

Children's Champion - Pam Ellis



Pam is the kind of person who goes above and beyond in everything that she does. It didn't matter whether she was working with a participant or completing a large, complicated project: she gave it her all. She has a never-give-up attitude when it comes to the needs of all children and the teachers who work with them. Pam built strong bonds with hundreds of T.E.A.C.H. scholarship recipients, inspiring many to stay in college when the journey was challenging. She made sure to contact those who were struggling to give them the extra time they needed to problem-solve or just talk. Pam has a keen sense of understanding the steps needed to move an organization or situation forward. Her leadership is respected by those within her work

and the education field. Some of her major contributions include 15 trips to the national T.E.A.C.H. & WAGE\$ conference, helping over 630 scholarship recipients, processing \$2.6 million of tuition, and supporting 338 degrees.

Influencer Award - Hollie Allen



Hollie has been an unwavering advocate for competitive pay and benefits for the workforce. In her time at Vine Street Child Care, Hollie developed and refined a competitive salary scale for her staff which comes with a full, employer-paid benefits package. In a field where competitive pay and benefits are woefully lacking, Vine Street has prioritized and robustly funded them – years ahead of their counterparts and competitors. She encourages higher education for staff and works hard to support staff as they take college credits, going

above and beyond helping not only foot the bill, but helping with paperwork, reminding staff when things are due, and supporting them to meet deadlines. She has served on the Early Childhood Workforce Advisory Committee since 2021, being invited because she will speak up, loudly if necessary, for what best serves the workforce and programs.

Commitment to Young Children - Kay Strahorn



Kay has shown an outstanding commitment to the well-being of children of every level of education in the Des Moines area at the child care center she administers. Without a doubt, Kay has been instrumental in the continued success and elevation of Connigo Early Childhood education with her exemplary organizational skills and willingness to do whatever it takes to ensure every child under her care is successful. She has a multitude of skills and experience that allow her to excel in her role as an educator, be it in growing the scope of services Connigo can provide, helping out directly in the classrooms, engaging families and staff in the culture of the center, and getting legislators focused on education. The time Kay has been at Connigo has been marked with unparalleled

success and engagement at all levels of operation and it has been clear that the driver behind this success is her dedication to the profession of education.

Family Partnership - Cassie Odland



Cassie provides ongoing professional collaboration which elevates families with young children and makes connections with a variety of early care and education service providers. She tailors her program's service delivery methods to uniquely align with partnering programs, resulting in enhanced and increased positive outcomes in the areas of early childhood literacy, family relationship development, guidance and other health and wellness education for young families. She has led collaborations that address the barriers of language and culture, creating greater access to ISU's family engagement opportunities for refugee and immigrant communities. She has participated in Iowa AEYC's Week of the Young Child celebrations, the Early Literacy Metro Collaboration and other commu-

nity networking activities, always offering possibilities to expand, reach and engage families with young children, supporting their goals and hopes for lifelong learning, health and wellness achievements.

Emerging Leader - Rachel Miller



Rachel was new to teaching as a whole, and had only been in child care 9 months before taking on her position as a Lead Teacher. Part of what has made her an excellent teacher has been her ability to maintain the humility that she started with. She is always asking questions to get a better grasp on teaching, early childhood education, and caring for children as a whole. She has and continues to utilize all work relationships to make sure she is serving her students to the best of her ability. She is always seeking out ways to implement more leadership and advocacy in her role, and has been an active collaborator in fundraising and staff retention efforts. She takes Lead staff meetings as an opportunity to advocate for her staff and students, rather than herself, and makes all decisions

with the wellbeing of the children at the center of her mind. She is loved so deeply by all for her commitment to being any and everything her students could need from her.

Educator of the Year - Blanca Collins



Blanca goes above and beyond for her students. She constantly adapts to new situations and shows her love for not only her students, but their families and her coworkers. She is always striving to be better for her students and herself. Blanca always puts her students first before anything else. Her passion and joy is something to be so proud of. She has the great gift of being creative in any situation and turning it into a positive opportunity for herself and the children around her. She has a passion for children and gets joy from watching them learn a new skill. She is someone

who is actively looking for ways to relate learning with life. Blanca loves to learn new skills and then utilizes them or shares them with families. Blanca's ability to connect with different people in any environment is admirable. She is a genuine person who has dedicated her life to helping children feel protected, loved, and confident to take on new challenges.