January 23, 2015

To Members of the Selection Committee, *Exchange* Magazine:

I wish to recommend Jamie Bonczyk for the Emerging Leaders in Early Care and Education selection based on her contributions to the health and nutrition of young children and their families. I have known Jamie professionally for the past two years. We have worked together on several professional advisory groups and I have attended a workshop she presented during the 2014 MnAEYC-MnSACA annual conference last January. I have come to know Jamie as a skilled trainer, health advocate, and cross-sector collaborator. She has energy and warmth, is creative, and brings a passion to her work of improving the health and nutrition of young children.

Jamie is a “Master Trainer” through DEVELOP, the Minnesota Quality Improvement and Registry Tool. I had the pleasure of attending a workshop she presented titled “Who Am I?: A Teachers Guide to Understanding Themselves Before Helping Children Build Identities”. Using her own personal story of challenge and change, Jamie crafted a message to those of us in attendance to self-examine our personal similarities and our unique differences and to inspire us to become better early childcare providers.

Jamie is the Director of Health and Nutrition at the Parents in Community Action, Inc. or PICA. She is an experienced Head Start administrator and successfully leads the health and nutrition program at the largest Head Start organization in Minnesota. PICA has 10 locations, reaching 2,500 children and their families. Jamie’s standards for ensuring healthful foods and beverages for each child have guided menu planning for the entire organization. The culturally and developmentally appropriate menus are incorporated into the learning activities of all classrooms. Jamie coordinates the entire menu planning process using foods representative of diverse cultures and exposes young children to a variety of foods. Some menu examples include quinoa porridge with blueberries, fish tacos with shredded cabbage and mango salsa, pinto bean burrito with cheese and red pepper strips, Somalian ground beef pasta with chickpeas, and black eyed pea soup with collard greens. In fact, the menu for PICA which Jamie championed were such “head-turner’s” and so popular with the children, that they have been featured in a Team Nutrition training video for the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) on the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) website.

In early 2014 Jamie was invited to participate in the Child Nutrition and Wellness Advisory Group of the Minnesota Department of Education, which I facilitate for the CACFP. Advisory group members represent industry leaders in early child care and education. Jamie brings a unique perspective to the group which is driven by her passion to advocate for the health and nutrition of young children. In addition, Jamie was selected to participate on the planning of the December 2014 early childcare and education summit known as “Born to Thrive: Minnesota Summit: Growing Strong, Smart Kids through Healthy Eating and Active Play”. Her contribution to identifying key leaders and cross-sector champions was instrumental in deriving the guest list. In addition, Jamie also contributed suggestions to identify and leverage collaborative solutions to the summit organization.

Jamie is fun-loving and quite a “character” at times! As part of her role in the Summit, Jamie facilitated the physical activity breaks. Remarkably, she is just as comfortable teaching a workshop to child care leaders as she is leading a physical activity stretch break during a statewide Summit. Her smile and inclusivity is contagious and many of the comments on the evaluation included appreciation for the stretch breaks.

When you meet Jamie, you will remember her. She is not casual but direct. She understands the industry, is skilled in engaging others and has a broad sphere of influence. She is highly qualified, capable and dedicated. She understands her own personal journey so she brings the best of herself to her work with children and their families. I have never known an individual with as much passion to advocating for young children as Jamie. She is, undoubtedly, an emerging leader and I totally support Jamie in all future endeavors and welcome the positive impact she will bring to the health and nutrition of early child care and education in Minnesota.

Sincerely,



Gloria K. Wilkinson RD, LD

Lead Nutritionist, Child and Adult Care Food Program

Minnesota Department of Education