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

**Name of Center:** Hand in Hand-35th Avenue **Enrollment:** 150 **License ID No. (Reapplications)** 42652

**Street:** 3524 35th Ave **City:** Marion Iowa **Zip** 52302 **County:** Linn

**Mailing Address:** 3524 35th Ave, Marion, IA, 52302

**Director's Name:** Kathy Kolthoff **Phone Number:** 319-373-3630

**On-Site Supervisor(s):** Molly Luedeman, Brooke Holub **E-Mail:** hih@handinhandinc.com

**Date(s) of Visit:** 02-15-2024

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

**LICENSING VISITS**

**New Application** X **Re-Application** **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:** 01-19-2023

**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:** X Infants (0-23 mo.) X 2 Years X 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 | 26 | 13 | 80 | 30 | 149 |
| Summer | | | | | 0 |

**QRS Rating:** 4

| RECOMMENDATION FOR LICENSE: | |
|---|---|
| X | **FULL** license from 04-01-2024 to 04-01-2026 |
| | **PROVISIONAL** license from |
| | **DENIAL** of initial application |
| | **SUSPENSION** of license |
| | **REVOCATION** of license |

**Licensing Consultant:** Amy Lyons **Date:** 02-27-2024

**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 23 years. Specifically, Hand in Hand - 35th Avenue has been in operation since 2014. Hand in Hand - 35th Avenue is a profit program which operates year-round Monday through Friday 6:30am to 6:00pm. The program serves children age infant through school-age. Hand in Hand - 35th Avenue includes a statewide voluntary 4-year-old preschool program in collaboration with the Linn Mar School District. Current enrollment is 150.

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 multisite curriculum specialist Katie Simmons has been with Hand in Hand for over 18 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 Katie Little and Katie Marshall. Ms. Little has been with Hand in Hand since December, 2017. Ms. Little has a BA degree in nursing, an AA degree in marketing management, several years experience working with children, and continues to participate in much child development related training. Ms. Marshall has been with Hand in Hand since 2016. Ms. Marshall has a BA degree in early childhood education, has several years experience working with children and continues to participate in much child development related training. Site specific on-site supervisors of Hand in Hand - 35th Avenue are Molly Luedeman and Brooke Holub. Ms. Luedeman 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. Holub has been an on-site supervisor of Hand in Hand since May 2022. Ms. Holub has over 6 years experience working with children and continue to participate in much child development related training.

On 2/15/2024, 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 2024 marks Hand in Hand's 23rd year of providing childcare and early learning services to children and their families throughout the community. Congratulations on celebrating 23 years! Specifically, Hand in Hand - 35th Avenue will be in their 10th year of operation during 2024.

The philosophy of Hand in Hand is to "…understand your needs and your child's needs and offer convenient options....that go way beyond after school needs...offers a variety of activities that promote life skills such as teamwork, sportsmanship,

creativity, and leadership..."

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. Hand in Hand - 35th Avenue has a QRS 4-Star. 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. Little, school-age coordinator Ms. Marshall and specific on-site supervisors Ms. Luedeman and Ms. Holub. 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. Since the last review, the program began using a new childcare management software tool to help with administrative items (e.g. LineLeader).

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 - 35th Avenue has retained seasoned staff as well as hired some new staff. Staff reported celebrating 13 years, 10 years, 5 years and 3 years of employment with Hand in Hand. In the entryway, a staff display celebrating attendance and acknowledging the "Teacher of the Month" was observed! One staff discussed being enrolled in the TEACH program and having a valued partnership with another local childcare. 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. Ms. Simmons discussed the investment Hand in Hand makes in their employees which is directly related to quality as well as staff longevity and "...not just for IQ4K but because it's right..."

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 2008 Linn County flood, 2019 winter Polar Vortex, 2019 health (covid-19) pandemic, 8/10/20 Derecho Storm, 2021 food supply issues, 2022 infant formula shortages and 2023 air quality alerts. 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 - 35th Avenue 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. Family programming activities include open houses, parent/program conferences, holiday parties, themed events, preschool graduation ceremony, on-site guest events (e.g. Blank Park Zoo, Humane Society, fire department, police department), graduate luncheon, muffins with mom, donuts with dad, and giving back community service projects. Since the last review a new board noting the program's core values including growth, excellence and kindness was established.

Building and grounds are well-maintained. Upon entering the building, a new handmade childcare sign was observed above the administrative area as well as a fresh coat of paint. The kitchen is spacious, sanitary and organized. The program cook has been with Hand in Hand since September 2020. The cook talked about her prior culinary experience expressing most joy in being able to cook for children. Classrooms continue to be arranged in a thoughtful manner with learning at the forefront. Each child has their own designated area celebrating each's accomplishments (e.g. artwork, milestone work, ice cube paintings, safari animal prints, If Snow Came Down in Colors, my little groundhog footprint)! Materials are accessible to children. Staff were observed communicating with children verbally, using picture cues, and through sign language. Curriculum is inclusive including a combination of teacher inspired ideas and academic based learning strategies (e.g. individualized Handwriting Without Tears, intense kindergarten readiness, Everyday Mathematics, A Little Spot of Emotion and Feeling, Hand in Hand's "We are safe. We are kind. We are workers."). Curriculum additionally incorporates on-site guest speaker events, themed days, extra outside enrichments (e.g. Kiddy Keys, Dance Academy) and sentimental memory book for families as each child graduates into the next classroom. Ms. Luedeman and staff throughout the classrooms discussed the many recent areas of study including the anaconda project study, the building and eruption of an on-site volcano, a trip to Egypt with clever staff created mummy, and space exploration. Ms. Luedeman also talked about the preparations that are underway for the Academy Program's first ever 2024 Science Fair!

Hand in Hand - 35th Avenue collaborates well with community partners including local school districts, early access persons, CCR&R, local businesses, and health professionals. Hand in Hand - 35th Avenue continues their specific partnership with the Linn Mar School District in order to provide a statewide 4-year-old voluntary classroom. Hand in Hand does provide some transportation to and from their preschool program. Management discussed utilizing CART and AEA services when needed in partnership with their own in-house, multi-site curriculum leader Katie Simmons.

The infant room has a “no shoe” policy and was observed supporting safe sleep practices.

Management discussed how 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. Hand in Hand has policies and procedures in place for hand washing, diapering, cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting. Staff were able to verbalize and engage in these processes. Cleaning checklists and daily sanitation reminders were observed to be posted in various areas of the center.

On the day of the monitoring visit, staff were nurturing and attentive to the children's needs. Areas of study throughout the classrooms included safari, valentines, friends, and rockets. Activities observed throughout the classrooms were many (e.g. infant cares, group discussion, center play experiences, large outdoor gross motor activities). Stepping into the 3yo room included an inspiring heart search, play dough making hearts, heart skilled crafts (e.g. cutting, pasting), I-Spy hearts, pipe cleaner heart magnets, and "A Little Spot of Love". Staff and children in the 4yo childcare room were observed during a group game of "who's hiding under the blanket". Throughout the classrooms, children had access to an array of materials (e.g. books, imaginative play options, sensory items, building materials, journaling, crafts) that encouraged innovative play. Staff provided a companionable presence allowing children to have many choices in their play experiences. Routine transitions (e.g. food service rituals, clean-up activities) worked smoothly into the program's welcoming and cooperative play environment. Staff were overheard providing children with many words of encouragement, utilizing positive redirection when needed and engaging children in much meaningful discussion. Children were engaged in activities, 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.