

January 21, 2015

To the Emerging Leaders review panel:

I am writing this letter in support of Kara Lehnhardt's application for the Emerging Leaders recognition award. As the Executive Director of the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership at National Louis University (NLU), I have worked with Kara in her role as Director of Technology Initiatives for the past five years. She brought to the Center her early childhood expertise, gained while serving as Assistant Director for a child care resource and referral program reaching more than 4,000 early childhood professionals and families each year. Kara has already been recognized as a future leader by NLU. Last year, she was chosen to participate in the University's year-long Emerging Leaders Program (ELP). This program enhances leadership effectiveness while working on a strategic project, which for Kara's team was to improve customer service across the University. The ELP stresses the collaborative leadership model, building a collegial network of professional support, in which leaders share resources, networks, intelligence, perspectives, and assets.

Kara is deserving of the Exchange Emerging Leaders award because of her experience and expertise in the field of early childhood. She demonstrates natural leadership qualities and, with the support of the mentors around her, will be fast on her way to being a national leader in the field of early childhood care and education.

I know there are many definitions describing the qualities of a leader because the McCormick Center has focused on leadership development work for over 30 years. When describing leadership as one's ability to get others to willingly follow; Kara meets the definition. In building the McCormick Center's successful national online director's credential, Aim4Excellence, Kara has built a strong team to support over 1,500 online students across the country. From conceptualization to the successful launch of a project, Kara is able to get a team on board to accomplish the goal.

This success starts because Kara has a vision of where to go, what needs to happen, and how to achieve the desired outcome. She then is able to articulate that vision and all the necessary steps needed to accomplish it to her team and work together alongside them to reach the goal. Kara inspires, encourages, and recognizes others as vital members of the team.

Kara's background in Organizational Communications provides her with a strong foundation of the intersecting factor across all levels of an early childhood organization – communication. This perspective, along with her MBA, provides Kara with a critical lens in which to see the field of early care

and education. In addition, Kara has established herself as an expert for the technology design and delivery for a high-quality online professional development experience. Her thoughts and ideas from a perspective outside of a strict early childhood training are what the profession desperately needs for the future.

Lastly, sometimes the most important but difficult to achieve aspect of an emerging leader is the ability to have a sense of humor. Effective leaders know how to use humor to energize team members and strengthen comradery. Kara shines when it comes to making people laugh and enjoy their work.

Please accept my nomination of Kara Lehnhardt for *Exchange Magazine's* May/June 2015 Emerging Leaders issue. If I can be of any further assistance or if you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [sue.offutt@nl.edu](mailto:sue.offutt@nl.edu) or by phone at 847-947-5233. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Sue Offutt  
Executive Director

