Iowa Department of Human Services
CHILD CARE CENTER EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATION FOR LICENSE

Name of Center: Hand in Hand-Echo Hill **Enrollment:** 106 **License ID No. (Reapplications)** 51559

Street: 400 Echo Hill RD **City:** Marion Iowa **Zip** 52302 **County:** Linn

Mailing Address: 3524 35th AVE, Marion, IA, 52302

Director's Name: Kathy Kolthoff **Phone Number:** 319-373-3363

On-Site Supervisor(s): Bailey Meza **E-Mail:** hih@handinhandinc.com

Date(s) of Visit: 01-13-2025

X **Licensing Visit** X **Unannounced Visit** **Off Year Visit** **Administrative Change**

LICENSING VISITS

New Application **Re-Application** X **NA**

Signed Application (470-0722) Received **Yes** **No** X **NA** **Date Signed:**

FIRE INSPECTION **State** X **Local** **NA** **Is Fire Inspection Approved?** X **Yes** **No** **NA**

Date Inspected: 02-21-2023

Comments :

LICENSE TYPE: X **Child Care** **Preschool (ages 3-5 meets three hours or less per day)**

Financial Type: X Profit Non-Profit NA

Accredition: Accredited NAEYC NSACA Other X NA

Program Serves: Infants (0-23 mo.) 2 Years Preschool-Age X School-Age

Get-Well Evening Care Special Needs

SCHEDULE: X Year-round School-Year Summer Only

HOURS:	*Year-round*	*School-Year*	*Summer Only*

LICENSE CAPACITY	Infants	2 Years	Preschool	School-Age	Capacity
General				80	80
Summer					0

QRS Rating: N/A

RECOMMENDATION FOR LICENSE:	
X	**FULL** license from 05-01-2025 to 05-01-2027
	PROVISIONAL license from
	DENIAL of initial application
	SUSPENSION of license
	REVOCATION of license

Licensing Consultant: Amy Lyons **Date:** 02-18-2025

I. IF CURRENT LICENSE IS PROVISIONAL, IDENTIFY THE CORRECTIVE ACTIONS

Not applicable.

II. IDENTIFY THE AREAS OBSERVED ON THE VISIT:

Hand in Hand operates multiple programs throughout the community and has been in operation since 2001 or for 24 years. Specifically, Hand in Hand - Echo Hill is located inside Echo Hill Elementary School which is part of the Linn Mar Community School District. Hand in Hand – Echo Hill has been in operation since August, 2021. Hand in Hand - Echo Hill is a profit program which operates year-round Monday through Friday 6:30am to 6:00pm. The program serves school-age children. Current enrollment is 106.

Hand in Hand multi-site owner/director is Kathy Kolthoff. Ms. Kolthoff holds a degree in Early Childhood Education and Business Management. Ms. Kolthoff has achieved the National Administrators Credential (NAC) and is a member of National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Hand in Hand multi-site management personnel includes Ms. Sara Swestka who has been with Hand in Hand for over 20 years. Ms. Swestka holds her Bachelor of Art Degree in Elementary Education and Early Childhood Education. Ms. Swestka has many years of experience working with children, continues to participate in much child development related training, and has achieved NAC. Hand in Hand multi-site curriculum specialist Katie Simmons has been with Hand in Hand for over 19 years, and specifically, been part of the management team since 2011. Ms. Simmons has an AA degree in early childhood education, has much experience working with children, and continues to participate in child development related training. Hand in Hand multi site school- age coordinators are Molly Luedeman and Lindsey DeDecker. Ms. Luedeman has an early childhood education administration degree, has been employed with Hand in Hand for several years, has much experience working with children and continues to participate in much child development related training. Ms. DeDecker has been employed with Hand in Hand for several years, has much experience working with children and continues to participate in much child development related training. Site specific on-site supervisor of Hand in Hand -Echo Hill is Bailey Meza. Ms. Meza qualified for the on-site supervisor position in August, 2021. Ms. Meza has been employed with Hand in Hand for several years, has experience working with children and continues to participate in much child development related training.

On 1/13/2025, program space was observed.

III. IDENTIFY THE OBSERVED STRENGTHS OF THE CENTER:

Hand in Hand offers a variety of early learning/childcare programming options to help meet the needs of children and families in the community.

The year 2025 marks Hand in Hand's 24th year of providing childcare and early learning services to children and their families throughout the community. Congratulations on celebrating 24 years! Specifically, Hand in Hand - Echo Hill will be in their 4th year of operation during 2025.

The goals and purpose of Hand in Hand is to "…guide all children with experience that will help them to grow in independence by meeting and solving problems and feeling secure with other children and adults...to provide a safe, healthy, and loving environment for children and to meet the physical, mental, emotional and social needs of the children..."

Hand in Hand has the following website for families and the community to learn more about their programs: http://handinhandinc.com/.

Hand in Hand has a history of participating in quality initiatives including local quality initiatives. Management has talked about future goals related to IQ4K, PBIS and possible CACFP. In 2022, Hand in Hand received a "Certificate of Appreciation" from the Linn Mar Community School District to certify that Hand in Hand made a significant and important contribution to Linn Mar High School and is held in the highest esteem as a member of their school community.

Founding original owner Ms. Kolthoff is a local entrepreneur invested in the local and surrounding communities. Ownership and management of Hand in Hand has remained consistent. This includes owner Ms. Kolthoff, management personnel Ms. Swestka, curriculum specialist Ms. Simmons, school-age coordinator Ms. Luedeman, school-age coordinator Ms. DeDecker, and specific on-site supervisor Ms. Meza. Management is extremely organized, and in turn, the program operates smoothly. Hand in Hand has noteworthy systems of organization in place to help ensure administrative items are completed and maintained as required. Management is knowledgeable of licensing guidelines as well as their own policies and procedures. Management has achieved NAC. Hand in Hand programs continue to use a childcare management software tool to help with administrative items.

Management team continues to be mentors throughout the community as well as part of an online innovative national director social media group. Hand in Hand management team also continues to be part of a local task force known as "Building Community Childcare Solutions" which examines childcare needs and solutions. In 2021, Hand in Hand management team established an optional monthly employee wellness challenge to help focus on lowering stress and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. In 2022, Hand in Hand undertook the immense task of establishing a company-wide unique online process for staff onboarding, training, and continuous transfer of knowledge. This then brought about an updating of the company's Employee Manual and a new Lead Teacher Manual both of which have become part of the company's online staff onboarding program. In 2023, management further enhanced hiring practices to include a 2-week new staff onboarding, seasoned-new staff mentorship, and program created educational videos. In 2023, Hand in Hand also added 3 new Marion Independent Community School District school-age childcare locations as well as an additional school-age coordinator position.

Since the last monitoring visit, Hand in Hand - Echo Hill has retained seasoned employees as well as hired a few new ones. Ms. Menza talked about this being her 4th year in the OSS role and how she has "...the best children, families and staff...our team of staff get along very well with one another...". Management encourages staff to pursue professional goals through the use of mentoring/shadowing experiences, the Wages program, and one-on-one management-staff meetings. Hand in Hand hosts semiannual lead staff meetings (e.g. welcoming idea generation, tapping into specific staff/room expertise, collective linking of resources), has an annual staff requirements calendar book (e.g. necessary forms, materials) and sponsors quarterly employee newsletters (e.g. helpful policy reminders, classroom tips, teacher resources). Management continues to support employees through an accrued point system rewarding staff for their daily dedication, providing fun staff incentives (e.g. childcare, snack cart, social media contests, wellness challenges, birthday acknowledgement), and offering staff the ability to collaborate among all Hand in Hand sites to share materials, curriculum, joys, challenges, and ideas/planning. In 2023, management established the staff "score card" with a weighted checklist for data driven monetary rewards and a "Four-Walls, Four-Corners" tool encouraging overall classroom/building aesthetics. In 2023, management further assisted each staff in establishing a quarterly training "Roadmap" to pursue personal trainings for specific classroom needs/resources as well as collective trainings to support the center as a whole. Documentation indicates employees complete annual professional growth training that exceeds Iowa Code requirements.

Hand in Hand programs have emergency plans, policies, and procedures in place which are annually reviewed and updated as needed. Hand in Hand sites have successfully navigated through the 2019 winter Polar Vortex, 2019 health (covid-19) pandemic, 8/10/20 Derecho Storm, 2021 food supply issues, 2022 infant formula shortages, 2023 air quality alerts and 7/19/24 global technology outage. In 2023, Hand in Hand began monthly employee safety plan reviews focusing on a series of topics including first-aid, housekeeping, ergonomics, proper lifting, workplace violence, and slips, trips and falls.

Hand in Hand - Echo Hill has a collaborative partnership with the school district. The school building and grounds are well maintained. School custodial staff, school administration, school nurse, and school food service personnel help ensure the children's space is sanitary and hazard free each day. The school kitchen is inspected at least annually by the health department. There is an AED on-site. The program has regular access to the school gymnasium for large gross motor activities. Since the last review, a re-organization of supplies was observed to have occurred. Ms. Meza discussed the favorable relationship their program has with the school.

Hand in Hand - Echo Hill continues efforts at optimal communication between the program/staff and families. The program has an organized parent-staff/program information center, offers regular program newsletters, utilizes technological communication resources, and supports family programming activities. Hand in Hand offers a "...daily curriculum of exciting, challenging activities for children...theme-based curriculum filled with fun activities to help fine tune critical literacy skills with activity like reading aloud and writing stories..." Curriculum includes a reading incentive program called "Reading Rainbow" and homework time/assistance. Hand in Hand also supports a character counts curriculum offering

experiences in teamwork, sportsmanship, leadership and creativity. Summer camp 2025 school-age planning is currently underway and will include a Junior Summer Camp experience, field trips, theme based activities, and in-house events.

Hand in Hand collaborates well with community partners including local school districts, CCR&R, local businesses, health professionals and other childcare owners/directors (locally and nationally). Hand in Hand continues to utilize their own in-house, multi-site curriculum leader Katie Simmons.

Hand in Hand programs support a “safe shoe” policy to encourage ease of play.

Each child is engaged in a daily health check upon arrival for early detection of apparent illness, communicable disease, or unusual condition or behavior which may adversely affect the child or the group. The program has policies and procedures in place for hand washing, cleaning, disinfecting, and sanitizing.

On the day of the monitoring visit, staff were observed warmly greeting children and families as they arrived for a full-day of no-school childcare. Activities observed were many (e.g. self-selected activities, small group activities, indoor large gross motor play). Children had access to an array of materials (e.g. crafts, board games, large gross motor items, card games, imaginative play supplies, building materials, books) that encouraged creativity, innovation and problem-solving. Staff provided a companionable presence while allowing children to have choice in their programming experiences. During indoor large gross motor play, a staff was observed providing one child with minor first-aid in the form of comfort and an ice pack. Routine transitions (e.g. clean-up activities, restroom breaks, face-to-name checks, snack rituals) worked smoothly into the program's welcoming and cooperative environment. Staff were overheard providing children with meaningful discussion, offering positive redirection when needed, and encouraging the use of social graces. Children responded well to staff and appeared to be truly enjoying their day.

IV. IDENTIFY THE ASPECTS OF OPERATION THAT FALL BELOW THE STANDARDS REVIEWED:

None noted.

V. SPECIAL NOTES/RECOMMENDATIONS:

A full license is issued. Thank you for the visit.

*Note: If you are the Child Care Center Director and you feel something is unclear or unjustly cited, please contact your DHS Licensing Consultant to discuss the issue. The child care director may also send a response which will be placed in the licensing file.

*Note: If you are a member of the general public, there may be additional information contained in the public file. You may contact the DHS Licensing Consultant to inquire.