



Welcome to Our 2022 Exchange Leaders

by Pam Boulton, coordinator, Exchange Leadership Initiative

Through the Exchange Leadership Initiative, *Exchange* has been making leadership more visible in the field of early care and education since 2014. Now with more than 450 Exchange Leaders, we see them everywhere—as directors, owners, and administrators, in classrooms, family child care homes, schools, colleges, and universities, and in all the programs and services that support children and families. As leaders, they provide vision and stability, imagination and caring, and through their actions they offer direction now and into the future.

This year has brought more challenges and opportunities. We are, at once, exhausted and exhilarated as we welcome the summons to the demanding task of providing excellent care for our youngest children and their families during these turbulent times. The need for leadership throughout our field continues to be high, and

our Exchange Leaders have stepped up and moved forward in response. Thank you to all our leaders and to all of us who follow. Together, we work to sustain families and communities through our supportive services.

With congratulations and delight, we invite you to meet your new Exchange Leaders for 2022.

Exchange Leaders thoroughly understand early care and education principles and practices, address diversity and equity, and are engaged in lifelong learning. They are grounded in their own work and are using their strengths and skills to make a difference for children, families, and their communities.

We asked applicants to share their passion for the field, and to tell us stories about their leadership journey. Here are their inspiring answers.

Samantha Balch

HONOLULU, HAWAII

Educator, The Early School

What is your personal mantra that is important to your leadership?



When faced with any kind of issue, I have found the mantra “choose curiosity over judgement” has had an immensely positive impact on my leadership. It allows me the chance to slow down and see people as full human beings, with their own ideas and perceptions, and gives me the chance to reflect on systems or traditions that might be impacting the situation. To embrace this level of vulnerability with each other and allow for communication that is open, honest, and unafraid has led to my growth as a more compassionate leader.

When did you realize that you were a leader? How did you embrace the pride and the willingness to self-identify as a leader?

My director stopped me and said, “You know, since our doors are open, I hear you when you are with the children—I hear the way you talk to them and encourage their thinking. You do it really well.” I was stunned and humbled that she took the time to listen to me with the children, when my position often felt like an afterthought to the “real” school day; I was encouraged that my priorities when working with children were respected, and it made me hungry to learn more and keep getting even better. It was such a small moment—one that cost my director no money or time—but has made me so aware of how these positive interactions can change someone’s day, year, or even life.

Julia Bardsley

FORT RILEY, KANSAS

Owner/provider, Play Platoon

When did you realize that you were a leader? How did you embrace the pride and the willingness to self-identify as a leader?



In 2015, new military regulations were imposed that shut down my program, due to no fault of my own. I completed the necessary paperwork, but the security office responsible for handling my background checks lost my documents—not once, not twice, but three times. Because my paperwork was not processed in time, I lost a month’s income. Feeling helpless, but not one to idly sit by, I wrote a letter to my senator, congressional representative, and the secretary of the Army. One quiet Friday evening, I received a phone call from the chief of security for the Army and spent the next few hours outlining all of the ways the system had failed me. Fortunately, or rather unfortunately, I was informed that I by far had the worst experience with the new system, but I was able to prevent this from happening to others. That was when I discovered I had the motivation and ability to advocate for myself and others. I became a key stakeholder in military policy as it pertains to Army family child care providers, in addressing policies that directly affect the process of our small businesses.

Jennifer Blohm

GLASSER, NEW JERSEY

Technical Assistance Specialist, CJFHC

What is your vision for what needs to happen in early care and education? What needs to change to achieve the vision?



My vision, and personal goal, is to help all early childhood educators understand that they are professionals. Change happens within, but helping others understand their true value over time will help to change the world. It is when a person views themselves as a professional that their achievements and quality of teaching flourish—providing a better foundation and quality of learning for their students, who will one day be the leaders of this world!

Lauren Bond

BOWIE, MARYLAND

President and founder, Bond Education Services & Training, LLC

What is your personal mantra that is important to your leadership?



As I go through doors of opportunity, I want to ensure that I leave the door open behind me, with a welcome mat for other leaders to join me. I am a firm believer in networking and collaborating with professionals who have the same

Are values lived or laminated?

—Mary Myatt

passion for young children and their families as I do. I recognize that others have left the door open for me and have provided me opportunities to challenge myself to do things that I have never done before. As a result of those opportunities, I have grown as a professional and a leader within the field of early education. I am committed to empowering and equipping educators and leaders. It brings me joy to see others win and reach their goals. If we all work together to support each other, we can have a positive impact and ensure that the early childhood education profession is seen as a profession of excellence.

Lisa Taylor Cook
MIDLOTHIAN, TEXAS
Assistant professor,
Tarleton State University

When did you realize that you were a leader? How did you embrace the pride and the willingness to self-identify as a leader?



In the last five years, I started to realize that I am a leader and have begun to embrace this responsibility more. I previously had not viewed

Courage doesn't always roar.
Sometimes courage is the little
voice at the end of the day that
says I will try again tomorrow.

—Mary Anne Radmacher

myself as a leader, but rather as a supportive team member. Through the encouragement of others, I realized that I do have the skills to lead and have begun identifying myself as a leader. The pride I have as a leader is continually renewed when I see those who I have assisted achieve new things within their programs and professional fields.

Jeremy Daly-Griffen
SOUTH DAYTON, NEW YORK
UPK teacher, Pine Valley
Elementary School

What is your passion in the field of early care and education? Why?



I bring music and movement every day to the students using my guitar as a teaching vessel. All students experience success academically while being engaged musically and physically. When given these opportunities, all students can succeed.

Denise Fadina
BROOKLYN CENTER, MINNESOTA
Owner/primary provider,
Bright Future Child Care

What is your passion in the field of early care and education? Why?



My passion in the field of early care and education is to find ways to support child care providers to continue the work of cultivating the brilliance in children. I feel strongly that many amazing providers and educators come into the field of care and education excited and giving their all, but many leave due to the adverse work environments, low wages, and lack of support from the government.

I am certain that we can make the work of a provider and educator more rewarding and more appealing for those that could make a huge difference in the lives of many children. If we do not speak out on this and bring attention to the working conditions of child care workers and educators, I know our society as a whole will be greatly affected.

Aviva Fudem
THORNHILL, ONTARIO, CANADA
Owner, freelance educator,
idea architect, ThinkinEd

What is your personal mantra that is important to your leadership?



"If you change nothing, nothing will change." I cannot wait around for change to magically materialize before my eyes, or expect others to change for me. I must take action and take ownership of the things others should never own: my journey, my emotions, my behaviour, my wellbeing, my story.

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Nicolette Graf
APPLE VALLEY, MINNESOTA
Equity and advocacy coordinator,
Child Care Aware Minnesota

What is your vision for what needs to happen in early care and education? What needs to change to achieve the vision?



When it comes to advocacy, I like to think this: in the history of our country, we have a lot of "isms" (racism, sexism, etc.) but the least practiced is activism. Not because we do not want to, but because we do not have innate skills to stand up for ourselves and what we believe in. Advocacy can be taught and learned. To me, that is exactly what our field needs. We need the ability to say, "This is what I need," "This is what my children need," "This is what our community needs." Once we are all grounded in our power, man, we could do big things.

Corrine Hendrickson
NEW GLARUS, WISCONSIN
Family child care provider,
Corrine's Little Explorers

What is your vision for what needs to happen in early care and education? What needs to change to achieve the vision?



My vision for what needs to happen is fully funded universal child care. Our society and culture need to understand that children and families are not an "individual responsibility," but a collective responsibility and investment; that communities thrive when people are prioritized, and that educators are professional, knowledgeable, and deserve to be compensated as such. But the only way any of that can happen for every child/family is to invest in child care as a public good. Currently, the system relies on those willing to sacrifice their own financial, emotional,

and physical well-being to be early childhood educators, while parents sacrifice their own financial stability to pay for care.

Kristen Wheeler Highland
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA
Licensing compliance, professional
development, community child care
partner support coordinator, Commu-
nity Action Partnership of
Ramsey/Washington
County



What is your personal mantra that is important to your leadership?

"Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others." —Jack Welch

Growing up, both of my parents held management positions. I believe that