



IDAHO
STARS



QUALITY CHILD CARE IS ESSENTIAL

ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20 FISCAL YEAR

CHANGE BRINGS OPPORTUNITY



As we reflect on the past fiscal year, the last quarter has taken us to places we have never been before – as a nation, state, project, or profession. Child care in Idaho has been deeply impacted by the pandemic. As we have supported child care professionals in adapting their practices, we have been adapting right along with them.

Work from home began in March, and we pivoted to coaching, training, and providing technical assistance to professionals through Zoom, phone calls, and emails. Our regional offices helped child care professionals access essential supplies and navigate health and safety issues, from new sanitation procedures to communicating the facts to families. IdahoSTARS outreach connected child care providers to financial resources designed to help them weather the COVID-19 storm.

So, while the work of the last four months is foremost in our minds, the excellent work we were doing before the pandemic paved the way for our success.

We have included updates about our commitment to equity and the work we are doing to recognize and respond to the challenges marginalized communities face.

Lastly, we tell the stories of child care professionals who partnered with IdahoSTARS to support parents and children through good times and bad.

We are proud to show you how our strategic goals demonstrate that Quality Child Care Matters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Melissa Crist'.

Melissa Crist
IdahoSTARS Director



EQUITY MATTERS

IdahoSTARS supports the professional development of child care professionals with the end goal of improving the quality of early care and education for children in Idaho. To that end, our team participates in a yearly Summit to focus on improving the systems we build and manage. Our new internal professional development series on equity grew out of this year's Summit, a conversation facilitated by Early Education Consultant Iijumaa Jordan entitled "Strengthening Your Equity Lens". Monthly, team members explore practices and policies that both support and hinder our journey toward becoming a fully inclusive, anti-racist organization. We look forward to adapting our systems to equitably impact children and families in Idaho.

Professional Language Supports - Facility

According to self-reported data from RISE, **7% of child care facility administrators speak a language other than English.** In order to effectively communicate with all child care professionals, IdahoSTARS has contracted with an on-site interpretation services company for professional language interpretation since July 2019. **In fiscal year 2019-2020, 278 interactions with child care professionals were supported by an interpreter, including trainings, site visits, and in-office appointments.** Many of these interactions supported successful ICCP and state licensing renewals and the use of RISE, our online database.

Training Language Supports - User

According to self-reported data from RISE, **5% of child care staff have a preferred training language other than English.** As of July 2019, a child care professional can request an interpreter when registering for an in-person training. This has increased equitable access to professional development opportunities statewide. When COVID-19 hit, IdahoSTARS began offering training statewide virtually. Zoom has a language interpretation function that allows attendees to hear the training in their language of choice. In this way, we were able to continue to support the unique language needs of child care professionals.



GOAL 1: INCREASE QUALIFICATIONS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS

CDA Cohorts Expand Professional Development Opportunities

Zachery Lewis, a lead teacher since 2013 at the Lighthouse Preschool and Child Care Center in Pocatello, completed his Child Development Associate (CDA) certificate this year. The CDA is a nationally recognized credential that guides child care providers to implement core competency standards into classroom practices. Providers are trained to create, gather and implement resources and then reflect on their practices.

Zachery had completed many trainings over the years, so when an IdahoSTARS consultant approached him about participating in a CDA cohort, he said yes. A CDA cohort is a group of providers who meet regularly with a consultant who guides them through the CDA process. This is a good way for providers to use trainings and professional development towards a credential.

The consultant supported Zachery as he completed his portfolio and prepared for the verification visit and test. The consultant helped him decide on goals for the classroom and for himself. The consultant also assisted him in applying for verification with the CDA council and obtaining an IdahoSTARS scholarship to pay for the credentialing costs.

Zachery believes the process has increased his knowledge, which in turn has helped his classroom run smoother and with more focus. He says that he was excited to receive his CDA certificate in the mail and felt a sense of accomplishment. He will use the knowledge gained in his CDA to offer new and varied ways of engaging with the children in his care. He wants them to enjoy his classroom as they learn together.

Professional development is vital to improving the quality of child care in Idaho. Our work in this area simplified processes for child care providers while offering more rigorous opportunities for professional learning.

Training

This year the IdahoSTARS adapted and improved the ways we offered professional development to meet the changing needs of child care professionals.

We started the last fiscal year with the launch of the Training Portal in RISE. The portal allows

child care professionals to use a course catalog to access training developed by IdahoSTARS, and other high quality training entities. The training most taken in our new training portal was the mandatory ICCP training, "Germs are Everywhere." IdahoSTARS online trainings are more user friendly, interactive and rigorous.

This past year 6,514 individual learners completed 35,335 trainings in English and Spanish from their computer, tablet, or phone. Online trainings have proven invaluable during the pandemic as child care professionals sought ways to use their time at home constructively.

To increase access to training for more professionals, IdahoSTARS developed a system of free live trainings offered on Saturdays throughout the year, dubbed “Super Saturdays.” **634 child care professionals statewide attended these trainings** and as a result COVID-19 couldn’t stop IdahoSTARS from continuing to offer live training facilitated through Zoom and webinar. **We offered a total of 285 live trainings to 1,593 early care and education professionals. Our evaluations indicate that 99% of participants feel the training will help them to perform their job better.**

Our goal remains that no matter how a child care professional prefers to receive professional development, online or live, we will offer numerous opportunities to fulfill their needs for ICCP and licensing and improve their practices in caring for Idaho’s children.

Academic Scholars:

This year we had 54 Academic Scholars, a growth of 35% over the previous year. Additionally, we had 15 scholars who completed single course scholarships.



Academic Scholar’s Story:

Without this scholarship, it would have been very difficult for me to find funding to be able to go back to school. School was something that I had always struggled with as a young child. I did not believe I could be successful or gain anything from a traditional school system. Going back to school helped me find the strength and confidence to pursue my education and follow my passion in Early Childhood Education. This scholarship made that possible. Without it, I would not be the early educator I am today. I have grown and learned so much while pursuing my professional education. I have been able to take what I have learned and not only brought it into fruition in my classroom, but to my center as a whole.

My long-term goals include being able to continue to be a lead pre-k co-teacher at my center. After graduating from CWI this coming spring, I hope to continue my education and pursue a bachelor’s degree in Early Childhood Education from a 4-year university.

Ashley Carlson, St. Alphonsus Early Learning Center, Academic Scholar CWI – AA Anticipated Spring 2021





GOAL 2: INCREASE QUALITY PRACTICES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

Partnerships in Action: Nature's Childcare Succeeds

Nature's Childcare enrolled in Steps to Quality in late November of 2018 and in January of 2019 they began utilizing the Quality Consultants as a resource to help build their skills and knowledge on what quality looks like.

Director Angela Taylor and Assistant Director Christina Martin embrace STQ and want the best for the staff and children in their care. Christina says she "wants to empower the teachers and support them to be the best they can." They give time to their teachers for professional development by offering time out of class to complete trainings and by scheduling trainings on site. In November 2019, Christina and Angela utilized grant opportunities to complete their Directors Credentials so they can continue to strive for excellence in their professional careers and in their program's practices.



The teachers welcome IdahoSTARS consultants with open minds and eagerness to learn. Consultants often meet with staff, creating a plan for individual children, and by the next visit the plan was already implemented. Teachers have shown an interest in making early childhood education a career goal for themselves and through the support of their regional consultants began a CDA cohort in February of 2020.

In April, Angela and Christina worked to create a Quality Improvement Action Plan focused on professional development and coaching around developmentally appropriate practices and environments. This included engagement in Region 4's ERS-R preparation program, completion of the Block Area Targeted Technical Assistance Package and individualized coaching to further understand topics surrounding these larger conversations. While the Initial ERS-R scores earned them Step 3 in Steps to Quality, their continued engagement and drive towards quality led teachers to request that they be a practice site for IdahoSTARS work with the ERS-3. Through continued coaching, ERS-3 scores showed a marked improvement in the Space/Furnishing and Activities subscales.

After becoming Star-Rated, the staff of Nature's Childcare still strive to improve daily and never stop learning. This happened by having a strong leadership team, that bought into the "WHY" behind Steps to Quality, and a positive strong partnership with their Regional Consultants.

Nature's Childcare is a great example of partnership in action and results to celebrate.

STEPS TO QUALITY

71 programs are at the level of participating.

136 programs have progressed to be verified at Steps 1 to 6.

30% of STQ programs progressed to a higher level this year.

STQ awarded 27 Quality Improvement grants this year, totaling \$52,000

IdahoSTARS consultants completed 502 joint coaching plans, 356 focused observations and 254 relection & feedback coaching visits.

Our regional Multi-Disciplinary Teams (MDT) created 189 Quality Improvement Action Plans

Targeted Technical Assistance provided professional development to 93 child care providers and staff.

Environmental Rating Scales examine the many factors that contribute to positive child development. The maximum score is a 7. This year out of 127 assessments, the average overall score was 5.04. Scores assigned specifically in teacher-child interactions averaged 5.83

GOAL 3: BUILD KNOWLEDGE AND INVESTMENT IN HIGH QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

The work of the IdahoSTARS Outreach team is to promote the importance of quality early childhood education to child care professionals, parents, and community partners.

That work became even more important as the Covid-19 pandemic greatly impacted the essential role of child care. Outreach provided just-in-time support at each stage of closing and reopening, sharing health and safety resources, updated recommended practices, and economic opportunities.

Outreach was done through email, newsletters, the IdahoSTARS website, and social media. Social media in particular is a great tool for getting information out quickly, when professionals need it most. **Our posting rate grew from an average of 10 posts a month before March to an average of 27 posts a month March through June. Our engagement doubled during this period when Facebook posts reached audiences of up to 11,900 in April.**

IdahoSTARS typically sends out a monthly newsletter to child care providers. In the initial stages of the pandemic, we had so much information to share with child care professionals we sent out weekly newsletters. **Our readers were eager for this information as shown by an all-time high newsletter open rate of 77%.**



GOAL 4: INCREASE NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN HIGH QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Providing Support to Families

The Family and Provider Support team (FPS) supports both child care programs and families searching for child care. Resource Specialists partner with families to increase awareness of the importance of quality practices in any child care setting. They also help families find child care that meets their individual needs. Due to COVID-19, many child care programs closed, some permanently. We worked closely with families as they struggled to find local programs that were open and accepting new families.

Here is one parent's story about balancing work responsibilities and caring for her children:

“Overnight, my son's school closed and my daughter's childcare closed. My husband works in a hospital, but we were “fortunate” that the same week my employer designated that we work from home, so we weren't scrambling to find childcare. We also have two older children who were easily able to accommodate home schooling but finding a balance between work and taking care of my younger children was incredibly challenging. I felt like I was either going to let my family down or my coworkers down. It was a lot to juggle.



As childcare programs started opening back up, it felt scary as a parent to know if it was “safe” to start the children back in childcare. My daughter’s childcare program has put many safety protocols in place to ensure that our children are as safe as possible including daily wellness checks, extra cleaning and sanitizing, outdoor pickup and drop offs and requiring masks for staff and families. It’s hard to know if we are doing the right thing but it made coming back to work a lot easier knowing they were being as cautious as we were. ””

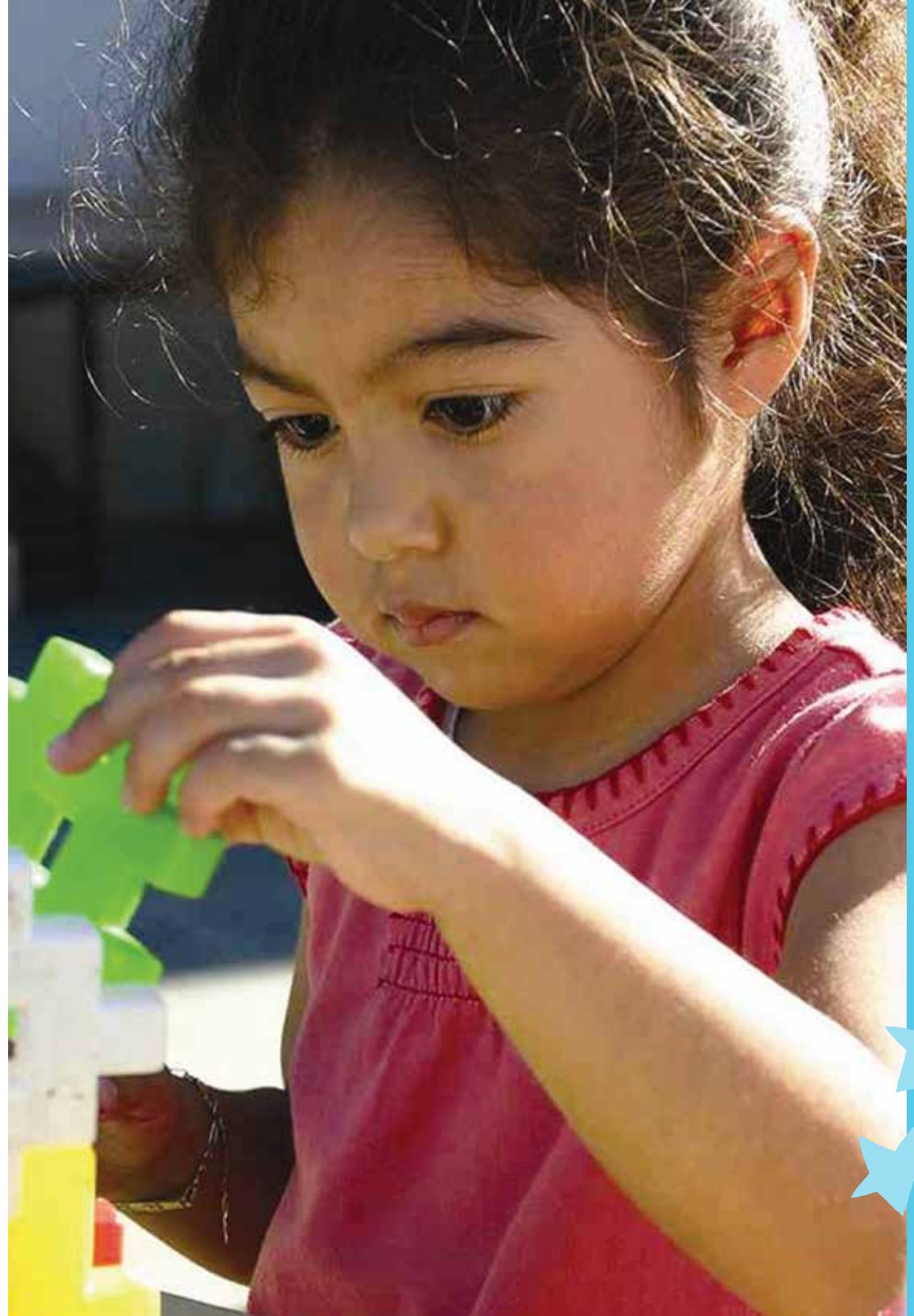
- Amanda, working mother of 4

Idaho Child Care Program (ICCP)

The Customer Support arm of the FPS team works closely with child care program directors and owners to become certified Idaho Child Care Program (ICCP) vendors and to meet state licensing requirements. We support programs through the application processes and with updating program information to ensure accuracy for families receiving a child care referral. The Customer Support team shares information and processes documents necessary for maintaining ICCP certification and annual renewal.

A primary IdahoSTARS goal is to support successful ICCP renewal, to the benefit of both programs and families. To that end, we updated procedures to become more proactive in our communication and outreach. We added alerts in RISE and in-person contacts from Resource Specialists to complement renewal notices sent in the mail.

In February of 2020 we saw an all-time high with 85% of providers successfully renewing their ICCP certification.



WHO WE ARE

IdahoSTARS mission is to ensure that Idaho's children, infancy through age 12, have access to the highest quality inclusive early care and education. We accomplish this by:

- Supporting child care providers with professional development opportunities to improve their practice and develop their businesses.
- Equipping families with tools and resources that empower them to find a nurturing and safe environment for their child.

The University of Idaho Center on Disabilities and Human Development (CDHD) and Idaho Association for the Education of Young Children (IdahoAEYC) proudly partner on the IdahoSTARS project. IdahoSTARS is funded by the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) to improve the quality of child care available to families.



Quality Child Care Matters

Visit idahostars.org | **Call** Idaho CareLine 2-1-1 or 800-926-2588