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- Jerry Klauck, Director
Children's House Montessori School, Eau Claire

Learning the Work and Play of Child Care

Jumping In

Jerry Klauck entered the child care field four years ago at Children's House Montessori School with a strong business background and the will to succeed; but with no previous child care experience. "When I came on I had never heard of YoungStar to be honest with you," said Jerry. "But it was a great learning experience." In Jerry's second year with Children's House, they started strong in YoungStar with a 3 Star rating. By their last review they had worked their way to a 5 Star rating. Jerry said that even as someone with a business background, entering the business of early childhood was somewhat unfamiliar. While he did have a previous understanding of the operational and financial side of how a business should function, he pointed out that typically in a business, "you are just satisfying the customer and the tax person." In child care, explained Jerry, there are a lot more people involved. There is licensing, YoungStar, The Registry, and many others to satisfy when you are working with young children. Overall, in child care you are held accountable for a lot more than in your typical business.

Beginning Challenges and Advantages

As a Montessori program, which entails a specific approach to programming and environment, there were some "initial advantages" said Jerry, "but also some initial challenges." For instance, as a Montessori school they consider their program a single classroom of students who are of mixed ages, primarily from 2 to 5, which makes it more difficult to define and structure curriculum, environment, and similar things within YoungStar guidelines. However, the Montessori approach to meeting every child where they are at developmentally, emotionally, culturally, and otherwise, is very much in line with the individualized approach that YoungStar emphasizes. "We tailor everything to the individual child," said Jerry. "This philosophy is what we are governed by."

Steady Climb

As Children's House Montessori School started out with YoungStar, one of the main things they focused on was updating business practices and policies that, according to Jerry, were "antiquated." That meant getting important structural elements of the business standardized and into writing, such as program policies, rules, and staff guidelines. This included upping their pay scale to better meet the needs of staff, instituting PTO, and implementing staff evaluations as "a means for staff to look at themselves and create goals based on what they believed needed to be improved." Jerry said that since starting YoungStar and making these changes, the program has seen a steady improvement over the years. They have met YoungStar requirements head on, and now more than half of the staff is certified in Montessori as well. "You have heard the expression, 'It takes a village to raise a child.'" said Jerry. "Our approach [to child care] is, we want to be part of your village."

Wisconsin's Stars are Shining

YoungStar informs parents, recognizes quality providers and brings resources and support to programs committed to improving quality. But what it's really all about is helping Wisconsin children shine bright.