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

Name of Center: Creekside Forest School **Enrollment:** 28 **License ID No. (Reapplications)** 51312

Street: 5300 Otis Rd SE **City:** Cedar Rapids Iowa **Zip** 52403 **County:** Linn

Mailing Address: 5300 Otis Rd SE, Cedar Rapids, IA, 52403

Director's Name: Kelli Kennon-Lane **Phone Number:** 319-362-0664

On-Site Supervisor(s): Morgan Bryant, Nicole Upchurch **E-Mail:** naturecenter@indiancreeknaturecenter.org

Date(s) of Visit: 05-11-2023

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: 12-16-2020

Comments :

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

Financial Type: Profit X Non-Profit NA

Accredition: Accredited NAEYC NSACA Other X NA

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

Get-Well Evening Care Special Needs

SCHEDULE: Year-round X School-Year Summer Only

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

LICENSE CAPACITY	Infants	2 Years	Preschool	School-Age	Capacity
General			28		28
Summer					0

QRS Rating: 2

RECOMMENDATION FOR LICENSE:	
X	**FULL** license from 05-01-2023 to 05-01-2025
	PROVISIONAL license from
	DENIAL of initial application
	SUSPENSION of license
	REVOCATION of license

Licensing Consultant: Amy Lyons **Date:** 06-06-2023

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

Not applicable.

II. IDENTIFY THE AREAS OBSERVED ON THE VISIT:

Creekside Forest School commenced operations on 5/25/2021. The program is located at the Indian Creek Nature Center. Creekside Forest School is a nature-based, independent preschool program offered to preschool-age children. This preschool operates school-year only, offering two half-day preschool sessions each day Tuesday through Friday. At the time of this visit, enrollment is 28.

Director of Creekside Forest School is Kelli Kennon-Lane. Ms. Kennon-Lane oversees all educational programming at the Indian Creek Nature Center, leads the Creekside Forest School, and supports the Nature Center's mission to create champions of nature through education and inspiration. Ms. Kennon-Lane has a graduate degree in public education, several years experience working with children and continues to participate in much child development related training. On-site supervisors are Nicole Upchurch and Morgan Bryant. Ms. Upchurch is a graduate of the Iowa Master Naturalist program. Ms. Upchurch has experience instructing K-6 Spanish, Songwriting/Ukulele and Outdoor Education. Ms. Upchurch has several years experience working with children and continues to participate in much child development related training. Ms. Bryant has a degree in Therapeutic Recreation. Ms. Bryant has experiences working in a youth behavioral hospital unit and experiences with the Iowa State Extension. Ms. Bryant has several years experience working with children and continues to participate in much child development related training.

On 5/11/2023, program space was observed.

III. IDENTIFY THE OBSERVED STRENGTHS OF THE CENTER:

Creekside Forest School is a nature-based preschool program located at the Indian Creek Nature Center in Linn County. The program's mission is to create "...Champions of Nature in an outdoor learning environment that educates the whole child through play-based learning..." In September 2023, Creekside Forest School will be celebrating the start of their 3rd year of operations providing a nature based preschool experience to families throughout the community. Congratulations!

Creekside Forest School's mission is "...to create Champions of Nature in an outdoor learning environment that educates the whole child through play-based learning..."

Creekside Forest School has the following website for persons to learn more about their program: https://indiancreeknaturecenter.org/creekside-forest-school/. The program also sponsors a blog https://indiancreeknaturecenter.org/about-us/our-blog/.

Creekside Forest School participates in quality initiatives. Creekside Forest School achieved a QRS 2-Star. Creekside Forest School is a member of the Natural Start Alliance, American Forest Kindergarten Association, and Iowa AEYC. Ms. Kennon-Lane discussed future goals related to a Nature Based Environmental Rating Scale (NABERS) and possible accreditation.

This year 2023 marks the Indian Creek Nature Center's 50th year of creating Champions of Nature! Year-long celebration

events include a special proclamation with music and live auction as well as a first ever BioBlitz event involving the community in efforts to document as many living things as possible in a certain area. Creekside Forest School is a non-profit program which operates under a Board of Directors. Creekside Forest School has access to a variety of Indian Creek Nature Center staff including executive director, director of land stewardship, trail manager, farm manager, naturalists, volunteer coordinator, office administrators, guest services associates, and custodial staff. Creekside Forest School collaborates well with these persons in efforts to help ensure the preschool is sanitary and hazard free each day.

Ownership, management, and directorship of Creekside Forest School remain consistent and are professional - experienced and educated. This includes director Kelli Kennon-Lane, on-site supervisor Nicole Upchurch, and on-site supervisor Morgan Bryant. Ms. Kennon-Lane is extremely organized, and in turn, the program operates smoothly. Management has established systems of organization in place to help ensure administrative items are completed and maintained as required. Ms. Kennon-Lane is knowledgeable of licensing regulations as well as their center's own policies and procedures. Since commencing operations, the program continues to retain their seasoned team of employees. Evidence supports staff participate in annual training that exceeds licensing requirements. One staff is a certified "Iowa Master Naturalist". Ms. Kennon-Lane discussed being proud of their team of preschool employees who bring so many ideas, skills, and experiences to each day's events. Ms. Kennon-Lane talked about how Creekside Forest School is an environment where teachers flourish as well as want to stay and retire. Ms. Kennon-Lane discussed the program's full enrollment and waiting list. Ms. Kennon-Lane acknowledged "...creating a school here for families that don't want to leave...that's so magical families want the experiences through the elementary years..." Future goals include various ideas for growth to increase programming and accommodate additional waiting families as well as increase areas of outdoor shade.

Building and grounds are well-maintained. Amazing Space is Indian Creek Nature Center’s building and campus that opened in September of 2016 and will be celebrating a 7 year anniversary. Amazing Space is where the Creekside Forest School indoor classroom is located. Amazing Space is not only beautiful, it’s one of the most environmentally sustainable buildings in the country. In 2019, Amazing Space achieved Living Building Challenge Petal Certification – a rigorous certification that is years beyond LEED in providing a measure of true sustainability. The Creekside Forest School outdoor classroom includes Hazelnut Hideaway a certified in 2017 and recertified in 2020 Nature Explore Classroom. Each element of Hazelnut Hideaway was designed to fit the overall space and reflect a component of nature including the stump spiral and live edge balance beam in Adventurescape, the huts made of living willow, the performance stage made of tree cookies, and materials for block and structure building. Hazelnut Hideaway is an evolving project that embraces the seasons and program's mission. In the Natural Art area, the loom incorporates the weaving of natural grasses that are harvested on site, and the Mud Kitchen table uses earth and wood for creative play. Landforms in the shape of a snake and a turtle were created using earth and were seeded for green-scaping.

Creekside Forest School has a daily schedule that varies with the rhythms of the season, student interest, and weather conditions. The program encourages children to connect with their natural environment through activities and explorations that are centered on what is happening seasonally. Children spend each preschool session outdoors unless there is inclement weather. The program has adopted the Emergent Curriculum and the Flow Learning Sequence as their approach to teaching and learning. Children have unique opportunities including catching a bullfrog, bird watching (e.g. nest creation, eggs hatching, first flights), tree climbing, building forts, and catching a tadpole to observe the life cycle in action from a classroom aquarium over several weeks before releasing the critter back into the wetland. Creekside Forest School is able to offer additional experiences based upon their location within the Indian Creek Nature Center. For instance, the preschool has access to nature trails, plant identification lessons, creek-stomping experiences, special events (e.g. monarch butterflies, migrating oriole bird feeder watching), on-site critters, and fresh foods from the Etzel Sugar Grove Farm (the nature center's farm).

The program supports a healthy lifestyle including encouraging composting of food items when needed as well as paper products on-site. Items used on-site are eco-friendly. Preschool classroom furnishings include tree trunk stools made from trees lost to the 8/10/20 Derecho Storm.

Creekside Forest School continues efforts at optimal communication between the program/staff and families. The program has organized parent-staff/program information centers, offers regular program newsletters, utilizes technological communication resources, and supports family programming activities. Family events include open houses, family nights, parent/program conferences, preschool pen pal experiences, expert grandparent bird caller visit, and encouragement of family visitors.

Creekside Forest School has emergency plans, policies, and procedures in place which are annually reviewed and updated as needed. Their emergency preparedness policies and procedures do include extensive plans for inclement weather on trails as well as trail emergency plan.

Creekside Forest School collaborates well with many community partners including CCR&R, health professionals, local school districts, the retirement community, local colleges (e.g. interns) and local businesses. The program does receive support from many volunteers and outreach efforts. Ms. Kennon-Lane discussed how the program's 400 volunteers unselfishly offer their unique skills and assistance to help the Indian Creek Nature Center and Creekside Forest School

succeed. Donations have helped the preschool obtain a mud kitchen, child-size picnic tables, storage cabinets, a sand and water table, tarps, balls, ropes, gross motor play tools, a big parachute, measuring tapes, wool socks, backpack coolers, a sled, sunscreen, bug spray, rugs, pillows, snack tools, a puppet theater, art easels and more. The program continues to apply for and receive grants including a grant to obtain Patagonia outdoor protective gear (e.g. snow gear, rain gear, sun hats, water bottles with slings) for each child while at the preschool to help decrease barriers that may impact a child's ability to learn outdoors in all seasons. Through additional grant funds, the program was also able to obtain an electric school bus that will be able to accommodate 24 students.

Staff engage each child 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. Staff were observed encouraging and engaging in hand washing at all levels. Staff encouraged children to "catch coughs" and "catch sneezes" in elbows. Staff discussed the program's cleaning, disinfecting, and sanitizing policies and procedures.

On the day of the monitoring visit, staff were nurturing and attentive to the children's needs. Staff were observed warmly greeting families and children upon arrival. Rollie pollies, plants, birds, butterflies, rocks, and a viewing of sprouting seeds from previous preschool sessions were being enjoyed by children as they gathered in the meadow to begin their preschool day. Activities observed were many including a trail hike to the outdoor amphitheater for a picnic snack that included fresh plums and a nature based storybook reading. It was noted that as teachers and children arrived to the outdoor amphitheater, early hikers greeted those following with an animal call (e.g. wolf howl) discussing how their group is similar to a wolf pack staying strong by staying together in nature calling to one another. Children appeared to be greatly enjoying the animal nature call experience as eventually all arrived and joined in! After snack, children engaged in nature excursion activities based upon their interests and what was actively happening in nature around them. Activities included peaking into a bird's nest they had found a few days prior as well as tree climbing and plant identification discussions. Staff provided a companionable presence allowing children to have many choices in their play experiences. Routine transitions (e.g. clean up activities, snack rituals) worked smoothly into the program's welcoming and cooperative play environment. Throughout the program area, staff were overheard providing children with many words of encouragement and engaging children in much meaningful discussion. Children were overheard verbally expressing joy with the day's events and responded well to staff.

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.