Chris Nason honored as Teacher of the Year

The Region VII Head Start Association recently named Chris Nason their Teacher of the Year. Chris is the Lead Teacher in our High Street 1 classroom and has been working with us at MICA for over twenty-three years and has been a teacher for over thirty years.

The Teacher of the Year award is very prestigious - Region VII encompasses Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska, and Kansas and hundreds of Head Start classrooms. Chris will be honored at the association’s awards ceremony in October.

On reflecting on her time at MICA, Chris (known as Miss Chris in the classroom) is particularly affected by former students who bring their own children to her classroom: “When parents are bringing their children back to MICA, they say ‘I remember Miss Chris, we have to take you back to her!’ and that’s really touching.”

Certainly, it is obvious that Chris has made a significant impact on the lives of many young children. She truly has a generous spirit. One of the factors that keeps Chris teaching is because she feels that there is something out there she still has to do to help someone, even though she may not know what it is just yet.

Chris was grateful for the recognition and acknowledged the contributions of her team: “This is a great honor and as much recognition should go to the strong team and agency that I work for. We are all in this together!”

Congratulations on your award! We are all very proud of your accomplishment.
1. LEARNING TO USE TECHNOLOGY IN NEW WAYS:

YouTube videos, texts, zoom meetings, and more are helping our teachers and home visitors connect with families. One classroom held a zoom meeting for children to share what they had been doing while they had been home. In another, teachers are reading books to students virtually. This extends to connecting with other staff as well; in our Early Childhood Programs, Laura Abbe spearheaded the creation of a video fostering connection that featured dozens of other staff members.

2. GETTING CREATIVE WITH PARENT ACTIVITIES:

ITDS’s are helping parents brainstorm about how to create innovative activities for their children using materials they have at home. In one home, a parent used empty pill bottles to create a stacking activity. In another, a parent had planned to explore texture and color with paint in a ziploc bag, but since they had no paint, they brainstormed with the ITDS to use hair gel and mashed blueberries to add color.

3. FOOD AND SUPPLIES, DELIVERED:

Both Family Development and Early Childhood Programs are delivering items to families in need right now. In our Family Development Centers, this has turned into a food delivery effort that is providing dozens of families with needed food even if they are in a high-risk population. Health Services has also gotten creative with delivery, arranging the delivery of a car seat, pack n’ play, and more to families who needed them.

4. RECONNECTING WITH CLOSED CASES:

Health Services staff are reconnecting with families who they think may still need our help during this time, even if they have left our programs. They are seeing an increased participation thanks to more frequent communication with families. In some cases, especially due to the Trauma-Informed Care training, they are in a position to help families feel comfortable talking through their difficulties.

5. EXPLORING FAMILY NEEDS:

Through Resource Development, a multi-disciplinary team of staff engaged in surveying hundreds of families over the phone about their current and emergent needs as part of the community needs assessment. During these calls, staff were able to band together to share resources and get families connected to resources, often speaking with them for a half-hour or more, despite the fact that the survey was short. In taking the extra time, they went above and beyond getting families connected and making sure they felt heard.
A Grateful Grandma in Need

Keliena Caldwell, our Family Development Worker in Ames, has been working to deliver food to a family in need.

Willa is currently caring for her grandchildren, ages 3 to 14, as their parents are working full-time and childcare is unavailable. Unfortunately, Willa has had a tough time finding food and getting to the food pantry. She is in a high-risk category for contracting COVID-19. So, Keliena delivered the food to her at her home.

Willa wrote us a nice note in appreciation of what MICA is doing for her family right now: “There are no words to express my deepest appreciation and heartfelt thanks to MICA/Keliena for the food deliveries to my home. Bringing food and household supplies for us is an assurance that my family has enough to eat and I don’t have to worry. Because of the social distancing requirements MICA personnel (Keliena) is an asset to my family. May God bless them all.”

Staff Anniversaries: April and May

Top row, left to right:

- Don Snider (11 years) - Housing Production Coordinator
- Laura Hornberg (11 years) - Family Development Data Administrator
- Diane Wearda (7 years) - HS Lead Teacher/Center Manager
- Diane Kueny (5 years) - ITDS
- Taressa Figgins (4 years) - Registered Nurse
- Rachael Black (4 years) - TOP Facilitator
- Michael Oxley (3 years) - Resource Development Coordinator
- Nora Velarde (3 years) - HS Assistant Teacher

Second row, left to right:

- Christina Ordaz (3 years) - HS Assistant Teacher
- Tiffany Witte (2 years) - HS Lead Teacher
- Gabby Garcia (2 years) - Accountant II
- Connie Stephen (2 years) - FDS - ECP
- Lindsay Kerch (1 year) - HS Assistant Teacher
- Steve Sodders (1 year) - TOP Facilitator
- Kaitlyn Engstrom (1 year) - Fulltime Classroom Substitute
Riddle of the Month

This Month’s Riddle
What has many keys but opens no locks?

How it works:
If you have the answer to this month’s riddle, e-mail it to jaimie.adkins@micaonline.org. A winner will be randomly drawn from all correct entries. His or her name will be published along with the correct answer in the next issue, and he or she will be awarded a prize.

Last Month’s Riddle
Brothers and sisters I have none, but this man’s father is my father’s son. Who is the man?

Last Month’s Answer
The person asking the question (me).

Last Month’s Winner
Jana Larsen, Callie Oltman, Robyn Fine, Alicia Scoggin, Jessica Miller, and Julie Chopard all answered the riddle correctly, but a random drawing made Alicia the winner!

Congratulations, Alicia!

Do you have a story or a picture you want to share in the Insider? Send it along to jaimie.adkins@micaonline.org!