



“One of the things is in starting YoungStar is you have to be proactive in where you want to go...we are in a rural county that hasn't got a lot of money...there is nothing overly spectacular about us...I believed we could do it and I really believed my team could do it.”

- Kelly Jensen, Director
Sand Box Child Care & Preschool, Medford

5 Stars and Holding

A Community Achievement

When Kelly Jensen's program was first featured as a YoungStar success story they had reached 4 Stars, and Kelly professed her commitment to continued program improvement. Now, years later, her program has achieved a 5 Star rating. “When we said we were going to do YoungStar, we kept saying ‘we can do it’ so maybe it would become a reality,” said Kelly. “Then once we hit 5 Stars we were like, ‘holy cow, we are there!’ And you settle back into the pride of it.” Kelly said that she is also encouraged by community members' recognition of her program's accomplishment. Parents of the children in her program told their friends about YoungStar and about Sand Box reaching 5 Stars, and the word spread. “A 70-year-old stopped me in the grocery store and said, ‘Nice job on that 5 Star, I know how hard you worked on it,’ laughed Kelly.

Next Steps

Now that they are at a 5 Star level, they are doing what it takes to stay there. “It's more fine-tuning,” said Kelly, “creating your system a little better so that your work is more efficient...the icing on the cake.” Kelly said her staff is very proactive in finding and implementing better systems and methods than those already in place. “The whole YoungStar experience has made me take a look at how I interact with children and families,” said one staff member, Julie. “You always wonder if you could do more; YoungStar makes you think.” Because attracting and retaining high quality staff can be a challenge, Kelly has worked towards increasing the wage scale for her staff in accordance with their education; a plan that she referenced in her first success story. She has now successfully reached that goal, with the program now at a point where staff salary increases were possible at the end of 2014. Kelly emphasized that she wants her staff to know that she recognizes their importance and is committed to making it better for them. “People want to know that you see them, and that you hear them, and that they are valued.” said Kelly. “I want my staff to know that, and for that message to go from my staff to the parents.”

Looking Forward

Recently, Kelly received word that her center would be one of the beneficiaries of an Early Head Start—Child Care Partnership Award; a result of [President Obama's Early Learning Initiative](#). Indianhead Community Action Agency in Ladysmith was awarded \$1,400,000 and Sand Box Child Care & Preschool is one of four child care centers that were involved from the beginning in formulating the grant proposal. “Sand Box is pleased to represent a large group center in a rural area that is working towards improving the lives of children and families,” said Kelly. “I am so very proud of my staff and what they have accomplished.”

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.