

Award Winners

Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children 2021 Commitment to Young Children - Senator Joni Ernst



Senator Joni Ernst has worked hard for child care in Washington, DC and in Iowa. The Senator spent time discussing issues with child care in roundtable discussions, touring child care centers, and speaking with parents, providers, and businesses. The Senator made child care an integral part of her campaign and carried out the work as she championed the need to address the lack of affordable child care. Senator Ernst continues to advocate for Iowa's child care system and works to address the child care crisis in Iowa and the nation.

Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children 2021 Educator of the Year - Kate Johnsrud



Kate Johnsrud is a caring teacher and a community minded educator who utilizes developmentally appropriate practices in her teaching to provide fun and engaging activities for children. Kate also communicates with parents so they can support the classroom efforts at home, making for greater continuity between home and classroom. Kate's support of children and families is not limited to her workplace. Kate went above and beyond during the pandemic and used her sewing skills to sew over 2,000 face masks which she supplied all the staff in her center and to families to take free of charge.

Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children 2021 Emerging Leader - Cassie Beaver



Cassie Beaver is a life-long learner, passionate about early childhood, focusing on best practice and meeting the individual needs of the children. She continually exceeds the requirements for continuing education, brings energy to her team, and encourages her peers. Cassie recently began training around advocacy and has engaged one of her teammates to increase their ability to advocate for the families they serve. Cassie worked wonders during the pandemic, communicating with families and maintaining the relationships necessary to provide rich experiences for children. She is an up-and-coming leader as an early childhood professional.

Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children 2021 Equity and Opportunity - Iowa Child Care Resource & Referral



The staff of Iowa Child Care Resource & Referral worked tirelessly alongside child care providers helping wherever they could over the past year. Staff supported providers to understand and fill out applications so they could benefit from the stipends. They helped programs decipher the recommendations and requirements from the Department of Human Service and Iowa Department Public Health. They delivered supplies and maintained consultation in any way that they could. Staff listened to frustrations and worked on solutions. They were empathetic and understanding, helping everyone to do their best for children and families. Many programs closed during the pandemic, yet many stayed open due to the creative and persistent efforts of Iowa Child Care Resource & Referral.

Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children 2021 Equity and Opportunity - Sama Agar



Sama Agar has learned through her experiences in life, fleeing her country and providing child care in a refugee camp, the need for families to have comfort in the knowledge of the professional caregiver with whom they leave their children. Along with learning language and culture, Sama has become a licensed child care provider and she continues to build her in-home business. Through Sama's work and professionalism, she has built a bridge for herself into the early care and education profession. She is an exemplary example of how to best serve a diverse community of children and families.

Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children 2021 Family Partnership - Amber Ferriss



Amber Ferriss is a parent and an advocate. In 2021, she was elected to the position of Head Start Classroom Representative to DMPS Head Start Policy Committee. During her first Committee meeting, she was elected into the role of Policy Committee Chair and is a Parent Representative on Drake University Head Start Policy Council where she was elected and serves as Vice-Chair. Amber has an inquiring, thoughtful presence among parent peers and professionals, she is an exemplary parent, family member and has risen to great heights as a leader and advocate for early care and education.

Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children 2021 Influencer - Nicole Hanson



Nicole Hanson has stepped outside of her comfort zone to help elevate issues around early care and education. Nicole is an Iowa Afterschool Alliance Board Member and is a core member of the child care Initiative-Team at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. Nicole posts on social media about the need to keep their struggling local child care program open and has sparked the interest of local media which created opportunities for new partnerships. Recently Nicole spoke at the Governor's Child Care Task Force meeting about concerns she has as a working mother and the volatile local child care program.