Staff of the Year Chloe Falkner



"SHE IS QUICK TO ADDRESS ISSUES (THINGS THAT NEED FIXED) THAT ARE BROUGHT TO HER"

Chloe is our "rookie of the year" and plays an important part in our team as the Food Service Assistant and the Custodian/Maintenance Specialist. Chloe assisted the cook in how to effectively manage the new distance meal preparations.

Chloe also doesn't let her fear of spiders keep her from needing to crawl into the attic every week or two to check buckets from our leaky roof.

She is quick to address issues (things that need fixed) that are brought to her and if she doesn't know how to fix it, then she will ask and watch You Tube Videos so she can learn how to do it.

She also incorporates her artistic expression into her job by painting seasonal greetings and pictures in the entry way. -Angela Nickich



Corporate Award Three Bears Alaska



Three Bears Alaska is a family-owned chain of Alaskan Grocery Stores and so much more; it was started in Tok in 1980.

This Cooperate Partner has been vital a part of our community and has provided us with above and beyond outstanding service.

Last year, when the COVID Pandemic began, and there were no sanitizing wipes to be found, the Store Manager Larry Weiz, Jr. donated a whole case from the store's personal janitorial supplies.

"FOR THOSE OF US IN RURAL ALASKA, WE CANNOT EXPRESS ENOUGH GRATITUDE OF HAVING SUCH A GREAT LOCAL GROCERY STORE IN OUR COMMUNITY"

Our Head Start is in the same building of the Tok Senior Center and he knew the importance of keeping both populations healthy. When our program's fridge went out, they prioritized us on their backorder list and even delivered it to us. When our freezer went out, they let us store our food in their freezer. If we want or need something, they special order it for us, including different food for our graduation/closing ceremonies.

A few months ago, they happened to have some really cool manipulatives. When staff told them how much the kids loved them, they ordered more so that we could purchase one for each student. We are even doing a classroom planting activity with the soil they donated.

They have provided us with white handled bags used to decorate for Easter Egg Hunts and Valentine's Day. In years past, they have donated the main dish of turkey roasts to the Parent Committee sponsored potluck Thanksgiving and Christmas Dinners. They also donate pumpkins each year for dads to help carve in the classroom. For the past several years, Three Bears has provided us with a generous 10% discount; this in-kind gift has really added up. For those of us in RurAL Alaska, we cannot express enough gratitude of having such a great local grocery store in our community. Thank you, Three Bears Alaska! -Carrie Beeman



Humanitarian Award Ketchikan Public Library



"THEY PROVIDED LIVE STORY TIMES VIA FACEBOOK TO THE COMMUNITY AND ACTIVITY BAGS FOR ADULTS, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES"

The Ketchikan Public Library, a place where field trips and story times used to occur but has been closed to the public and school groups for the majority of the pandemic. However, that didn't keep the staff in the Children's Library down. They provided live story times via Facebook to the community and activity bags for adults, children and families.

In doing so, they also made activity bags and dropped them off at Head Start for all our families several times this school year. They also sent us a flyer each month that has special events for adults and children so that we can share it with our families.

Sometimes their guest speakers include people that talk about topics from financial literacy to self-care. -Angela Nickich

FAIRBANKS NATIVE
ASSOCIATION



HEAD START
0-5

Administrative Support Staff of the Year Poly Chico-Acevedo



When looking at the nominations for this particular award I could not think of a better candidate than Poly Chico. I cannot think of a moment when Poly is not smiling and willing to help. It never matters what Poly is tasked with she is going to smile while doing it and give 100% at all times. Poly makes it exceptionally easy to ask for assistance or for help. She will drop everything she is doing to accommodate everyone else.

**"MORNING AFTER MORNING I WATCH AS FAMILY
AFTER FAMILY ARE GREETED WITH A SMILE AND A
LAUGH"**

English is Poly's second language, but that is not a barrier for her at all. Poly is taking classes and perusing her undergrad degree as her youngest child finishes high school.

Because Poly holds such a high value on education and is so accommodating Poly will always jump right in to become an interpreter for many of our parents who do not understand the English language.

Although her title is Receptionist/Data Tech, weekly Poly meets with a home visitor and a family for their hour and half visit to translate and interpret the entire learning experience for the children and parent to meet their goals. This would not happen without her humble happiness and willing demeanor.

nomination continued on back...



Due to the pandemic, we now have to meet our families at the front door and walk the children to their classes. Morning after morning I watch as family after family are greeted with a smile and a laugh. Children are separating from their parents and are met with funny, upbeat and encouraging words each day. I am certain the parents would be shocked to learn that the person who greets them so warmly every morning is facing a tremendous medical hurdle at this time in her life.

Although she has faced some setbacks in her medical care, which she has to travel out of town for, sometimes for a few weeks, and it all truly does become expensive for a single parent such as herself no one would ever she is facing such hardship right now. While undergoing extensive surgeries, hospital and hotel stays, Poly never missed one of our college classes.

Immediately after surgery, while in recovery she showed up on the zoom and refused to fall behind, also she helped others such as myself to finish the final project. Although Poly has been going through so much in her personal life facing her medical hardships I believe there are many coworkers who have no idea that she is going through anything at all because her gracious pleasant attitude has never wavered.

In addition, she takes time to check on other families in our program who have suffered tragedies because she is concerned about how they are feeling, what they are going through and the outcome. Again, Poly Chico is an exemplary example of how all of us should react to living with a tremendous hardship and Poly is without a doubt a tremendous asset to FNA Head Start. She is truly an example to us all.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Aliya Maiden

FAIRBANKS NATIVE
ASSOCIATION



HEAD START
0-5

Cook of the Year Jeremy Agee



I would like to nominate Jeremy Agee as Cook of the Year for Head Start. Jeremy has held many different positions within Head Start throughout his career. He has been both an Assistant Teacher and a Primary Teacher. He has been our cook for almost 10 years now.

While responding to the pandemic Jeremy has been busy ensuring our Head Start children had food at home. . He managed shopping for our bi-weekly food boxes that accompanied our learning kits and family services items.

"JEREMY'S POSITIVE ATTITUDE AND EFFORT TO TAKE CARE OF PEOPLE CARRIES THROUGH HIS WORK."

He selected and planned the purchase of items and assembled the boxes, putting the boxes together. At a time where shopping in bulk was difficult, he located enough of the same items to send out to each family. He also made sure the families health needs were met, teaming with the Education Managers to obtain items required for the lesson plans that involved cooking activities.

Jeremy has sought feedback from families and adjusted menus while continuing to meet CACFP guidelines as best as possible, helping families stretch their budget during this time. Jeremy has ensured that items for food accommodations were still purchased and available to the families as they needed them. Many families have expressed over the past year how beneficial these boxes were for their families with children and families home 24 hours a day due to lock down and the pandemic.

nomination continued on back...



Jeremy also assisted in a classroom maintaining contact and supporting teachers during the pandemic ensuring that teachers had support as best he could. Jeremy continued to help support classrooms as we moved recently to in person services while preparing the kitchen and getting ready to serve children back in person.

Jeremy's positive attitude and effort to take care of people carries through his work. Jeremy is always upbeat; he looks for the good in every situation and is always striving to improve the relationships around him whether it serving the families or supporting a coworker or being a friend. Jeremy gives a quick smile and hello to everyone. His support of his coworkers does not go unnoticed. Jeremy takes the time to check in with staff and to support them.

Jeremy thank you for continuing to serve our families and staff, you are an example of optimism even when everything is changing. You remind us all to look for the good in all things. -Angi Thomas

FAIRBANKS NATIVE
ASSOCIATION



HEAD START
0-5



Family Advocate of the Year Aliya Maiden

Please consider my nomination for Aliya Maiden as Family Advocate of the Year as I work alongside Mrs. Aliya as a fellow advocate in our program but I am writing this letter as a parent.

This past year with the pandemic it has been hard for everyone. My own family a month prior to the start of the pandemic experienced a house fire where we lost everything. All four of our children have gone through the foster care system and are adopted.

"AS A HEAD START FAMILY THERE ARE NOT ENOUGH WORDS, GIFTS OR ACTS OF APPRECIATION MY FAMILY CAN SAY OR DO TO THANK HER ENOUGH FOR EVERYTHING SHE HAS DONE FOR MY FAMILY OR OTHER FAMILIES"

They are also all past Head Start students from our program with our last graduating from FNA Head Start 0-5 in August of this year.

I was out of town when the call came from my children and husband that our house was on fire. As I rush to make plans to return home, I notified my team and Aliya as my coworker. I cannot tell you how quickly Aliya started to compile things for my family. To this day the simple act of Aliya staying on the phone with me as I cried and her telling me to breath, that everyone was safe meant and means the world to me. I remember on the phone Aliya directing her sons to gather blankets and material and scissors and her paper and pens. Aliya let me know she would deliver dinner the next night at our hotel and that I needed to stay in contact and update her as I made my way home.

nomination continued on back...



Aliya did not just deliver dinner that next night, she brought everything we would need for our stay at the hotels. She made each of the boys a blanket as she knows they love blankets and pillows. The boys a year later still sleep with those and they have become their comfort blankets. My 2nd oldest calls his “my made with love by Maiden blanket.” This gesture alone brought so much comfort to my children.

Aliya didn’t just bring the “best fried chicken” as my 5 year old said or the best comfy blankets. She came prepared with a list that I would later need to do (she knows I am list person) and applications for me to fill out for assistance. The list included things that I needed to do right away, a list that had what I would later need to furnish a home, and a shopping list of basics. The fact that I didn’t have to think in those moments was such a blessing. Aliya even included color pens that she knew I used to help myself stay organized along with notebooks for my husband and myself.

While we had some savings build to cover, Aliya knew the process for insurance was long. She understood even when I thought we were functioning just fine; we (especially myself) were in a survival state of mind. Looking back now the support she provided helping me to fill out forms I knew how to fill out since I helped and assisted others was so valuable. She took the time to make sure that i’s were dotted and t’s were crossed so that the paperwork wasn’t returned. This helped us so much as we navigated so many challenges with getting duplicates of important paper work such as adoption records, social security cards, children’s medical records, our children’s medication and my husband’s medication. Aliya helped to contact the school district and the homeless liaison and the children’s teachers to notify them of what had happened. She in many ways became their go to person so that we would not be overwhelmed with so many people asking questions or offering help.

Aliya coordinated not only with the community but our church to help us obtain the basics. She coordinated getting the boys backpacks and lists from the teachers making sure the boys would have everything they needed so their education and services were not interrupted. The boys were at school the very next day and within two days because of Aliya coordinating and working with the district the boys had everything. Their outside private therapies were also looped in by Aliya’s coordination and working as our Family Advocate, the boys did not miss their appointments as transportation was arranged to and from with family and friends as well as down time so that my husband and I could get as much done as possible.

Once I returned to work a few weeks after, Aliya was first to check on me the day we had a fire drill. I will admit that I didn’t think the sound of the alarm would affect me when notified that we were going to have drill as I was in a classroom teaching at the time. It hit afterwards as I took a break and Aliya held me in those moments and remind me that we were all safe and that my children were safe at school and my husband was at work safe.

As the pandemic hit 2 weeks after we found housing, Aliya was instrumental in supporting my family and my children as we went from one traumatic experience to dealing with the pandemic in an almost empty house. Aliya supporting me through the rough days of virtual learning, while working from home with 4 special needs high energetic boys, to developing a safe plan for my husband whose employment was considered essential. I can say without a doubt that Aliya's support and guidance during these times both with the house fire and the pandemic is a huge part of why the boys and myself and my family made it through the pandemic while rebuilding our life and home.

I knew from working with Aliya as an advocate how much she cares for the families she serves but experiencing it first hand as I faced a traumatic experience followed by the pandemic. As a Head Start family there are not enough words, gifts or acts of appreciation my family can say or do to thank her enough for everything she has done for my family or other families. FNA Head Start is blessed with an exceptional and amazing advocate serving families in Mrs. Aliya Maiden. -*Angi Thomas*

FAIRBANKS NATIVE
ASSOCIATION



HEAD START
0-5

Community Advocate of the Year Mac Transit



We would like to nominate Mac Transit as Head Start Community Advocates of the year. Mac Transit is the local bus system here in Fairbanks.

During COVID and with remote learning in place they have continued to provide services to our families. With our recent return to in-person services their continued support of our families and staff is priceless.

"MANY OF OUR FAMILIES WHO USE THIS SERVICE TELL US HOW THE DRIVERS CHECK IN WITH THEM WHEN THEY MISS THE BUS OR IF THEY ARE NOT ON SCHEDULE ENSURING OUR FAMILIES SAFETY AND WELLBEING"

Prior to COVID and when returning to in-person services Mac transit drivers have gone beyond helping to empower our parents to continue to progress even during this difficult time.

We watch daily as one driver and a family have worked out a plan where the parent calls the teacher while the bus is coming down the road, the teacher is at the door of the building. The parent exits and does the sign in process at the front door. While she is doing this, the driver very slowly does a circle in our parking lot. This small measure of time allows the parent to drop off and get back on the bus and not have to wait 20-30 minutes for the next bus. This has a great impact as it allows for the parent to get their child to the program and then proceed to their workplace on time, every day.

nomination continued on back...



Another way MAC Transit dispatchers and drivers help to support and empower our families is by taking the time to talk and get to know the families. Many of our families who use this service tell us how the drivers check in with them when they miss the bus or if they are not on schedule ensuring our families safety and wellbeing.

We have had families who shared that driver noticing their child or themselves may be missing gloves or hats in the winter having provided those to the parent the next day or have offered to connect the parent to community resources themselves. Drivers also know that we have staff and families who during winter months stay in the foyer of our building and wait for the bus. The drivers allow time for the families and staff to exit the building and make it to the bus stop limiting their exposure to the extreme cold that we experience in Fairbanks, Alaska.

Drivers taking the time when on tight schedules to help a parent (and staff) by learning to read the bus schedules or providing alternate bus routes, helps to empower our parents as they navigate a town under a lot of construction right now. Many of our parents worked through the pandemic and used the bus system as their only mode of transportation.

Mac transit also provided a training for parents and staff on the how the bus system is working during COVID while we were working remotely and providing remote services. They provided individual copies of all the bus schedules and mask for our families. The trainer Ms. Chris took the time to explain and answer all the questions they had. The staff and parents even months later are talking about how great Ms Chris was on the training. We can't wait to return to fully opening our program to visitors and have her visit our classrooms as part of transportation studies.

Thank you to all of the MAC transit drivers and staff who go above and beyond helping to get our families to and from school, work, training and life in general. They are not only transporting them but caring about our families and staff is a strength that many of our families include in their plans and goals. Thank you for supporting Head Start!

-Aliya Maiden

FAIRBANKS NATIVE
ASSOCIATION



HEAD START
0-5

Cultural Awareness Award Wanda Cover



I would like to nominate Wanda Cover for the Cultural Awareness Award. Wanda is one of our Primary Teachers in our part day preschool classroom. Wanda is an outstanding teacher who brings cultural awareness to the forefront of her teaching.

Wanda takes the time to teach new staff and to help everyone understand the importance that each culture in our classroom and building has, being sure to honor and respect them all. She recognizes the importance in making a connection to individual families and children by learning about their culture.

"HER ABILITY TO BE AVAILABLE, TO LISTEN, AND TO SHARE HER WORDS WITH KINDNESS AND GENTLENESS ALLOWS THE FAMILIES TO TRUST IN HER GUIDANCE"

As a teacher Wanda works to learn her family's cultural traditions, when appropriate she incorporates them into her classroom activities or environments. With COVID this was much harder, however Wanda found a way to include children's first languages as well as traditions and important dates in the virtual teachings or learning kits that were sent home.

When Wanda has a child enroll in her class who is preparing to celebrate a special day or event she will invite the family to share a special circle time with the class. In person pre-COVID, she would prepare cooking lessons and using input from parents. When teaching during COVID she would offer for the families to share their recipes and they were sent out to the other families.

nomination continued on back...



Wanda also helps to incorporate Alaska Native cultural into our program daily. She takes the time to teach the history and meaning behind why things are done the way they are. Wanda educates the staff on the hardships and trauma her ancestors have faced and the importance they play in educating the next generation. Wanda takes pride her in heritage and Alaskan Native culture passing the gift of her knowledge and stories to our Head Start community.

Wanda will seek advice and guidance from elders to help explain and teach the families and children. Wanda enlists her own family to help as well in preparing for events. She actively helps during Festival of Native Arts in teaching the songs and dances. Wanda comes prepared to help enhance the activities prepared. She has taken time to sew Kuspuks, an Indian dress and even helped bead for the regalia that the children wear.
-Angi Thomas



KAWERAK, INC.
Our People & Tribes are Thriving

Teacher of the Year **Courtland Pannebaker**



Mr. Pannebaker goes above and beyond what we call expectations.

He is there for our kids as well as our community. He is not a man that can easily say no when it comes to helping others no matter the task or what is asked of him.

I've witnessed him working on a 40 foot whale for 12 hours straight without wanting a share or acknowledgment of his hard work.

"COURTLAND IS KNOWN FOR HIS WORK ETHICS AND FLEXIBILITY BOTH ON AND OFF THE CLOCK"

He comes and works during the weekends and after hours and he successfully teaches our students and has reached out to families throughout his time in Gambell (at least 5 years).

He is in constant training to better himself as a teacher, and as a person. Courtland is known for his work ethics and flexibility both on and off the clock.

Living in a small village is rough. I will say that elders are the toughest on newcomers but Courtland has earned the respect of many and they now refer to him as Naayvaghvik, the month of October (his birth month), and because he is a successful provider. -Lucas Aningayou



Head Start Director of the Year Anne Shade



Anne Shade from Bristol Bay Native Association deserves to be recognized as the AHSA Director of the Year!

Anne has been an amazing leader for many years, not only for her program but for our statewide Association as well.

Anne consistently works for continuous improvement and is not afraid to tackle the big challenges that come her way.

"SHE CONTINUES TO BE THE DIRECTOR WHO REACHES OUT TO ENGAGE, MENTOR, AND SUPPORT NEW DIRECTORS WHO CAN OFTEN FEEL OVERWHELMED AND ALONE"

A couple examples of this are seen in her taking on the role of Child Development Director for BBNA which oversees child care and Head Start - and her work to guide BBNA from RX over into AIAN which is a better fit.

As the former President of AHSA for many years Anne worked very hard to pull grantees together so our voice would be more effective. She continues to be the Director who reaches out to engage, mentor, and support new Directors who can often feel overwhelmed and alone.

For these reasons and many more I nominate Anne Shade for AHSA Director of the Year! -Mark Lackey



All 2021 AHSA Award Nominees



Alicia Fields
 Angeliz Rodriguez
 Ann James
 Ariel Webster
 Beverly Mierzejak
 Brandi Heppe
 Carrie Beeman
 Casie Marang
 Cassandra Harris
 Cindy Deschamps
 Dana Story
 Darilyn Bryam
 Debra Harbison
 Dina Contreras
 Dorothy Harris
 Erin Monarch
 Fancy Conner
 Hannah Jackson
 Jeanny Manilay
 Jennifer Ellison
 Jessica Toth
 Karen VanDoesalaar
 Kelly Pertano

Kristen Mayo
 Lana Arsenault
 Lillian Willis
 Luz Villamarin
 Mai Yia Yang
 Mark Lackey
 Martha "Marty" Newton
 Martha Spencer
 Maya Blackweasel
 Melissa Charlie
 Mystic Webster
 Patricia Gardner
 Pilita Fernandez
 Raelynn Verney
 Rena Akerelrea
 Sheree Titus
 Tana Heussner
 Terre Lee
 Tess Gustin
 Tracy Neves
 Valeria Fostet
 Victoria Grey
 Wendy King



Congratulations to the Alaska Head Start Association 2022 Awards of Excellence Winners!

Parent Awards	Name (Head Start Program)
Beating the Odds Award	Joe Steel (RurAL CAP)
Head Start Father of the Year	Joseph Lash (CCS Early Learning)
Head Start Mother of the Year	Aana Sales (Clare Swan Early Learning Center)
Program Policy Council Award	Thrivalaska Head Start Birth to Five Policy Council (Thrivalaska)
Staff Awards	
Administrative Support Staff of the Year	Jennifer McClure (Kids' Corps Inc.)
Assistant or Deputy Director of the Year	Victoria Grey (CCS Early Learning)
Assistant Teacher of the Year	Shaira Dungca (RurAL CAP Kodiak)
Bus Driver of the Year	Ron Kilian (CCS Early Learning)
Content Area Specialist of the Year	Jill Ridenour (Tanana Chiefs Conference)
Cook of the Year	Debra Harbison (RurAL CAP Tok)
Early Childhood Coach of the Year	M.J. St. John (CCS Early Learning)
Early Head Start Teacher of the Year	Julia Lovett (FNA EHS - HS)
Family Advocate of the Year	Rebecca Yunker (RurAL CAP-Ketchikan)
Head Start Director of the Year	Jennifer Russell (Tanana Chiefs Conference)
Home Visitor of the Year	Lana Arsenault (CCS Early Learning)
Maintenance Staff of the Year	Simon Lawrence (RurAL CAP Kwethluk)
Teacher of the Year	Ana Agee (FNA EHS - HS)
Community Awards	
Community Advocate of the Year	Mat-Su Health Foundation (CCS Early Learning)
Corporate Award	Tanana Chiefs Conference (Tanana Chiefs Conference)
Other Awards	
Cultural Awareness Award	Chugachmiut Heritage Depart (Chugachmiut)
Leadership Award	Lola Hannon (Kawerak, Inc.)

Alaska Head Start Association Awards of Excellence 2022





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Beating the Odds
Award
Joe Steel



**"JOE HAS DONE A REMARKABLE JOB COMING UP
FROM THE BOTTOM AND WE ARE LOOKING
FORWARD TO SEEING HIM STAY ON TOP"**

Joe has gone from being without his daughter, to living in a shelter with his daughter, to obtaining housing, getting a vehicle and being able to provide for his daughter. He even gets her to school when the bus is not in service. Joe has done a remarkable job coming up from the bottom and we are looking forward to seeing him stay on top.

-Angela Nickich



Assistant Teacher of the Year Shaira Dungca



Shaira is respectful, culturally sensitive and nonjudgmental of the Head Start families, children and staff. Being bilingual, she has assisted me with families with accessing community resources if needed. She's demonstrated the ability to work effectively in a team environment.

Shaira maintains confidentiality, has professional boundaries and has no problem gaining trust in the families we serve.

"SHE'S MINDFUL OF WHAT FAMILIES MAY NEED AND WILL CHECK UP ON FAMILIES IN QUARANTINE AND OFFER ASSISTANCE OR ACCESSING RESOURCES IF NEEDED"

In the classroom, she ensures it is a safe, healthy & nurturing environment and ensures staff is using the principles of Active Supervision at all times. Also while in the classroom, she is very observant of children's behaviors & interests. She is aware of the changing resources in the community and brings things to my attention if she has a concern or ideas.

With the changes that COVID-19 has brought to our community, she's mindful of what families may need and will check up on families in quarantine and offer assistance or accessing resources if needed.

She has helped guide the new TA in learning their position, responsibilities & the program as Shaira also switched roles from FA to TA this school year.

She doesn't skip a beat! It's noticed & appreciated that she is a self starter & self directed. Without hesitation, she jumps in to help where needed from the kitchen to the classroom or in the office. -Kathy Johnson



Cook of the Year **Debra Harbison**



Over the past 18 years, Ms. Deb has held various positions in Early Childhood Education. Those positions include: classroom Teacher, Head Start Health Coordinator, and Parents As Teachers (PAT) Parent Educator. Deb has always been there to support Tok Head Start. When the Bus Monitor had to fly out to help with her sick father, Deb subbed for months. When our last Cook had to stop working for medical reasons, Deb stepped up and finished out that school year.

"DEB IS ALWAYS ONE OF THOSE PEOPLE WHO GOES ABOVE AND BEYOND"

She then also subbed for the start of that following year, until she was hired as our Cook in 2019. This wasn't the first time Deb has taken on this responsibility, she was also our Cook from 2002-2004. It was during this time that our classroom adopted the handwashing song she created that is STILL in use. We sing this song before each meal while using sign language as a transition activity. One of our classroom jobs is a song leader. This child starts by choosing how many pumps of soap. Often, he/she selects three.

ONE...TWO...THREE!

Before we eat our lunch/snack we wash our hands,
WITH SOAP!

Before we eat our lunch/snack we wash our hands,
WITH SOAP!

Before we eat our lunch/snack we wash our hands,
WITH SOAP!

nomination continued on back...



It's a good idea I think,
To wash those DIRTY germs down the sink,
So before we eat our lunch/snack we wash our hands,
WITH SOAP!

Ms. Deb has created and conducted nutrition education programs in the classroom using books and other age appropriate materials as well. One of these learning tools, a puppet named Jeffrey, teaches the children about a new food each week. The children learn to identify if a food is glow, grow or go food. Through the years, we often have parents joining us for lunch and they always feel welcome with plenty of food for all. Some have asked her for cooking tips saying that "Their child won't eat a certain food like a certain vegetable at home, but they love Ms. Deb's!" She's used techniques such as everyone at her table taking a bite after some saying, "One, two, three," has helped the students acquire tastes for new foods. Last year, Deb had taken on the new challenge of creating meals to be delivered to students while still providing a lunch and afternoon snack in the classroom.

Whenever I was able to eat lunch with the children in the classroom, she made me feel welcome and had a spot ready for me. I want to give you a glimpse of a typical day and how it is made extra special because of Ms. Deb. Ms. Deb started to describe to everyone what they were eating while emphasizing the words the children might not know or remember, like "quinoa" and "frittata." She put things in simple terms like "quinoa is a grain" and "frittatas have eggs." She then went on to remind everyone about "eating the alphabet." She asked if they remembered what they ate yesterday that starts with the letter "A" and one of the students excitedly said, "asparagus!" She then let them know that for the letter "B," she has beets. Ms. Deb actually had two types of beets for the children to try. It was fun to hear which beet each child preferred. Beets hadn't been a part of my own diet, but having tried them myself, I will be purchasing pickled beets for my family to try. I found out that the next day, she served an "ABC salad" consisting of apples, broccoli, and carrots. After I was finished eating, Ms. Deb and several others did a special "clean plate club" clap.



At the Tok Head Start Graduation this year, the teacher read to families in attendance the answers to various questions, including: "What is your favorite food that Ms. Deb has served?" Several of the children responded, "salmon patties!" and I had overheard a parent say to her spouse, "I guess I'm going to need that recipe again." That parent will very happy to discover that Ms. Deb had already included that recipe in their child's graduation packet! She also added some other items that she had gotten each student to enjoy this summer, including a pair of sunglasses and fidget spinners.

Ms. Deb maintains her Alaska Food Worker's card as well as her ServSafe certification. She always gets 100% on the production records she submits. Deb is always one of those people who goes above and beyond. I know Ms. Deb puts in extra hours to make things extra special. When I had monthly Family Fun Nights, she made yummy dinners like homemade soup and rolls, or chili with cornbread for the children and families. If she sees something that needs to be done, she will take it upon herself to do it without being asked, including taking out the trash or shoveling the walkway. When I changed positions within RurAL CAP, she took on the added responsibility of creating the weekly newsletter and sending it home to families. Ms. Deb participates in our weekly staff meeting and helps bring laughter to the office. She has given each staff "You're Awesome" cards to open up on several occasions. The last one I received said: "There is not a duplicate of you in the whole wide world," though I do wish we can clone Ms. Deb! I appreciate Ms. Deb's hard work and I feel very honored to have worked with her. Ms. Deb is very deserving of the AHA Cook of the Year award! -Carrie Beeman



Family Advocate of the Year **Rebecca Yunker**



Rebecca came back to Ketchikan Head Start after spending many years as an advocate and supervisor at the local domestic violence shelter, WISH. The knowledge that she gained at WISH has had a huge impact on the families and staff that she partners with at Ketchikan HS. Rebecca has also jumped right in to the role of being a Family Advocate and makes meaningful connections with the families. She has supported one family this school year by going to several medical appointments with a mother who was overwhelmed.

"SHE TRULY DOES HER BEST TO MAKE SURE THE PARENTS AND STUDENTS ARE INFORMED AND COMFORTABLE AT HEAD START AT ALL TIMES"

Rebecca has also worn many hats this year in the center because we were so short staffed. She was the bus aide until we could hire one and the Teacher Aide when our Teacher Aide was out sick. She is a pleasure to work with, is always positive, gives great advice and brings a level of professionalism that is good for building high quality connections with families, community partners and staff. -Angela Nickich

Becca is one of the first people you meet when you enroll your child in our RurAL CAP Ketchikan Head Start. She goes above and beyond to answer any of the parents' questions not just at the beginning of the year, but all throughout the year and throughout kindergarten transitioning. She truly does her best to make sure the parents and students are informed and comfortable at Head Start at all times. She encourages parents to ask questions no matter how small and insignificant they might think they are. She is absolutely fantastic with the children and other staff members. I am lucky to have her not only as a coworker but as a friend as well.

-Elizabeth Jones



Maintenance Staff of the Year

Simon Lawrence



Simon Lawrence has been overseeing one of our most complex, rural EHS/HS buildings as the Maintenance Specialist in Kwethluk, AK for over 12 years. This consists of maintaining commercial boilers, a separate diesel power generator, a fire suppression system, and a full air ventilation system. His communication skills include timely information concerning building needs; including trouble-shooting mechanical, plumbing, and integrated systems of the facility.

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

He advocates for future building needs and spends time to improve his understanding of how the different systems work together to keep the building in a safe, working condition.

Simon has a lot of pride in his job and it shows by the level of care he provides to the large facility. He is constantly checking the building to ensure everything is functioning as intended. When a situation arises, Simon is level-headed, acts quickly, and utilizes his resources to resolve the problem (ie. referring to YouTube videos to teach himself). He makes sure there is enough fuel to last during school closures, and continues to check on the building during closures. With fuel shortages this year, Simon has been especially proactive to ensure adequate heating fuel is delivered to the site from a nearby community.

nomination continued on back...



He ensures the facility is safe & sanitary at all times, taking extra precautions during COVID exposures.

He is very flexible to meet the needs of the center, this includes traveling to Bethel by snowmachine or ATV to get parts. During the past year, the facility's fire panel system needed troubleshooting, and he was able to do it over the phone with guidance from a professional. Simon is able and willing to step in wherever needed, sometimes including the classroom. He has a great rapport with the children and their families.

Simon is very knowledgeable with technology, always willing to install new equipment and train his co-workers on how to use new systems/software platforms.

He has a sense of humor that keeps everyone smiling, especially as we navigate through the challenging times of the Pandemic.

Simon has great communication with the Head Start Regional Manager, notifying her immediately of any problems and getting permission for purchases.

During PY 2021-22, he met all of the goals that were established in his March 2021 Performance Review. He is working hard towards his next goal of getting his Level II Portable Fire Extinguisher Certification.

Simon is an asset to RurAL CAP Early/Head Start. *-Lynette Cooper*



Head Start Father of the Year **Joseph Lash**



Joseph is an amazing father to see in action. He is very hands-on with his children and communicates well to the CCS staff about his family's needs, concerns, and satisfaction of care. Joseph raises his family with love, kindness, and generosity and he shares that passion with the staff in the classrooms. Joseph is willing to volunteer with CCS as needed. Joseph engages in a team approach to give his child the best level of care at CCS.

-Victoria Grey

" HE IS A POSITIVE ADVOCATE FOR NOT ONLY HIS CHILDREN, BUT ALL CHILDREN THAT CCS SERVES"

Joseph is a strong participant in the Policy Council as the Vice President. He is a positive advocate for not only his children, but all children that CCS serves. He very professionally communicates concerns and provides insight from a parent perspective. He is dedicated to providing the best opportunities for his children and family. Even when participating in the program became a challenge, Joseph continued to participate as much as possible in the Policy Council and at the Center. It is inspiring to see his level of commitment. *-Tabatha Peterson*

Joseph was the only father within our center to volunteer for Policy Council and has been an amazing support to his daughter. *- Cassie Padgett*



Assistant or Deputy Director of the Year **Victoria Grey**



This year CCS Early Head Start has had many staff changes due to many unfortunate events. Victoria took on the rolls of multiple job titles and kept our center together while also continuing to serve our children and families. During times of happiness and distress, Victoria has been there every step of the way. Aside from daily duties Victoria has gone above and beyond doing everything she can to support her staff.

**"DURING TIMES OF HAPPINESS AND DISTRESS,
VICTORIA HAS BEEN THERE EVERY STEP OF THE WAY"**

Victoria has been an incredible advocate for her staff, students and families and words do not do her justice to the important role she holds at our center.

-Cassie Padgett

Victoria is the best center coordinator I have ever had! She works hard to keep our team on track. She holds the center together. *-Ariel Webster*

Victoria is deserving of this nomination because she is a walking billboard of resiliency. Victoria has been with CCS for less than two years. In that time, she has gone from a leadership position working primarily within family services to a Center Coordinator position leading an entire facility.

nomination continued on back...



During her time with CCS, there have been some extremely difficult challenges specific to the center that she has navigated with the highest level of professionalism and empathy. Victoria has been a role model for her staff in many ways. She leads by example. I have had the pleasure of observing Victoria cultivate the staff members at her center into a family that encourages staff wellness, positive communication, healthy and professional conflict resolution, and growth through professional development. In the absolute most challenging moments, Victoria finds the opportunity to strengthen the teams she works within. Learning how to lead a facility during a pandemic is not for the faint of heart. Victoria's dedication to the work she does is apparent every day. She is one of the most positive and supportive leaders I know. -*Tabatha Peterson*



Bus Driver of the Year **Ronald Kilian**



We would like to nominate Ron Kilian, as bus driver of the year. Ron has been a bus driver for CCS Early Learning since 2016. Ron really deserves this award. He is always calm and uses a quiet voice with the children. He is always willing to help children get to their classrooms even when they are struggling. We had one child in particular who had a difficult time with transitions, and rode Ron's bus. Ron would often hold his hand and help the child get to class, or wherever the class was supposed to go, anytime Ron was in the center.

" RON IS NOT ONLY A GREAT DRIVER HE IS ALSO A GREAT PERSON, AND IT SHOWS IN EVERYTHING HE DOES"

The children really like Mr. Ron and are glad to see him. He builds personal relationships with the bus aides that makes it easier to ride the bus with him and can be considered a lifelong friend for many people who meet him. He is also willing to help with making sure important information gets sent home to families and would carry children's artwork out to the bus to help the aide. Ron also makes sure that the snow is removed from the sidewalks if needed and that they are safe for staff and families, showing up before his bus route to take care of them. We really enjoyed his conversations, he was a great member of the Chugiak team. Ron would come in and chat with staff before his bus route every afternoon, and to make sure he knew which children were riding that day. Ron has been a mentor to others and is a very reliable bus driver and also was willing to help out with another head start center when needed. Ron is not only a great driver he is also a great person, and it shows in everything he does. We hope you will consider Ron for bus driver of the year.

-Michelle Schilling



Early Childhood Coach of the Year

MariaJose St. John



MJ is an incredibly talented coach who really loves what she does. Her passion for Early Childhood Education is a strength when it comes to coaching the Early Head Start Teachers. When MJ enters the classroom she makes a point to greet every child and teacher with respect, which is something appreciated by both staff and students. MJ's work with the Early Head Start Teachers has been an exceptional experience to be a part of. MJ works really hard to be intentional with what she brings to the table.

"SHE TURNS CHALLENGES INTO OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH"

Recently MJ has been doing individual feedback sessions with the teachers which allows time for her to highlight their glows and really support them with their area of growth. She is flexible on meeting the needs of each teacher and I believe that has strengthened her ability to be an Early Childhood Coach. MJ has also started a book club with the teachers which has been a new, fun, and beneficial way to learn about early childhood and how we can apply these concepts in the classroom. MJ is very deserving of this award. -Victoria Grey

MJ St John. MJ is a positive force in every situation. She is always smiling and always willing to help you find a solution for any problem you may have. She goes above and beyond if she doesn't know the answer, she'll find it! -Lana Arsenault

nomination continued on back...



I am nominating MJ St. John for Early Childhood Coach of the year. MJ has been in her position as a coach for two years and has brought a whole new perspective of coaching to our Early Head Start Programs. MJ has immersed herself in multiple opportunities for her own professional development and gives that knowledge directly back to the work she does. She turns challenges into opportunities for growth. In two years, MJ has moved our Early Head Start programs from a minimally structured coaching system to fully implementing Practiced Based Coaching, One on One coaching and TLC' groups. She supports every teacher, meeting them individually where they are and prioritizing the importance of the relationships she builds with them. MJ has also taken a very intentional approach to formally introducing the CLASS tool to the Early Head Start programs in such a way that teachers value the tool and its ability to enhance their teacher child interactions. She continues to support the agency's growth and development through coordination with the program management and leadership teams. Her head start work beams with equity, diversity and inclusion and we couldn't be more proud to have MJ on our team. I want us to all celebrate MJ and all that she has done for CCS Early Learning! -*Tabatha Peterson*



Home Visitor of the Year **Lana Arsenault**



Lana is an amazing Home Visitor. She takes the time to know and understand her family's needs and walks with them during the short time as their CCS Home Visitor. She has managed to meet the families where they are during the last few years and rolls with the changes that have been placed in her path. She enjoys connecting families together and providing activities and resources.

"SHE HAS MANAGED TO MEET THE FAMILIES WHERE THEY ARE DURING THE LAST FEW YEARS AND ROLLS WITH THE CHANGES THAT HAVE BEEN PLACED IN HER PATH"

Several of her families have talked to me about how Lana is wonderful in supporting their ideas and concerns and always available to listen. She is a wonderful asset for our Home Visitor team and enjoys coming up with ideas to keep us connected and working together. She loves to share her knowledge with others and is a joy to work with. -*Tammy Berdeaux*

Lana is very compassionate, goes the extra mile to help the families, always makes sure that families are welcomed and feel safe with sharing their information. -*Kacie Arsenault*

Lana is great and really cares about her families. She is always looking for new ideas to bring to her families and they all love her. She really helps them with resources and needs. -*Wendy King*



Community Advocate of the Year **Mat-Su Health Foundation**



The Mission of the Mat-Su Health Foundation is to improve the health and wellness of Alaskans living in the Mat-Su. CCS would like to nominate the Mat-Su Health Foundation (MSHF) for all the work that they have done to have a positive impact in our community - especially in supporting the work of CCS Early Learning. Since 2008 - the Mat-Su Health Foundation has provided over \$2.2 million dollars in grants to our agency.

"WE ARE SO THANKFUL THAT WE HAVE A COMMUNITY ADVOCATE THAT RECOGNIZES THE IMPORTANCE OF INVESTING UPSTREAM - IN THE YOUNG CHILDREN (AND THE YOUNG FAMILIES) THAT WE SERVE"

Some of the purposes these funds have accomplished:

1. Purchasing property, construction, and renovating facilities
2. Refurbishing playgrounds
3. Providing funds for professional development and training for our staff
4. Providing funds to support increased mental health supports for children, family members and CCS staff.
5. Helping us to institutionalize best practices in Trauma Informed Care (which we have shared with other Alaskan grantees)

In addition, the Mat-Su Health Foundation consistently reaches out to CCS Early Learning to make sure that their advocacy work and legislative correspondence includes items that are important to early childhood.

nomination continued on back...



They have worked very hard to make sure that Mat-Su data is accurate and readily available to our agency and to the community as a whole to support grant writing and community improvements.

We are so thankful that we have a community advocate that recognizes the importance of investing upstream - in the young children (and the young families) that we serve. In our work to make a difference in the lives and families of young children - there has not been a better partner and we would like to honor their ongoing support by recognizing them as the Alaska Head Start Association - Community Advocate of the Year! -*Mark Lackey*



Head Start Mother of the Year **Aana Sales**



Aana Sales is truly a great example of an involved and caring parent. She regularly attends family functions with Clare Swan, including our family nights and our Tsil'que parent training. She is dedicated to her children and making sure that they are attending school and learning. She is involved in her children's education and helps to ensure that her children succeed. Aana has experienced significant trauma in her life including the tragic loss of her partner in a shooting that left her a single mother of two with another one on the way.

"OVERALL, AANA IS AN INCREDIBLE MOTHER WHO HAS CONTINUED TO FACE SO MANY CHALLENGES AND DIVERSITY WITH STRENGTH AND RESILIENCE"

Despite this trauma Aana has continued to stay involved and dedicated to her children. After the loss of her partner COVID hit the Anchorage community which led to the closing of Clare Swan. In June of 2020, we re-opened our center which allowed Aana to return to her job as an essential worker.

Around every corner, Aana has persevered. She became homeless in July of 2020. With some ingenuity, she was able to create a safe living space for her family while they waited for their housing situation to improve. With the support of Clare Swan Aana is now in stable housing. Due to another unseen circumstance, Aana took placement of her nephew and has now adopted him. With the addition of her nephew Aana has continued to be involved in his education and being an advocate for him.

nomination continued on back...



Throughout all of these challenges Aana has continued to work on herself to better meet the needs of her children. Aana is in the process of furthering her education and attaining her High School Diploma. She has also participated in our Tsil'que parenting class and has used these skills to become an even more present and attentive parent. She has also used these additional skills to provide support and encouragement to other parents who are also struggling. Aana has learned to not only speak up for the needs of herself and her children, but also the needs of others.

Overall, Aana is an incredible mother who has continued to face so many challenges and diversity with strength and resilience. Due to all these aspects I think Aana Sales truly represents the values of Head Start and would make a great Head Start Mother of the Year. -*Thelma Clay & Victoria Gonzalez*



*Program Policy Council
Award*
**Thrivalaska Head Start
Birth to Five Policy Council**



Steve Bouta



Rick Burroughs



Justice Soule

I would like to nominate the Thrivalaska Head Start Birth to Five Policy Council for the Award of Excellence!

It has been extremely challenging getting a group of parents committed to being on the Policy Council with the ongoing difficulties COVID continues to throw at us. Our Policy Council, consisting of parents Rick Burroughs and Justice Soule, along with Board Liaison Steve Bouta, have continuously supported our program by being active members on our Policy Council.

"THEY TRULY UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANT ROLE THEY PLAY AS AN ADVOCATE FOR THEIR CHILDREN AND BELIEVE IN WHAT HEAD START CAN DO FOR FAMILIES".

They have been able to make meetings happen monthly and sometimes in a matter of hours depending on our program needs. They truly understand the important role they play as an advocate for their children and believe in what Head Start can do for families. They have often joined Board meetings for different program approvals which allows for crucial business to happen in a timely manner. All of our worlds turned completely around and we have had to change many ways that our tasks are accomplished and this group has definitely stepped up to the challenge! Without them and their ongoing support, our program would not be possible! They deserve to be recognized for the Policy Council of the Year for the Alaska Head Start Association! -Sarah Newton



Administrative Support Staff of the Year **Jennifer McClure**



I would like to nominate Jennifer McClure for the Administrative Support Staff of the Year Award for the exemplary dedication she has shown to Kids' Corps, Inc. especially in this 2021-2022 school year. Our agency expanded this school year which led to many changes. We added new positions, and we re-opened a site we closed at the start of the pandemic back in 2020. Like many programs we have been short-staffed for much of the year.

**"YOU STILL SEE JENNIFER'S BRIGHT SMILE AND
CHEERFUL DISPOSITION NO MATTER WHAT
CHALLENGE IS PRESENTED TO HER"**

Jennifer played a big part behind-the-scenes helping us get to where we are today. She oversees and brings professionalism to our social media, staff page, office orders and makes sure our IT network runs smoothly. You still see Jennifer's bright smile and cheerful disposition no matter what challenge is presented to her. She maintains a can-do attitude and makes sure everyone's IT and office supply needs are met.

Jennifer has many talents that make her such a skilled worker. In order to help when we were short staffed during the pandemic, she learned to do child care program billing and assist with other bookkeeping duties. She is a wonderful event planner and host who makes sure everyone feels welcome and has what they need for the occasion, whether it is a pre-service training or end of the year celebrations.

Whatever the project, Jennifer always brings a positive attitude and a willingness to share her thoughts and ideas. You will find her promoting our mission and striving to bring unity to our School Family by making it an amazing place to work and be a part of. We are thankful for her care and tenacity. -Selina Ellis KCI MV EHS Center Director

FAIRBANKS NATIVE
ASSOCIATION



HEAD START
0-5

Early Head Start Teacher of the Year **Julia Lovett**



I would like to nominate Julia Lovett for the associate teacher of Early Head Start for 2022. Julia is a team player, she is quick to assist her team leads in prepping, cleaning, and lesson planning. Julia comes to the table ready to learn and willing to share ideas with her team and program. Julia works in our 0-3 option is often seen sitting on the floor with the little ones on her lap, singing, clapping, or just having fun.

"SHE HAS UNPARALLELED WORK ETHIC, RELIABLE, RESOURCEFUL, AND DEPENDABLE IN MANY RESPECTS."

Julia is committed to her families and her effort and commitment is clearly seen through her work and the smiling faces of the little ones when entering the classroom. Her nickname "Ms. Hulia" (Julia) is often heard as the children enter the classroom. She lights up the room with her smile when she enters the doors. Knowing that I have not long worked with Julia, I therefore sought help from her peers, assistant in writing the nominations from members of her team who knows her best. The following are her teams' response and comments:

Ms. Zelona states this is my profound words for Julia, she is very dedicated to her work, pleasant, hardworking, and understanding individual. I would publicly announce her contributions and positive attitude every day, she's always smiling and she's such a joy to work with every day. She has unparalleled work ethic, reliable, resourceful, and dependable in many respects.

nomination continued on back...



Ms. Alexia states Julia is one of my favorite co-teachers and my personal I.T. gal. First, we started out as co-workers then, we became great friends and we have created an amazing bond together. She is a whole lot of fun, a great team player, and has a ton of spunk in her. Julia has this infectious low-key quiet laugh and body shaking giggles that make you laugh even harder. She has hilarious come backs when we jokingly tease each other. Julia is passionate in her work and gives 100% to her students. She is definitely a mother bear to them.

Julia thank you for the passion, smiles and love you to give to the little ones in Head Start program; and your hard work, dedication, and willingness to learn and share to our entire team. Your skills and talent are why we are Head Start Strong, and our families and children are succeeding. Thank you!! -Angi Thomas

FAIRBANKS NATIVE
ASSOCIATION



HEAD START
0-5

Teacher of the Year **Anastasia Agee**



I would like to nominate Ms. Anastasia (Ana) Agee for Head Start teacher of the year for 2022. I have had the honor and privilege working with Ana since she started here at FNA Head Start 0-5 program. I have watch her grown from an Associate Teacher to a Primary Lead Teacher. She works in our D'ennake Language program as a Primary Teacher.

"ANA'S PASSION AND DESIRE TO BEST SERVE THE FAMILY IS EVIDENT IN ALL THAT SHE DOES"

Ana recently graduated with her Associates degree in Early Childhood Education. Ana is an instrumental part of our Head Start team. Ana's vast experience with preschoolers and as a past and current Head Start parent help her to enhance her services as a teacher. She is excellent at meeting the parent where they are. Ana comes ready and willing to work and builds secure and lasting relationships not just with parents and children but the staff and community we serve.

Ana builds long lasting relationships with families and children; she works endlessly to ensure families need are met. As her supervisor she communicates effectively with me and the family advocate. Ana advocated for and spear headed our team in gathering more education resources for traumatic brain injuries and working with individuals who have experience them as one of our parents does. Ana's passion and desire to best serve the family is evident in all that she does.

nomination continued on back...



Ana's ceaseless commitment to thinking outside the box, helped families navigate remote learning. She ensured a smooth transition to and from in person to remote multiple times and kept families engaged over the last 2 and half years of working during Covid-19. Her passion to see the children thrive in uncertain times and to support and hold them when they are learning a new skill is what we all strive in our work as early educators.

Ana has a propensity for learning; and language has become one of her passions. Ana's first language is Russian. English is a second language which makes learning. Hence Ana's 3rd language. She shares her story with families as part of their relationship and families can build and trust her as she works to serve their family. Ana, thank you for the countless hours you devote to our families, your wisdom, your love, and your skills. Ana your work and commitment makes Head Start triumphant.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Aliya Maiden



Cultural Awareness Award

Chugachmiut Heritage Preservation Department



I would like to nominate the Chugachmiut Heritage Preservation Department for the Cultural Awareness Award. The vision of Chugachmiut's Heritage Preservation Department is to revitalize the traditional Chugach Native culture and language.

"ONE OF THE MOST EXCITING DEVELOPMENTS IS THE COLLABORATION BETWEEN OUR HEAD START AND HERITAGE PRESERVATION DEPARTMENTS TO DEVELOP A SUGT'STUN LANGUAGE APP"

The goal is to make Sugpiaq/Eyak history and heritage a part of the regular school curriculum (Head Start through High School) with support and direction from Elders' traditional ecological knowledge. The Heritage Preservation Department and the Head Start have been collaborating to bring Sugt'stun language lessons into our classrooms. When health conditions have allowed, the local Sugt'stun Language Teacher is scheduled in our classrooms to teach language lessons.

They have also developed Heritage Kit Curriculum/Lesson for Pre-K – Grade 12 that are available for teachers. These age-appropriate Lesson Plans, aligned with state standards, have suggested activities, resources and are centered around cultural activities and provide Sugt'stun vocabulary words for students that align with the activities.

nomination continued on back...



One of the most exciting developments is the collaboration between our Head Start and Heritage Preservation Departments to develop a Sugt'stun language app (for IOS and Android). This app, set to be released the end of September, is game based. The children have an avatar that explores a Sugpiaq village, playing developmentally appropriate "games" and hearing and speaking Sugt'stun (and English). The app will reinforce the language learned in our Head Start classrooms.

We, at Chugachmiut Head Start, are so grateful for the support from the Heritage Preservation Department has given our Head Start Program and sharing the Sugpiaq culture, heritage and Sugt'stun language with our children.

-Kristin Ramstad



Leadership Award **Lola Hannon**



I would like to recommend Lola Hannon for your Leadership Award. I have known Lola for about 26 years, and she is one of the most dedicated staff members that I have worked with during those years.

She represents what a leader is for our program. She has the initiative to take charge, and work with her staff so that they excel in what they do in the program, and integrity to set high standards for herself, and for her staff.

"SHE ALWAYS WANTED TO MAKE SURE THAT SHE WAS A SUPERVISOR THAT WAS APPROACHABLE, UNDERSTANDABLE, AND TRUSTWORTHY"

I had first known Lola as the lead teacher in her classroom. She always took the initiative to make sure subs or new staff hired were trained. When we had new teachers coming in from our partnering Bering Strait School District, she always made sure they knew our Policies and Procedures. She took the lead in making sure all her paperwork was submitted to the appropriate core-staff members.

In her current position as a Program Specialist this past year, I have seen a growth in her leadership abilities as a supervisor. She supervised four sites, and in one of the sites there is an EHS & HS, so she was in charge of tracking five classrooms. She always made sure that the staff in these classrooms met with her on a weekly basis.

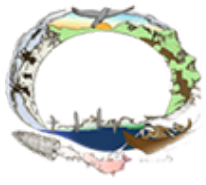
nomination continued on back...



She wanted to know what they were doing well, and also wanted to see if she could help with any struggles that staff brought up that they could find solutions to.

I have seen so much from her when it comes to setting high standards for herself. She always wanted to make sure that she was a supervisor that was approachable, understandable, and trustworthy. She also wanted her staff to follow her lead. She was a role model, and if she did have any staff not understanding, she made sure she met with them individually, so they were on the same page, the same road to achieving goals, and the same track to better themselves.

I hope you will consider Lola Hannon for this award. *-Mary Long*



Tanana
Chiefs
Conference

Content Area Specialist of the Year **Jill Ridenour**



The person selected for Content Specialist of the Year from Tanana Chiefs Conference is a person that has dedicated 12 years to ensuring children and families are thriving. She has held the title of: Deputy Director, Head Start Manager, and now Health, Safety, & Nutrition Coordinator (HSN).

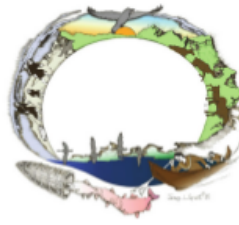
Jill has held many positions that supported the program in very specific ways, but in 2019 when she was hired as the HSN Coordinator, she took on a very intricate role and learned it inside and out.

"SHE WINS THE CARING HEART AWARD FROM HER TEAM"

Jill took on this role right before the pandemic started and implemented a lot of creative ways to support children and families in each of these areas. Like most programs, Jill assisted in 17 remote Head Start sites with food boxes, snacks, diapers, PPE, and of course all the compliance pieces such as dental and immunizations. She is always trying to figure out how our classrooms can remain open and we can assure children are receiving services. When the pandemic said no teeth brushing in class, Jill not only implemented the "Brush, Book, Bed", but went further to provide parent education to show the importance of a good bedtime routine.

As we emerge from the pandemic, Jill is working closely with parents and educators to return to safe environments "post COVID". The program wants to thank Jill and show our appreciation with this award nomination. She wins the caring heart award from her team. -Jennifer Russell

Corporate Award Tanana Chiefs Conference



Tanana
Chiefs
Conference

Tanana Chiefs Conference has been instrumental in the operations of our Head Start program. From Employee Health working with all Head Start staff on all things COVID related, disaster pay, to Administration supporting all programs to operate as they could safely.

The company vision of "Healthy, Strong, Unified Tribes" shows in all services provided to beneficiaries as well as to TCC staff. TCC has made it very apparent they believe in the way they work with their staff, and the services provided to beneficiaries.

"THE COMPANY VISION OF "HEALTHY, STRONG, UNIFIED TRIBES" SHOWS IN ALL SERVICES PROVIDED TO BENEFICIARIES AS WELL AS TO TCC STAFF"

To the Head Start program, this meant level increased pay, 5% COLA for 2022, this meant COVID relief payments to each employee, as well as the care that the entire organization had for all. It is because of TCC that Head Start was as supported as it was.

The partnerships from communities, the overall coordination it takes to make our Head Start program operate more efficiently. Without their support, our program would struggle to do it all.

As a large organization, there are many behind the scenes operations that support the program, supports that have incredible impact to daily operations. This includes mail pick-up and drop-off, HR with hiring, Accounting helping manage grants, and facilities with all tasks they do. There are many cogs to operate a Head Start program, and Tanana Chiefs Conference has been the most supportive they can be to support their vision in rural Alaska.

The program would like to Thank Tanana Chiefs Conference for everything they do as an organization supporting many programs and staff. They show Ch'egwhitsen' (True Love) every single day. -Jennifer Russell



Head Start Director of the Year **Jennifer Russell**



I chose to nominate Jennifer Russell as the Head Start Director of the year because she is passionate and loves her job.

I see the struggles and how hard it is to keep a Head Start program up & going successfully.

**"SHE IS POSITIVE, SUPPORTIVE, UNDERSTANDING,
ENGAGED, ENCOURAGING AND HONEST"**

As the Tanana Chiefs Conference Prenatal to Five Head Start Manager and serving 17 villages with Early Head Start and Head Start center base & home based options is not an easy job. I believe she is doing an outstanding job providing quality services to each village and the staff.

She is positive, supportive, understanding, engaged, encouraging and honest. She pushes and strives to make sure services are provided. She never gives up and always looks for the good in every situation, she is very supportive to her staff and the families we serve. She is understanding in every situation and believes that we can make this work no matter the situation. I can tell that she loves her job and most of all loves the program and what it provides to families and children.

Jennifer rocks as the manager at Tanana Chiefs Conference Head Start!
-Sheree Titus



All 2022 AHSA Award Nominees



Angela Nickich
 Almarie Cook
 Ariadna Jimenez
 Alice Edmund
 Alicia Notti
 Amber Vaska
 Aqueda Lozano
 Angie Malafronti
 Angela Jones
 Angeliz Rodriguez
 Brandi Heppe
 Bruce Greer
 Bering Strait School District
 Cassie Padgett
 Charity Lawrence
 Charlene Lauth
 Cindy Deschamps
 Casie Marang
 Charles Owusu
 Caroline Wolkoff
 Carrie Wallace
 Dorothy Harris
 Donna Reisinger
 Davina Sunkel
 Emily Cunningham
 Holly Houtchens
 John Strongheart
 Jessica Loaiza
 Kimberly Ross
 Katrina Nunemann
 Kayla Tripp

Ka Her
 Lauren Patton
 Lynsey Dellinger
 Linda Duke
 Marvella Webster
 Mark Lackey
 Miranda Doramus
 Marry Grace Garchitorena
 "Grace"
 Marcella Atcherian
 Marie Schliebe
 Neva Lancaster
 Pauline Lane
 Patricia Kramer
 Riley McLellan
 Rebecca Peterson-Spurgeon
 RYC (Residential Youth Care Inc.)
 Rizielle Acierto
 Roberta Katongan
 Roger Ridenour
 Sadie Maher
 Summer Frank
 Sheena Lizama
 Sarah Burton
 Tracy Neves
 Tamara De Los Santos
 Valeria Foster
 Walter L. Chastain
 Wesleyan Foraker
 Yaejin Park

Congratulations to the Alaska Head Start Association 2023 Awards of Excellence Winners!

Parent Awards	Name (Head Start Program)
Beating the Odds Award	Ryan Benedict (CCS Early Learning)
Head Start Father of the Year	Paul Pike (FNA EHS - HS)
Head Start Mother of the Year	Melissa Imboden (Kids' Corps Inc.)
Program Policy Council Award	CCS Early Learning Policy Council (CCS Early Learning)
Staff Awards	
Administrative Support Staff of the Year	Charity Lawrence (CCS Early Learning)
Assistant or Deputy Director of the Year	Kristi Walmsley (Tanana Chiefs Conference)
Assistant Teacher of the Year	Lilly Mann (RurAL CAP)
Bus Driver of the Year	Benjamin Tompkins (FNA EHS - HS)
Content Area Specialist of the Year	Kimberly Ross (RurAL CAP)
Cook of the Year	Tiffany Holley (APIA)
Early Childhood Coach of the Year	Terri Mach (RurAL CAP)
Early Head Start Teacher of the Year	Melanie Saeteurn (Cook Inlet Tribal Council Head Start)
Family Advocate of the Year	Victoria Gonzalez (Cook Inlet Tribal Council Head Start)
Head Start Director of the Year	Mark Lackey (CCS Early Learning)
Home Visitor of the Year	Jessica Elliott (CCS Early Learning)
Maintenance Staff of the Year	Hugo Arcentales (Kids' Corps Inc.)
Teacher of the Year	Kylie Shuneson (BBNA)
Community Awards	
Community Advocate of the Year	Saint John's United Methodist Church (Kids' Corps Inc.)
Corporate Award	Shawna Ragan (Kids' Corps Inc.)
Humanitarian Award	Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton School (Kid's Corps Inc.)
School District Collaboration Award	Bering Strait School District (RurALCAP)
Other Awards	
Cultural Awareness Award	Marie Schliebe (APIA)
Leadership Award	Denise Sturgis (CCS Early Learning)

Alaska Head Start Association Awards of Excellence



2023



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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**



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.

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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.

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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"**

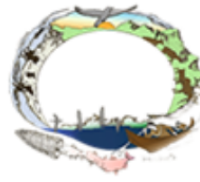
Part of this wonderful event is that each student must write and illustrate a story on being "thankful." What wonderful imaginations these children have. On the day of food delivery, the children come with their stories to read to the children in the classrooms. Our little children just love having the 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.

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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.



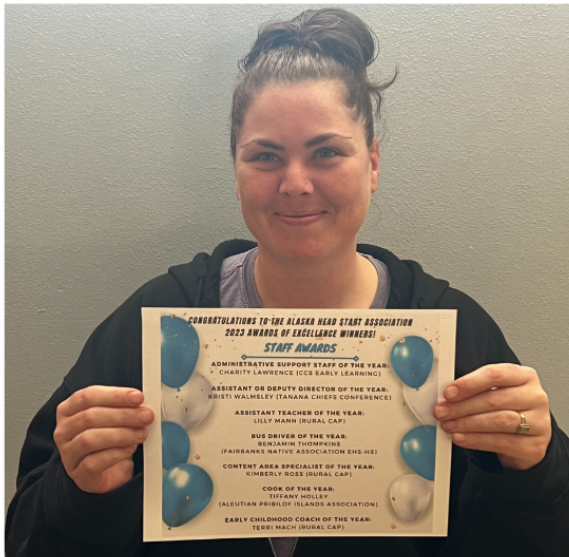
Through a partnership with Bering Strait School District, we are provided a qualified Teacher at our Savoonga and Stebbins Head Start centers. Without this, we would most likely not be able to have a program in these locations. Over the last few years, our communication continues to strengthen because 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



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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		



2024 AHSA Awards of Excellence Winners

Parent Awards	Award Winners and Program
Beating the Odds Award	Cody Keyes, Cook Inlet Tribal Council Head Start
Head Start Father of the Year	Victor Betances, CCS Early Learning
Head Start Mother of the Year	Jessica Merrill, CCS Early Learning
Program Policy Council Award	TCC Policy Council, Tanana Chiefs Conference
Staff Awards	
Administrative Support Staff of the Year	Nina Saechao, Kids' Corps Inc.
Assistant or Deputy Director of the Year	Tammy Berdeaux, CCS Early Learning
Assistant Teacher of the Year	Hlee Vang, Kids' Corps Inc.
Bus Driver of the Year	Guy Sandlin, CCS Early Learning
Content Area Specialist of the Year	Patrick Cockrell, CCS Early Learning
Cook of the Year	Rachelle Santos, APIA
Early Childhood Coach of the Year	Katrina Nunemann, Tanana Chiefs Conference
Early Head Start Teacher of the Year	Samuel Nyx, CCS Early Learning
Family Advocate of the Year	Louise Huffman, Kawerak
Head Start Director of the Year	Katrina Ahlfield, Kids' Corps Inc.
Home Visitor of the Year	Stefanie Ostlind, CCS Early Learning
Maintenance Staff of the Year	Eric Joe, RurAL CAP
Teacher of the Year	Kristen Phillips, RurAL CAP
Community Awards	
Community Advocate of the Year	Janel Gagnon, CCS Early Learning
Corporate Award	Providence Nurse Family Partnership, Kids' Corps Inc.
Humanitarian Award	The Community Diaper Pantry, Kids' Corps Inc.
Other Awards	
Leadership Award	Aaron Clements, CCS Early Learning



Alaska Head Start Association Awards of Excellence



2024



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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, CSELIC, 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



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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



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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



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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



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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



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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



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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



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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.

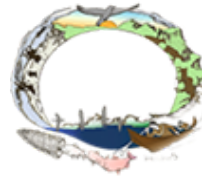
Since the pandemic hit, building a Policy Council has been difficult, the current elected PC has served for two years now. In the current school year, the program was unsuccessful to elect a new Policy Council, by default, the previous year's group still has to serve.

**“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



2024-25 AHSA Awards of Excellence Winners!

Parent Awards	Nominations
Beating the Odds Award	Michaela Murphy, CCS Early Learning
Head Start Father of the Year	Raul Yunsan, Kids' Corps, Inc.
Head Start Mother of the Year	Mary Parrish, CCS Early Learning
Program Policy Council Award	KCI 24-25 Program Policy Council, 1-2, Kids' Corps, Inc.
Staff Awards	
Administrative Support Staff of the Year	Arina Yang, Kids' Corps, Inc.
Assistant or Deputy Director of the Year	Rachel Schafer, Kids' Corps, Inc.
Assistant Teacher of the Year	Jennifer Hernández Miranda, FNA (EHS - HS)
Bus Driver of the Year	Bryanna Goodman-Toal, CCS Early Learning
Content Area Specialist of the Year	Kayleen Hetrick, CCS Early Learning
Cook of the Year	Cheryl Konahok, Kawerak
Early Childhood Coach of the Year	Mercedes Gomez, FNA (EHS - HS)
Early Head Start Teacher of the Year	Shelby Daniels, CCS Early Learning
Family Advocate of the Year	Kathy Johnson, RurAL CAP
Head Start Director of the Year	Tabatha Peterson, CCS Early Learning
Home Visitor of the Year	Hayley Bell, Kids' Corps Inc.
Maintenance Staff of the Year	Dave Bergstrom, CCS Early Learning
Substitute of the Year	Loretta Bradford, CCS Early Learning
Teacher of the Year	Derek M Chinuhuk, Metlakatla
Community Awards	
Community Advocate of the Year	Selina Ellis, Kids' Corps, Inc.
Corporate Award	Ptarmigan Pediatrics, CCS Early Learning
Humanitarian Award	Melissa Charlie, FNA (EHS - HS)

School District Collaboration Award	Kake City School District, RurAL CAP
Other Awards	
Cultural Awareness Award	Meghan Adair, RurAL CAP
Leadership Award	Abby Miller, CCS Early Learning



Alaska Head Start Association Awards of Excellence



2025



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Head Start Father of the Year Raul Yunsan



Raul is a single father who came to KCI through a referral from the Anchorage School District's Child In Transition Program last school year. We invited him to one of our home visiting group connections. He attended and enrolled right away in our Home Visiting Program. He expressed a great desire to learn about child development and parenting while building social support.

“RAUL’S DEDICATION TO HIS SON WAS CLEARLY SHOWN THROUGH HIS INVOLVEMENT IN HIS SON’S NEW CENTER”

Spanish is his first language, and he was new to Alaska. We helped support him in translating all paperwork to enroll in our KCI Head Start Full Day Program. We supported him and his child's transition into the full day center but Raul's dedication to his son was clearly shown through his involvement in his son's new center.

He would attend the center and agency events and ask questions to the staff and share his concerns. He was able to enroll in our Conscious Discipline Parenting Classes attending all and earning a certificate of completion. He also volunteered to join our Parent Discussion Interview during our recent Federal Review. He is an amazing role model & father!

-Myriam Agosto & Selina Ellis

*Program Policy
Council Award*
**KCI 24-25 Program
Policy Council**



I proudly nominate the 24-25 Kids' Corps, Inc. (KCI) Policy Council for the Alaska Head Start Policy Council Award, recognizing their outstanding leadership, commitment, and contributions in shaping a strong, responsive program for children and families.

The KCI Policy Council is made up of a diverse and dedicated group of current and past parents and community representatives who serve as a vital bridge between families and program leadership.

**“THEY LEAD WITH LOVE, SPEAK FROM EXPERIENCE,
AND HELP DRIVE IMPACTFUL CHANGES FOR OUR
CHILDREN, OUR FAMILIES, AND OUR FUTURE”**

In the 2024–2025 program year, the Policy Council demonstrated resilience, dedication, and heart—especially during a time of leadership transition and restructuring.

With my Home Visiting Coordinator role expanded to include the Policy Council Liaison, consistent support allowed the Council to remain active and strong. Veteran members helped usher in new representatives, and every KCI site, including Home Visiting now has representation with eleven seated members currently.

This year, our Policy Council engaged deeply in leadership and advocacy. One of our Muldoon parent reps traveled to Juneau in February to speak directly with legislators about the value of Head Start services.

nomination continued on back...



As a military dad, he shared his powerful perspective comparing his KCI experience to services received at his previous Child Development Centers (CDCs), leaving an impression on those he met. His voice carried the real-life impact of our program to those making policy decisions at the state level.

We are especially proud to have three fathers currently seated as parent representatives, an incredible example of male engagement and father leadership within KCI. Our Policy Council also includes a foster respite caregiver, bringing critical insight into the needs of children in foster care. Their contributions reflect a wide range of family structures and lived experiences, making the Council more reflective and responsive to our community's needs.

In addition to regular monthly meetings, Policy Council members supported recruitment efforts at open houses, co-hosted a Policy Council Open House to boost membership, and honored the service of three long-time Community Reps, who were former Head Start parents, who completed their five-year terms. They also participated in the interview process for potential new hires, helping to ensure candidates aligned with both the professional and cultural needs of our families.

They played a visible and vital role in planning and volunteering at the Mayor's Charity Ball fundraiser, proudly wearing their custom "KCI Head Start is Heart Work" shirts. They supported setup, promotion, and shared the heart of our mission with the community.

This year, the Policy Council made many important, program-shaping decisions, guiding the direction of services, reviewing program data, and advocating for families. During our Federal Review in May, several Policy Council members volunteered for both the PC and Parent discussions. The lead reviewer noted how deeply informed and passionate they were, stating, "The parents mentioned how being a part of KCI has been life-changing for them."

That moment captures the spirit of our Policy Council. They lead with love, speak from experience, and help drive impactful changes for our children, our families, and our future. For their unwavering dedication, advocacy, and leadership, I wholeheartedly nominate the Kids' Corps, Inc. Policy Council, for this well-deserved recognition. -Selina Ellis

*Administrative
Support
Staff of the Year*
Arina Yang



I am nominating Arina for Program Assistant of the Year because of her exceptional dedication and commitment to Kid's Corps, Inc. Muldoon Center. When we faced staffing shortages with teacher and assistant teacher positions open, Arina stepped up without hesitation, covering and even leading classrooms while still fulfilling her regular duties. Her consistent attendance, proactive attitude, and willingness to help without being asked to have made a significant impact.

“SHE IS EXCEEDINGLY KIND AND EASY TO HAVE A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH”

Arina communicates effectively with the team and has built strong relationships with both families and children, creating a positive and supportive environment at the center. -Alexis Costello, Supervisor

I would like to nominate Arina Yang for the AHSA award. Arina's job is program support but not only does she do her job well but whenever we need her to step into the classroom she does so willingly. Arina is highly creative. She consistently helps to create artwork to decorate our center. She is exceedingly kind and easy to have a good relationship with. The staff here at our center Muldoon appreciate all her hard work. -Hlee Vang, Coworker

nomination continued on back...



Arina is a former Head Start parent and has worked for KCI now for several years. During her time at KCI she has demonstrated a desire and interest in learning and growing professionally. One of my first interactions with Arina was when she was a brand-new employee who elected to attend a two day strengthening families training to bolster her knowledge and skills. She has since obtained her CDA and her AA in Early Childhood all while working and taking care of her own family.

Arina's role is to support the Muldoon Center through various tasks such as riding the school bus and preparing all the meals. She does so with positivity and reliability. Not only does Arina perform her own tasks on time and well but whenever she has time she is in the classroom supporting the teaching staff and children. She does this daily and often without even being asked to. She is a dedicated, reliable, positive, team player and we deeply appreciate her commitment to KCI. – *Katrina Ahlfield, Executive Director*

*Assistant or Deputy
Director of the Year*
Rachel Schafer



Rachel Schafer has devoted two decades of exceptional service to Kids' Corps, Inc., rising through the ranks from Coordinator to her current role as Program Manager of Family Services, Health, and Home Visiting. Her unwavering commitment to Head Start values, reflective supervision, and hands-on leadership make her an ideal nominee for Assistant Director of the Year.

**“HER DEDICATION TO OUR MISSION IS UNMATCHED,
AND HER IMPACT REACHES EVERY CORNER OF OUR
PROGRAM”**

Rachel's leadership is both empowering and inspiring. She not only “walks the walk,” regularly stepping in to cover classrooms or staff roles when needed, but she also fosters a workplace culture where goals are met through shared strengths and clear communication. Since the pandemic, her service areas have been some of the hardest hit by staffing challenges, yet Rachel has filled critical gaps with grace covering key positions including Family Services Coordinator, Home Visiting Coordinator, and Health Coordinator. Her team knows they can count on her, not only for solutions but for solidarity.

She is instrumental in training, mentoring, and supporting staff through reflective supervision that uplifts and motivates. Her ability to revamp systems has significantly improved workflow and the quality of services to children and families.

nomination continued on back...



Her dedication to our mission is unmatched, and her impact reaches every corner of our program.

Her long-standing contributions deserve the highest recognition, and I wholeheartedly nominate her for this prestigious honor. *Selina Ellis, supervisee*

Rachel has been a consistent and reliable presence and support for me. She has been instrumental in my own success. She leads with patience, wisdom, and practicality. I often reach out to her as part of my think tank when dealing with challenging issues. She leads with quiet strength, remains calm under pressure, and always makes decisions that align with the core values and philosophy of Head Start. I can count on her as a trusted confidant because of her unwavering commitment, integrity, and track record. For that I am so grateful!

-Katrina Ahlfield, supervisor

Home Visitor of the Year Hayley Bell



I nominate Hayley Bell for her outstanding leadership role as a Home Visitor for my child. Hayley is always providing great activities and fun ways to help me and my child connect effectively. She is an especially important part of our mornings once a week. My child looks forward to her visits. It feels wonderful to have a trusted teacher. -Faaleleiga Tapu, parent

“HER KNOWLEDGE, EMPATHY, AND ABILITY TO BUILD TRUST SET HER APART”

I nominate Ms. Hayley Bell because she has been so amazing with my family. From helping me to get car seats for my baby and getting it installed correctly in my vehicle to getting my kids helmets. She has always helped me to connect with other families by giving me different event dates when group connections are taking place. She spends quality time and patience listening to me and getting the necessary resources to help my family. She deserves this award because she is reliable, patient, resourceful, and just all-around a loving home visitor. I appreciate her a whole lot. -Xavia Bennett-Salmon, parent

I am honored to nominate Hayley Bell for Outstanding Home Visitor. Hayley's commitment to empowering families through her work as a home visitor with Kids' Corp Inc is exceptional.

nomination continued on back...



Not many home visitors bring the level of heart and professionalism that Hayley does. She connects easily with the parents and children. These parents feel seen and heard and most importantly, supported.

Hayley has made it her mission to go beyond to ensure her families understand child development. She deals very gently with tough issues around nutrition and child safety. Her regular screenings help parents understand the needs of their children.

Hayley can turn a family's home into a learning rich environment. She always shares the importance of reading to children and brings toys to encourage play time vs 'screen time.' She connects families to so many wonderful resources and encourages them to take part in the activities Kids' Corps puts on regularly.

-Sara Peebles, Catholic Social Services Refugee Assistance

I nominate Hayley Bell for the Home Visitor of the Year award. I have worked with Hayley for 2+ years now and we have previously shared a client/family. Hayley is knowledgeable and skilled at meeting her clients' needs as well as anticipating additional needs. She is well versed at using all the Alaska safety net services, including Medicaid, WIC, housing, childcare and education, charity care and services, etc. and assisting her clients to apply and update their applications. She schedules and attends medical visits and other appointments with her clients. She always goes above and beyond. Hayley Bell is the epitome of the Home Visitor of the Year! *-Cindy Lyell, Providence Nurse Family Partnership*

Hayley is the embodiment of dedication, compassion, and professionalism in the home visiting field. Her passion for supporting families is unmatched, and her genuine concern for their emotional, physical, and developmental well-being is evident in every interaction. Hayley's home visit attendance is above 90% consistently and her male engagement in the weekly visits and group socials is praiseworthy. Hayley's work consistently goes beyond the weekly home visit.

Hayley masterfully navigates the delicate balance between building meaningful connections and maintaining professional boundaries.



Her families trust her deeply, often reaching out during evenings and weekends but Hayley thoughtfully sets and communicates boundaries to prevent burning out, regularly seeking supervision and reflection to process challenging situations in a healthy and sustainable way.

Many of the families Hayley serves are English Language Learners. Hayley is one of our most skilled staff in using translation tools for child and family assessments. Her patience, adaptability, and cultural responsiveness led us to transfer a family to her caseload due to their need for frequent visits and language support. Thanks to her, that family is flourishing.

Hayley recently helped a family connect their 3-year-old to Early Intervention for suspected autism spectrum disorder. Thanks to her persistence and guidance, the child is now being evaluated for an IEP, an outcome that might not have been possible without her advocacy.

This year Hayley has connected families to critical community resources, advocated for families navigating the complex Division of Public Assistance system, acted swiftly when families experienced food stamp fraud, coordinated support through KCI and local resources, and promoted high attendance and engagement through flexible scheduling and consistent follow-up.

Hayley is well respected by our community partners, who frequently commend her dedication and the positive, lasting impact she has on families' lives. Her knowledge, empathy, and ability to build trust set her apart. She truly embodies the spirit of Home Visitor of the Year. - *Selina Ellis, supervisor*

Community Advocate of the Year Selina Ellis



I would like to nominate Selina Ellis for the community advocate award. Selina never hesitates to share her experiences as a parent & working for Head Start with anyone she meets. She is always front & center getting the word out on the importance of the work that we do. She recently went to Juneau this past February to advocate on our behalf for a much-needed funding increase, but also to share how amazing Kids' Corps, Inc. is & really paint a picture of all of the things that we do for the families that we serve.

"SHE IS ALWAYS FRONT & CENTER GETTING THE WORD OUT ON THE IMPORTANCE OF THE WORK THAT WE DO"

She made great connections that will help in the future. She is at all the recruitment events making friends everywhere, letting everyone know about local head start programs, and how they can benefit from being a part of them. Selina is the prime example of a person who shows up every day because she is dedicated and loves what she does. She makes it her purpose to advocate for all Head Starts. She is dedicated, passionate, and a great member to have on the team. -Hayley Bell

Selina Ellis is a notable example of what a Community Advocate is. She works hard in creating and maintaining collaborative relationships throughout the community. Within the last year she has partnered with PBS Kids and has helped create and continue on-going groups for our families.

nomination continued on back...



She has built a strong relationship with both the Community Diaper Pantry, and PIC's diaper pantry as well. That has helped our families combat any diaper insecurities they may face. She works with Clare Swan and other head starts to complete CDA observations and offers supportive advice and mentorship. She makes it a point to attend community and recruiting events on behalf of Kids' Corps, and our families. She never hesitates to give shout outs, praises, and award nominations to staff and community members. She does a wonderful job making everyone feel supported, special, and seen. -*Myriam Agosto*

*Assistant Teacher
of the Year*
**Jennifer
Hernández Miranda**



FAIRBANKS NATIVE
ASSOCIATION



From the moment Jennifer steps into the classroom, her energy and enthusiasm set the tone for a safe, joyful, and engaging environment. Interacting with infants requires not just patience and knowledge, but an innate sense of empathy and attentiveness—qualities that Jennifer possesses in abundance. She understands that every coo, giggle, and cry is a form of communication, responding with care that reassures and strengthens the bonds of trust essential for development.

“HER PROFESSIONALISM, TEAM SPIRIT, AND UNWAVERING COMMITMENT MAKES HER NOT ONLY A VALUABLE EMPLOYEE BUT ALSO A ROLE MODEL FOR OTHERS”

Her gentle voice, comforting touch, and infectious positivity foster a space where infants feel secure enough to explore, grow, and thrive. Her advocacy for infant well-being extends beyond her daily responsibilities, participating in professional development to improve FNA Head Start’s programs and impact. Alaska’s early childhood education landscape is enriched by educators like Jennifer, who approach their work with heart and dedication. - *Steven Guidry*

She is one of the most hardworking women that I know. She is always doing what she has too and sometimes ever more. She’s never late to work or she never gets tired of doing her work. - *Jam Dariel Rivera Hernandez*

nomination continued on back...



I proudly nominate Jenniffer Hernández-Miranda for Associate Teacher of the Year. Since joining Head Start in July, she has shown outstanding dedication in the infant classroom, providing a safe, nurturing, and developmentally appropriate environment for our youngest children. Jenniffer's calm, caring approach helps each baby feel secure and loved, fostering strong early attachments and supporting healthy growth. Her professionalism, attention to detail, and genuine care make her an invaluable part of our team and a true example of excellence in early childhood education. - *Alondra Baez-Hernandez*

She never missed work and never was late to work. - *Eliel Jamal Colon Aponte*

She's an amazing person and I think she deserves it. - *Kevin Casillas*

Jenniffer truly deserves this award for her outstanding dedication and exceptional character at work. She is consistently hardworking, always going above and beyond in every task she takes on. Her reliability is unmatched and she has never been late, always showing up on time and ready to give 100%. Beyond her strong work ethic, Jenniffer is an incredibly kind and respectful person, creating a positive and supportive environment for everyone around her. Her professionalism, team spirit, and unwavering commitment makes her not only a valuable employee but also a role model for others. This recognition is a well-earned reflection of her continuous effort and genuine care for both her work and colleagues. - *Jaiya Kapec*

It is with great pleasure that I nominate Jenniffer Hernandez-Miranda for Teacher Assistant of the Year. Jenniffer exemplifies dedication, compassion, and positivity in her role every day. Her warm and engaging presence is felt throughout the center, whether she's guiding stroller rides through the hallways or singing, dancing, and interacting meaningfully with the children in her care. Jenniffer consistently goes above and beyond to support both her students and her colleagues, creating a nurturing and joyful environment where children thrive. Her commitment to the mission and values of FNA Head Start 0–5 makes her an invaluable member of our team and a true asset to our program.

- *Merlina Isabel De La Cruz*



Jennifer is very punctual and is never late for work. She also is very active and helpful in her classrooms. - *Derek Eriel Perez*

Always joyful and attentive. Always willing to help and assist. Great with the children. - *Isabel De La Cruz*

I am nominating Jennifer because I see everyday how dedicated she is to her job and all the love she gives to all “her” babies in the Willow classroom.
- *Efrain Caban*

I am honored to nominate Jennifer Hernandez-Miranda for the 2025 Alaska Head Start Association Teacher Associate of the Year Award. Since joining FNA Head Start 0-5 in August 2024, Jennifer has brought warmth, joy, and dedication to our infant classroom. I’ve seen her singing songs while pushing the stroller through the hallways, always engaging lovingly with the children. She brings intention to her work, incorporating developmentally appropriate activities and creating a nurturing environment. Jennifer is committed to her professional growth, diligently completing required trainings and often sharing how much she enjoys caring for the children. Her compassion, enthusiasm, and commitment to early childhood education make her a truly deserving nominee.
- *Francisca Charriez-Miranda*

*Early Childhood
Coach of the Year*
**Mercedes
Gomez**



FAIRBANKS NATIVE
ASSOCIATION



I am honored to nominate Mercedes Gomez for the 2025 Alaska Head Start Association Coach of the Year Award. Mercedes has dedicated over 15 years to FNA Head Start, serving in multiple roles and consistently demonstrating exceptional commitment to our program.

**"HER THOUGHTFUL GUIDANCE AND ENCOURAGEMENT
HAVE A LASTING IMPACT ON EDUCATORS AND
CHILDREN ALIKE"**

She actively pursues professional development, continuously seeking training opportunities to enhance her skills and knowledge. Mercedes approaches her coaching role with great intentionality, using best practices and data-driven strategies to support staff growth and improve classroom outcomes. Her thoughtful guidance and encouragement have a lasting impact on educators and children alike. Mercedes's dedication, expertise, and passion for quality early childhood education make her a valuable asset and a deserving candidate for this award. - *Francisca Charriez-Miranda*

Humanitarian Award Melissa Charlie



FAIRBANKS NATIVE
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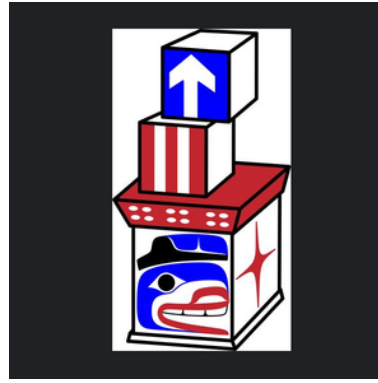


Fairbanks Native Association (FNA) historically is grassroots. Over the years, FNA's holistic service approach has increased awareness for education, social services like mental health, youth and elder support, end of life planning (burial and funerals), food sovereignty and justice for the community members residing in and around Fairbanks, Alaska.

“HER VOICE CAPTIVATES A NEW GENERATION OF LEADERSHIP...”

Prioritizing respect for human life has elevated FNA at the national level. Melissa Charlie raised the bar for service as an Executive Director of FNA. Her voice captivates a new generation of leadership who are courageous enough to meet the Department of Interior Committee and U.S. Senators to petition on-behalf of Alaskan Native/American Indian and a culturally mixed community deserving of long-overdue "People-oriented" services. Our strength and continuity as an early education learning center relies on strategic planning and partnership. Melissa Charlie is an exemplary champion for this award, which underlies her love for community. - *Francine Cachucha*

Teacher of the Year Derek Chinuhuk



Mr. Derek has worked for our Head Start Program for the last 17 years. He was a pillar of the community and the cornerstone of our staff. He was great at being a mentor and passing his years of knowledge down to the next line of teachers. We are fortunate to have a couple of his former students now working for us and hopefully a couple more joining our team. He has taught many students from 2007 until 2025.

"HIS SMILE WAS CONTAGIOUS AS WELL AS HIS LAUGHTER"

Mr. Derek was an inspiration to all. He was always making us laugh with his dad jokes and optimism. He was larger than life with the warmest hugs, brightest smiles, and his biggest heart which would make room for anyone who came his way.

Sadly, we lost Mr. Derek on April 29, 2025. Our community shines a little less brighter but when we look at the sky we see his bright light upon us still looking after the children of our community.

Derek had the biggest smile. He would light up the room with his smile and his laugh. - Ame

Derek had an inviting personality. He made sure everyone knew they were welcome in the area. His smile was contagious as well as his laughter.

nomination continued on back...



Derek was an important mentor too. Any questions one might have in the educational field, he provided what advice he could. Derek is greatly missed. - *Mystique*

When I first started here with the program, Mr. Derek welcomed me with open arms and was so supportive. He reminded me often that I was appreciated and to keep on doing what I was doing. We were able to talk to each other and give each other advice on what we thought would help the other. Derek worked at both Head Start and Early Head Start and the children enjoyed having him as their teacher. He played with them, sang with them, ate with them with no hesitation. He made them feel welcome and gave them the calm guidance they needed. Derek was our go to guy. If there was a child that was having a rough morning he would meet them up front and calmly talk to them while the parent went on there way. Soon enough, Mr. Derek and the child would be walking in the classroom with a smile. Derek is greatly missed. - *Diana*

Derek always loved all of the children. He always had a huge hug for my Sonny, my daughters and I. He valued family and friends and loved Metlakatla. He was always happy and kids always wanted to be by him. At community concerts his students would ask if they could go sit by him. We all miss our cousin Derek. - *Patty*

Derek was always kind and funny. He could make anyone laugh. The kids loved him so much and always gravitated to him. He taught me so much and I'm so grateful to have worked in the classroom with him. - *Anna*

Cook of the Year Cheryl Konahok



KAWERAK, INC.



To Whom It May Concern,
I would like to nominate Cheryl Konahok for Head Start's Cook of the year. She is hard working, knowledgeable, and goes above and beyond to help those around her. She is a joy to work with as well as reliable. She is not afraid to ask questions about procedures that she does not understand.

"SHE IS HARD WORKING, KNOWLEDGEABLE, AND GOES ABOVE AND BEYOND TO HELP THOSE AROUND HER"

She takes the initiative to implement changes if she sees the need for improvement. She is someone I can rely on to answer my questions and will help me solve problems when needed. She has been a dedicated employee at Kawerak for many years. I am so grateful that I can always count on Cheryl. She is a huge contributor to the success of the Gambell Head Start.

- Stephanie Eggart, Nome Head Cook

Family Advocate of the Year

Kathy Johnson



Kathy embodies the dedication and passion required in Head Start programs. She not only ensures quality service but also nurturing a deep commitment to the well-being of success of children and families. Her “heart work” is shown in her genuine effort to make a difference in the lives of those served. For 8 school years Kathy was the Home Visitor for the Kodiak Head Start home based program. She did bi-weekly group social and assisted families setting goals & accessing community resources.

**“SHE GOES ABOVE AND BEYOND TO MAKE EVERYONE
FEEL VALUED AND WORKS HARD TO CREATE
MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES FOR HER TEAM”**

She then moved over to the role of Family Advocate for the center base program. In 2019, she stepped up to take leadership position to ensure regulations were followed, maintained safety of children & assisted newly hired staff learn their positions. Ensured documentation was completed in a timely manner for both job positions. She was the acting On Site Coordinator/Family Advocate. In 2019, she took on her current position as a Lead Program Specialist/Family Advocate and her site a duration program. This year, Kathy hosted the most parent engagements events and Parent Committee meetings out of all 20 RurAL CAP sites. Kodiak was also the only Head Start in which parents had attended every monthly online Parent Academy. Kathy encouraged more participation with having parent utilize our parenting curriculum by sponsoring drawings for those who watched the ReadyRosie videos.

nomination continued on back...



Kathy was also one of the only few sites to create their own regular newsletters for families. She ensured that all the kids get their 45-day screenings done before they attend class by having it as part of each child's parent orientation. Kathy is also always willing to share her tips and resources with her peers and the Central Office.

Kathy has a creative and intentional approach with staff team building. She goes above and beyond to make everyone feel valued and works hard to create memorable experiences for her team. One example is that during Inservice in Anchorage she rented a car so that all the Kodiak Head Start staff could get around and have a special time together as a team. One of the things they were able to squeeze in during that was soaking in the Alyeska Nordic Spa. When I was on a site visit to Kodiak, Kathy helped to organize an after-school hike for me with all the Kodiak staff. We went to Mill Bay and picked salmon berries. The next day we got to eat a salmonberry coffee cake that Kathy made with them. As an amazing team member, she has worked in all the positions except Bus Driver to provide coverage while getting all her own tasks completed in a timely manner. As part of the RurAL CAP peer mentoring program, Kathy traveled to another Head Start site and helped them close out their program year. Kathy is always going above and beyond is well deserving of this award.

Ms. Kathy Johnson has done a lot of great things for Head Start families. She's been doing not only supervisor's job, but as cook and family advocate, too. She helps families in any resources they need in the community. She is a very good in communicating, too, to different agency in our community.

Kathy has been a standout Family Advocate in every way! She has been consistent with parent engagement events, has had a strong representation of parents participating in Parent Academy opportunities, and consistently maintains strong enrollment. Kathy's strong performance lead her to be chosen for a site to site visit in order to help another site have the support needed to finish the year strong. She additionally has taken on other roles at her own site such as cooking in the kitchen throughout the year in order to keep her site open. Kathy believes in Head Start and goes above and beyond to wrap around every family in her community and program while also caring deeply for her staff. She is highly deserving of this award.

- Rizielle Acierto, Becca Harris and Carrie Beeman

School Distrtict
Collaboration Award
Kake City School
District



James Gallanos is a LCSW at Kake Schools and initially got connected to RurAL CAP after accepting an invitation to our first ever Mental Health Services Advisory Committee. After learning more about our program, James took his own initiative to reach out with the desire to schedule a full day to be present at our Kake Head Start. He then initiated following up from his observation with a meeting with the staff where he provided highly meaningful feedback and insight.

“JAMES' LOCAL KNOWLEDGE AND SUPPORT COMBINED WITH HIS PROFESSIONAL EXPERTISE HAVE RESULTED IN AN OUTSTANDING PARTNERSHIP...”

Staff were super eager to express how positive the experience was to have him in the classroom, and plans have been made for him to continue connecting with our Kake team on a regular basis. James' local knowledge and support combined with his professional expertise have resulted in an outstanding partnership as we strive to support the social-emotional needs and an overall positive transition into Kindergarten for all of our children.

Kake City School District, led by Dr. Anji Gallanos, is a wonderful partner for RurAL CAP Head Start in Kake. For many years, KCSD has provided space for our classroom and has supported our CACFP food service.

nomination continued on back...



This year, KCSD installed a new fenced play space adjacent to the Head Start classroom, so teachers no longer need to cross a parking lot and driveway to access the K-12 playground. The partnership evolved further when Dr. Gallanos recognized the Head Start classroom as a wonderful, developmentally appropriate environment for young children and requested to hold the KCSD afternoon Pre-K program in the Head Start classroom. For children who attend both Head Start and Pre-K, this collaboration provides a consistent environment and more cohesive experience during the important year before kindergarten entry. It is my pleasure to recognize Kake City School District as an exemplary partner for Head Start.

- Terri Mach and Becca Harris

Cultural Awareness Award Meghan Adair



Meghan is a passionate advocate for bringing culture, wellness, and community connection into our classrooms. As the lead for the More Outside Your Door (MOYD) project, she's helped connect our 12 Yupik communities with partners like ANTHC, University of Washington, and Alaska Ninja Warrior Nick Hansen to promote physical activity, outdoor play, and cultural pride. She's also built strong local partnerships—like working with a Bethel hunting company to bring moose meat

**“MEGHAN’S CREATIVITY AND COMMITMENT ARE
HELPING CHILDREN GROW UP STRONG IN
BOTH CULTURE AND COMMUNITY”**

into our programs in addition to wild caught salmon so children can experience traditional foods firsthand.

Meghan has really gone above and beyond with taking her passion for food beyond the kitchen and into the classroom by leading our efforts to bring Culturally Relevant Play Materials into Head Start classrooms. In partnership with the University of Alaska Fairbanks, she helped design and even hand-make dramatic play items like mock salmon strips with drying racks, play akutaq, and soft, child-friendly ulu knives so children can safely practice subsistence skills through play. Thanks to her leadership, we received funding from the Office of Head Start to provide each classroom with a Yupik drum for staff to assemble and use with children—bringing music, culture, and family engagement into everyday learning.

Meghan's creativity and commitment are helping children grow up strong in both culture and community. We are proud to nominate her!

- Becca Harris

Beating the Odds Award Michaela Murphy



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Michaela has worked hard to overcome life challenges with the help of Headstart and other local facilities. She was able to find work although that fell through she persevered through taking care of her kids as well as her father all while completing her other programs. She is always present, caring and loving towards her children. She was able to secure another job and advocate for herself and children to help get the resources she needs to succeed.

"SHE HAS DONE HER ABSOLUTE BEST TO STAY POSITIVE THROUGH HER HARDSHIPS AND HAS DONE AN OUTSTANDING JOB DOING SO"

I am so very proud of the work she has done with all the obstacles thrown her way. - *Shelby Daniels*

Over the last year and a half that Michaela has been a part of the CCS family, I have witnessed her overcome many obstacles, such as losing several different jobs and still having to provide for her children and her father. She has done her absolute best to stay positive through her hardships and has done an outstanding job doing so. She is a wonderful mother to her two children and I have enjoyed watching Michaela grow and persevere over the last year and a half.

nomination continued on back...



She has received several big blessings recently that will help her tremendously and she deserves it all more than anyone I know! I am so grateful that she has opened up with me and is comfortable enough to voice her hardships with me. I am so extremely proud of her and all of the hard work that she has done, as well as her accomplishments. She strives to be better and do better for not only her children, but for herself. - *Kelsey Loyd*

Head Start Mother of the Year Mary Parrish



Mary is the epitome of HSMOY! I'm sure others could add more to this nomination since it is just my first year with her, but I truly cannot think of someone more deserving this year. Mary and Robert fostered a child in my class the last few years providing him a safe environment and all of the love he could ever want.

**"I TRULY CANNOT THINK OF SOMEONE MORE
DESERVING THIS YEAR"**

In November, just weeks from the adoption being finalized, Robert had a massive heart attack and died. In the midst of her grief, Mary juggled her new reality along with a whole new round of vetting, permissions, and calls regarding the adoption. All of this while loving this little boy and championing him through his own trauma and grief. I'm happy to say that I got to attend his adoption earlier in April, and we are so excited to now refer to Mary as Mom. The smile he has tells me all I need to know about the love between these two. There is no one more deserving than Mary Parrish for Head Start Mother of the Year! - *Lisa Benson-Nuyen*

Bus Driver of the Year **Bryanna Goodman-Toal**



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B is always putting the children first , she always considers them in every decision she makes down to the decorations on the bus or how the temperature will affect their mood, it's always about the kiddos. She's on time, has great attendance and makes the bus rides enjoyable for the children while always putting their safety first.
- Kristen Mayo

"SHE PERSONALIZES THE BUS TO SHOW EACH CHILD HAS A SPOT ON THE BUS AND BELIEVES IN THE CCS MISSION"

Bryanna or "B" as we call her is an outstanding bus driver. She is kind hearted and always happy to go above and beyond to give our children the best bus rides possible. She helps out with escorting children into the school and into their classrooms. She personalizes the bus to show each child has a spot on the bus and believes in the CCS Mission. B has been our bus driver on field trips and maintains excellent communication with the center. Thank you B!

- Victoria Grey

Content Area Specialist of the Year

Kayleen Hetrick



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Kayleen is our Social Emotional Specialist and she has gone above and WAY beyond for our kids, families, and staff this year. I don't know if she has set foot in her office at all since she is in classrooms, staff meetings, and centers for support every single day. I have never asked her for more support than I have this year, and even though she is going through her own personal struggles, she always shows up. I know I can count on her for words, support, and guidance.

"HER UNWAVERING DEDICATION TO THE WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES, AND STAFF HAS MADE A PROFOUND AND LASTING IMPACT ON OUR COMMUNITY"

Our center has been through it this year, and we would not have survived without her. Kayleen deserves all of the recognition!

It is with great pride and admiration that I nominate Kayleen Hetrick for this AHSA award in recognition of her outstanding contributions as a Social Emotional Specialist. Her unwavering dedication to the well-being of children, families, and staff has made a profound and lasting impact on our community. Kayleen brings compassion, resilience, and deep expertise to every interaction. She works closely with children and their families, providing support that goes above and beyond its calling.

nomination continued on back...



Whether helping a child through emotional regulation, guiding a caregiver through a crisis, or equipping staff with trauma-informed tools, Kayleen meets every challenge with empathy, patience, and integrity. Her path, especially this year has not been without challenges and she has faced her own personal obstacles that would discourage many. Yet, instead of retreating, she has persevered and modeled self compassion and unwavering support. Her ability to connect with others is one of her most powerful qualities. In times of uncertainty and stress, especially through organizational and community challenges, Kayleen has been a stabilizing presence. She has mentored staff, helped navigate complex behavioral and emotional needs, and created safe spaces for both children and adults to grow. Her leadership is quiet yet profound, and her impact is far-reaching. Kayleen exemplifies the core values of Head Start and the CCS mission! She is not only a social emotional specialist, she is a rock for so many! Please accept this nomination as a testament to her exceptional service and the positive change she continues to inspire. -Tabatha Peterson

Early Head Start Teacher of the Year Shelby Daniels



Shelby has worked closely with her team to integrate Conscience Discipline in her classroom. She is aware of each child and their needs. She shows kindness and understanding to everyone. Shelby works closely with her families on child individualization and family goals. Her communication with families is always professional but she adds in a bit of fun. She has an inner joy that shows in her day to day communications. Her families are comfortable talking to her about any concern or achievement they have.

- Kristine Campbell

"SHELBY GOES OUT OF HER WAY TO PROVIDE THE CHILDREN WITH A SAFE, LOVING, AND FUN ENVIRONMENT"

I would like to nominate Shelby Daniels for early Head Start teacher of the year. She has only been with CCS for a short time. Shelby has made strong connections with the families in her classroom, works well with her team, and shares knowledge from training when she attends them. I have seen so much growth from her. She brings in and makes items the classroom children are interested in. Recently she made a puppet theatre to add to the dramatic play area. An example of connections with families is that when a child gets hurt she makes sure to call the family and explain what happened and let them know what she will do to prevent it from happening again.

nomination continued on back...



Shelby is always professional and often thinks of others before she thinks of herself. I'm so glad to have Shelby on my team! Please consider her for this award. - *Darilyn Byram*

Shelby is the best thing that has ever happened to me. LOL. In all honesty though, before her I was given the runaround with co teachers. I am so extremely grateful to have Shelby as my co teacher. She is a hard worker and brings so much joy to our classroom. She is flexible and strives to be the best that she can be for not only the children and families we serve, but our team as well. Shelby goes out of her way to provide the children with a safe, loving, and fun environment. She takes time to build relationships with our families. She goes above and beyond for our children and their families. I am truly blessed to have such a wonderful co teacher and she deserves all of the recognition for her hard work in helping teach our kids and becoming one of the first model classrooms at CCS! Shelby makes sure to provide the children with a safe, fun, and loving learning environment. She takes the time to build relationships with our families and all of our families love her. Shelby goes above and beyond for our children and their families.

- *Kelsey Loyd*

Maintenance Staff of the Year Dave Bergstrom



Mr. Dave Bergstrom is our all-around fix-it handyman. He's always ready with a smile and a friendly greeting, to help with any request we might have. He's fixed every cabinet, hung every shelf, installed every corkboard, and been ready to help with every need in any building or classroom large or small. All of our kiddos love greeting Mr. Dave when he comes into the classroom, and watching him work with his tools to help their classroom and school family! We love Mr. Dave!

- KristiAnne Watson

"MR. DAVE ALWAYS HAS A SMILE ON HIS FACE AND A KIND WORD FOR ALL"

Mr. Dave is a very kind man who fixes just about everything that needs fixing at our center. - Charity M Hoff

Dave is a wonderful member of CCS who is fully committed to keeping our building up and running. We would not function without his willingness to fix all problems, big and small! - Serena Heck

What can I say about Dave that no one already knows. Dave is so kind and thoughtful and always comes to fix things when we need it the most. He doesn't complain or get annoyed with all of the tasks that we send his way. He stops and chats with us and asks how we are doing. He is just overall a great guy. I have known him for 3 years while working with CCS. He is very deserving of this award and I hope he gets it. - Casandra Jill Gulsvig

nomination continued on back...



I have had the pleasure of getting to know Mr. Dave through the work he completes at each center. Mr. Dave always makes time for each request. Whether putting up our many bulletin boards, building and hanging shelves, or creating the many beautiful pieces of wooden furniture, Mr. Dave always has a smile on his face and a kind word for all. One of the best memories I have is when I was teaching at Meadow Lakes and he was in my classroom fixing my air filter. Two of my students were fascinated with his tools. Mr. Dave took the time to talk to the students and explain what each tool was used for. The students' faces lit up as he was talking! They both said they wanted to be a "Fixer like Mr. Dave" when they grew up. My students even ask if I could bring in tools like Mr. Dave's! It has been a pleasure seeing Dave each time he comes to the Fairview center. He is truly an amazing person! - *Angie m Malafronti*

Dave has been a part of CCS for over six years. He has put in so many hours of fixing, building, and moving things for many people. When he walks through a CCS door he is greeted with the most sincere smiles. This is not because we always have a list a mile long for him but because he is a really nice guy. Not only does he fix, move and put things up and down but he loves to tell a good joke or story. Dave helps all of the Centers and he is very deserving of the Maintenance Staff of the year award. - *Tammy Berdeaux*

Dave is always ready to help with anything our center staff members throw at him. Whether it is building something from scratch, repairing or replacing fixtures or appliances or getting creative to help our ideas come to life, Dave shows up with a smile on his face, tools in hand. His wide range of expertise makes him a very "handy" man to have around. - *Eryn Martin*

Where to start with Dave... Dave keeps our centers safe and is quick to resolve needed repairs. He shares his ideas on what we come up with, on how it will work or maybe a different solution. Dave has even dedicated time at family fun nights sharing his handwork making bird houses alongside many of our families. Dave has a Head Start heart and it shows in the work he does. Thank you Dave for your hard work and lots of laughs. - *Samantha Glick-MacCracken*



Dave Bergstrom is the Head Start version of "Fix it Felix" and "Bob the Builder". From hanging bulletin boards to fishing a car out of the toilet drain, to making bird house kits. Dave is the man for the job. Dave shows up to the centers with a smile and is ready to help. We are so thankful for Dave! - *Victoria Grey*

Dave has been working on our building for as long as I have been here. He does quality work and is very timely. This year he donated time and materials to our center so we could have sturdy outside water tables. He made these for both of our early Head Start and headstart classrooms. He comes often to repair signs and water faucets. He is always kind to the staff and thoughtful of not disturbing the children at rest time. Last year Dave added shelves to all of our sheds so that the teachers could get to their materials easily. This made a huge time saving difference. Before we had shelves the teachers would have to unstack all of the boxes to get to what they needed and then they would have to restack the boxes to put things back. Another project that made a big difference was turning the gate around to make snow removal easier. Before Dave turned the gate around the snow removal crew had to use a chainsaw to remove the drifts that were caused by the wind. - *Darilyn Byram*

Dave has been a huge asset to CCS Early Learning. I personally have enjoyed working with him as he is always willing to stop what he is doing to have a conversation with me as well as others. I have also stopped him to ask him to fix this or hang that and he has it completed within a few hours. I even asked him to fix a toy, upon the toy being returned to me-I did not even think he fixed it because it looked the same as before, I had to try it out and it was perfect. He always has a smile and no problem seems to be too difficult for him. Thank you Dave for all you do behind the scenes for us. - *Stefanie Ostlind*

Substitute of the Year Loretta Bradford



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Loretta is Amazing!!! She has been a sub for CCS for a while and is always ready to come in when called!. She is such a big help and I personally love when she can work till closing because she gets things done right and fast and is willing to help other staff with closing procedures. She knows all the kids by name and is so loving and kind and the staff just loves her and they request her when a sub is needed in the classroom. We really love Loretta. She is the BEST!!!!

- Wendy King

"SHE IS VERY KIND AND COMPASSIONATE, ALWAYS WILLING TO HELP OUT WHOEVER NEEDS IT"

Miss Loretta has shown love and adaptability to every class she has been put in. No matter how last minute it is, she makes do. She is a superhero with fast thinking! - Eltzy Gil

Loretta Bradford best substitute of the Year!!! We have some great substitutes but Loretta goes above and beyond. Not only does Loretta sub for Wasilla Early Head Start but she also welcomes and talks to all of the new staff and subs. She trains and explains whenever she finds herself in a room with someone who is new. She has a great relationship with all of the children and staff. Loretta has such a wonderful outlook on life and it shows when she walks through the door and she brings her love for the children and her job. Loretta makes such a difference in so many lives and families and we are so blessed to have her as a sub. - Tammy Berdeaux

nomination continued on back...



Loretta is #1 when it comes to being a substitute. Loretta can adapt to any classroom she is supporting and recognizes each classroom is run differently and does her best to support the staff and children she is working with that day. Loretta is dedicated to the CCS Mission and working with young children in the valley. She brings calm and compassion into the classroom and prioritizes building connection with the young children enrolled in CCS Early Learning. Loretta is loved by all and her work within the center is so appreciated. Loretta is so deserving of the title substitute of the year! - *Victoria Grey*

Loretta always has kind words to say and greets everyone with a smile. If she sees a need she goes out of the way to make sure the children or families are taken care of and yes, she is a substitute. :) She seems to always be available and flexible. She cares for each child she is caring for that day, giving them individualized attention. She goes out of her way to work on any goals she feels needs to be met. She listens to the needs of the children. She follows the classroom routines. She listens to the families and their needs too. She is compassionate, dependable, and loved. - *Stefanie Ostlind*

Loretta seamlessly fits into every classroom that she substitutes in. In every classroom that she enters, she brings a positive attitude that makes the children comfortable. She always evokes a positive response from both children and staff, and is a very reliable person. She is very kind and compassionate, always willing to help out whoever needs it. Loretta always goes above and beyond. She is a substitute that the children appreciate and remember. - *Lana Arsenault*

Loretta is, by far, the glue that keeps CCS Wasilla Early HeadStart together. Nearly everyday I see her walking the halls, with that same cheery smile on her face and a disney T-Shirt, waving at all the children and greeting them each by name. Loretta exudes excellence, commitment and love to each person she meets. She forms close bonds with both staff and children alike, taking very precious time to get to know everything about you. When you see Loretta in the hallways or in the classroom, you know the day is going to be great. Loretta puts her heart and soul into everything she does, and without her I do not believe we could function as a center. She is here for every call-out, potty break, snack break (she even carries candy, gum and snacks in her purse for staff) and every life event.



Loretta jumps immediately into a situation with any child, possessing such wonderful conscious discipline skills and that motherly love that instantly calms children. - *Serena Heck*

Loretta works at CCS Early Learning as a substitute. She primarily works at Early Head Start Wasilla. She is one of the best substitutes we have. She always works when she can and we need her. She always comes into work happy with a smile on her face. She loves the children and they love her back. I can hear children get excited to see her and yell "Loretta!" She brings in a lot of fun toys and books for the children to play with. She is very deserving of this award. - *Elisabeth Meek*

Loretta is always willing to help out when needed. The children love her. She always has a smile on her face. She is a great substitute and asset to our team. - *Charity Lawrence*

Corporate Award Ptarmigan Pediatrics



Ptarmigan has been a leader in the Mat-Su and in the State for many years in providing high quality early childhood health/mental health and speech therapy services. In addition, they have consistently shown leadership and advocacy in our field. A few examples of this are: Dr. Bruce Hess has served on the Board of Directors for All Alaska Pediatric Partnership

**“THEY HAVE CONSISTENTLY SHOWN LEADERSHIP AND
ADVOCACY IN OUR FIELD”**

(A2P2) and for our local Child Advocacy Center (The Children's Place) for many years. Dr. Laura Peterson has served several stints as the Medical Director of Pediatrics and Maternal Child Health at Mat-Su Regional Medical Center. Dr. Therese Tomasoski has served on the Board of Directors of CCS Early Learning (and has volunteered as our primary Health Advisor) since 2013. Ptarmigan Pediatrics was a leader in our community in adopting the principles of Trauma Informed Care - infusing the things that we have learned from the ACE's study directly into their visits with patients. In 2017 they opened Ptarmigan Connections - providing developmental and behavioral health services and in 2023 they opened the Ptarmigan Therapy Clinic - providing speech therapy services. Ptarmigan regularly provides financial support to CCS Early Learning and they serve as one of CCS Early Learning's (as well as Head Start in general!) most consistent champions. Thank you Ptarmigan for your commitment to the children and families in the Mat-Su and across Alaska. - *Mark Lackey*

Leadership Award Abby Miller



Abby Miller is our Finance Director and she has been a delight to work with during her time with CCS. Abby has hit the ground running to learn all things Head Start and has merged her financial experience with the Head Start Mission. Abby and the finance team have made helpful and meaningful changes in our financial policies and procedures. Abby is cheerful and personable and makes asking questions and solving problems so easy. Abby has been taking the lead on training CCS staff on our new UKG Timesheet system.

- Victoria Grey

“ABBY IS CHEERFUL AND PERSONABLE AND MAKES ASKING QUESTIONS AND SOLVING PROBLEMS SO EASY”

Abby is Awesome! Abby was offered the position of Finance Director for CCS Early Learning after being interviewed via a zoom - while she was currently living on the east coast of Canada. Her “Head Start Heart” showed through the thousands of miles and the computer screens and we were incredibly confident that she would be a great fit to our CCS Early Learning team. After working alongside her... we now know that we received even more than we suspected when she joined our team - we got a true leader and someone who is 100% committed to the work that we do to support children and families. Her day to day work is often in Quick Books or Excel or in grant reporting or working with auditors (or getting us all paid!) which is incredibly important work and she excels at it. However, she is willing (maybe even excited...) to volunteer to work in a classroom

nomination continued on back...



when we are short staffed or to show up for Santa's visit dressed as Mrs Claus. Abby truly exhibits the very best qualities of leadership - service and caring and hard work for others. I am so fortunate to work with her and CCS has benefitted tremendously by having her join our senior leadership team. I hope that AHSA can recognize Abby with the Leadership Award! - *Mark Lackey*

It is with great enthusiasm that I nominate Abby Miller, the Finance Director at CCS Early Learning, for the AHSA Leadership Award. Abby exemplifies the highest standards of leadership through her unwavering commitment to excellence, her supportive and approachable nature, and her remarkable ability to make complex financial regulations clear and accessible to all.

Abby's leadership is rooted in her deep understanding of fiscal compliances but even more so in her approach to connecting with the people she does this important work alongside. She communicates with clarity and patience. She consistently translates intricate requirements into straightforward guidance, empowering staff and programs to remain compliant and confident in their practices. Her proactive approach not only ensures fiscal responsibility but also strengthens the organization as a whole.

What truly sets Abby apart is her positivity and willingness to help even when she herself probably needs support. No question is ever too small, and her open-door attitude encourages collaboration and trust across departments. She leads with kindness, listens actively, and offers solutions that are thoughtful and practical. Whether navigating audits, budgets, or other fiscal responsibilities, Abby brings a calm, reassuring presence and a can-do spirit that uplifts everyone around her.

Abby's leadership is a cornerstone of CCS Early Learning's continued success. Her integrity, communication skills, and dedication to serving both staff and families make her an ideal candidate for the Leadership award. She leads not only with expertise but with heart. - *Tabatha Peterson*

Head Start Director of the Year Tabatha Peterson



www.ccsalaska.org



Tabatha is beyond deserving of this award. She has held most every center position within Head Start over the last several years and it shows. She has lived experience working in classrooms and advocating with families. When working through tough situations she has a way of looking at all perspectives and has everyone's best interest in mind. Providing a safe space to seek guidance and acknowledging we in fact do hard(heart)work.

“WHEN WORKING THROUGH TOUGH SITUATIONS SHE HAS A WAY OF LOOKING AT ALL PERSPECTIVES AND HAS EVERYONE'S BEST INTEREST IN MIND”

Tabatha is a mentor to many and she is dedicated to our mission- Making a difference in the lives of families of young children within our community. She walks the walk and talks the talk daily. Thank you for your strong leadership.

- Samantha Glick-MacCracken

At CCS Early Learning the role of “Head Start Director” is technically held by myself in my role as Executive Director. However, the work of Head Start Director is largely accomplished by Tabatha Peterson, Program Director. Tabatha currently supervises each of our four Center Coordinators - overseeing all of the Head Start and Early Head Start programming and operations. She also supervises our Social Emotional Specialist, both our HS and EHS Coaches, and our Data and Compliance Manager.

nomination continued on back...



Together with each of these Center Coordinators she also is the “lead” person on our team of people who serve in the roles of Education, Disability, and Health Coordinators. She serves as the primary point of contact and staff liaison to the CCS Policy Council. And... in all of this work - she simply excels! Tabatha began as a classroom teacher in our program and has steadily progressed through multiple roles. She has been in the position of Family Partnership Coordinator, Coach, Center Coordinator - and now Program Director. She is passionate about making sure children and families receive individualized services and that our employees approach their work with professionalism and a full understanding of trauma informed care. The support and guidance that she provides to each of the people she supervises - and the constant communication and partnership that she brings with her as she participates in our Senior Leadership Team is so very appreciated. We are fortunate to have her doing the work - and her commitment to quality is one of the biggest reasons for CCS’ continued success. And... the fact that Tabatha is so good at what she does - allows me to be more engaged with our community partners and in the very important work of advocacy and policy improvements. Thank you Tabatha for being a crucial part of our CCS team!

- *Mark Lackey*

All 2025 AHSA Award Nominees

Adam Reida	Janet Vincent	Nou Saevang
Alaska Public Media Stephanie & Mason	Jasmine Lea	Patrick Cockrell
Alexa Meade	Jason Johnson	PIC Diaper Pantry
Alexis Costello	Jeanny Manilay	Rachelle Maillard
Alia Heck	Jennifer Lang	Rayna Jackson
Alondra Baez	Jennifer Russell	Reagan Chadwell
Amanda Lee	Jessica Clark	Relleijhn Newman
Angela Niggl	Jessica Fox	Reyna Fernandez
Angeliz Pagan	Jocelyn Primas	Robin Robertson
Angeliz Rodriguez	Juliet Ratajczak	Rosalie Egrass
Ariel Timo	Katrina Nunemann	Rylly Tony
Becca Harris	Kayla Reed	Samantha MacCracken
Bianca Montes De Oca	Kelsey Loyd	Samuel Amos
Brandi Heppe	Kristen Mayo	Samuel Nyx
Brandie Humphrey	Lana Aresenalt	Sara Long
Brandon Neal	Lee Xiong	Satina Edwin
Caroline Wolkoff	Liliana Vilorio-Guzman	Serena Heck
Carrie McClure	Lillie Sharma	Serena Murdock
Cassandra Bailey	Lily Naef	Shaira Dungca
Center for Safe Alaskans	Linda Duke	Shane Reisher
Chantel Pacheco	Lisa Benaen-Nunyan	Sienna Larson
Cody Keyes	Lisa Smart	Sierra Hawthorn
Corrine Lekanof	Logan Perala	Stefanie Ostlind
Dina Contreras	Lori Markkanan	Summer Keelan
Dominque Sanez	Maiyia Yang	Susan Arroyo
Dustin VanBuskirk	MariaJose St. John	Tammy Berdeaux
Eli Ellis	Marianne Fanger	Tammy Rice
Elisabeth (Lisa) Smart	Marilyn Cook	Teresa Xiong
Elizabeth Locklar	Mark Lackey	Terrion Thompson-Lucas
Elizabeth Mayrand	Mavielhen Cabuhat	Tiffany Jones
Elizabeth Perez	Megan Brouillet	Tonya Omta
Emmaly Brandell	Melanie Saeteurn	Tracy Neves
Erick Hanson	Merissa Maynard	Trisha Brown
Fanny Kuzuguk	Meritsabel Alfonso	Vicky Charlie
Forietta Emmons	Michelle Farrell	Victoria Grey
Fran Cachucha	Michelle Greenamyre	Victoria Sternhagen
Franciany Tavares	Ms Tracy in lynx class	Victorya Dorman
Francis Charriez-Miranda	Ms. Arina	Violeta Guerrero
Hannah Austin	Ms.Hlee	Wendy King
Jacob Bradley	Ms.Joua	Whitney Gobbi
	Nadia Chandler	Xavia Bennett-Salmon
		Yesenia Cruz