Health and Human Services

Iowa Department of Health And Human Services

CHILD CARE CENTER ANNUAL EVALUATION

Name of Center: Kinderhaus

Provider No.: 31014

Address: 701 Iowa AVE, Decorah, IA, 52101

County: Winneshiek

Director's Name: Mary McDonald

On-Site Supervisor: Lydia Haye and Tamie Holzer

Phone Number: 5633797303

E-Mail: gracie@kinderhausdecorah.com

HHS Visit Date: 10/07/2026

Licensing Period: 11/01/2025 to 11/01/2027

Fire Inspection:

Date Inspected: 02/13/2026

Comments:

Report Visit Type:

- [ ] PTO
- [X] Licensing Visit
- [ ] Drop In
- [ ] Administrative Change

License Type:

- [X] Full
- [ ] Provisional

Quality initiative:

Quality Rating: 1

- [ ] Accrediation

Program Duration:

- [ ] Year-Round
- [X] School Year
- [ ] Summer Only

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HOURS:	*Year-round*	*School-Year*	*Summer Only*
Sunday			
Monday		7:45 AM to 4:00 PM	
Tuesday		7:45 AM to 4:00 PM	
Wednesday		7:45 AM to 4:00 PM	
Thursday		7:45 AM to 4:00 PM	
Friday			
Saturday			

Program Population Served:

- [ ] Infant(0-<24 Months)
- [ ] Toddler
- [X] PreSchool
- [X] School Age
- [ ] All Ages

LICENSE CAPACITY	Infants	2 Years	Preschool	School-Aged	Capacity
General	0	0	13	2	15
Summer					0

1. Basic Overview

On 10/07/26 I made an unannounced off year licensing visit to Kinderhaus in Decorah. I met with Mary McDonald, the director. She started in August 2025 and was the assistant director last year. She has a BA in math and an MA in educational leadership and political studies. Lydia Hayes is an on-site supervisor and is currently the approved lead teacher for the voluntary preschool class until they can find a new one. Ms. Hayes started in August 2021 and she has a BA in elementary education. Tamie Holzer is an on-site supervisor. Asha Merritt is a new teacher this year. The program has four teachers and four work study students.

Kinderhaus is in Good Shepherd Church, but it is not affiliated with the church. The program was started by a group of parents who were looking for an alternative to preschool. The Kinderhaus program is based on the Waldorf educational model, as well as the European outdoor model of education. The Waldorf philosophy grew out of Germany in 1919. Its focus is to preserve the essence of childhood. They use imagination and play and strive not to over intellectualize the child. A good portion of each session is spent outdoors with opportunities to explore and learn in an outdoor setting. The program promotes a strong sense of community, reverence and respect, art, song, movement and oral storytelling. Math and academics are woven into storytelling. There is a bridge between preschool and home so the preschool has an extended family feeling. The emphasis is on natural and unformed toys so the children use their imaginations.

The program partners with the Decorah School district to provide the voluntary four-year-old preschool program. The program operates Monday through Thursday from 8:15 am until 3:15 pm. The preschool hours for the voluntary preschool program are 8:15-11:45 am. They offer afternoon care with programming from 11:45 am until 3:15 pm. Children can arrive as early as 7:45 am they have afterschool care available from 3:15-4:00 pm. Parents can choose to send their children two days, three days or five days. There are 13 children enrolled, but they are limited to 15 children each day. The program

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serves children aged three through six-years-old.

As mentioned earlier, the program primarily operates outside, but they also have a room in the church. The children start their day in the inside classroom. It is used during the core class if weather or another cause does not permit them to be outside. Windows provide natural lighting. Centers were arranged in a manner that allowed easy movement between activities, but it also allowed for clear supervision by staff members. Materials were in good condition. The materials are located at child level so they are easily accessible to the children.

The outside program area is naturalistic. It is fenced in using bamboo branches. There is an area of dirt the children can shovel in and use water to turn into mud. There is a sandbox, a small toys center (blocks, cars, hammers and nails), a digging hole/discovery center (shovels, rakes, magnifying glasses, nature items), reading and quiet activities (books, braiding, painting), gross motor center (wagons, bags, balls, jump ropes, hula hoops), music center, art center, imaginative play center (dolls, dramatic play items), a logs and obstacle course center (logs, stumps, rocks) manipulatives (beading and lacing) and library. There is a grassy area for circle time. Trees and two tarps are available for shade.

There was a phone and emergency numbers with the center's address and phone number posted inside. Staff members also carry a track phone while outside and communicate with two-way radios. Emergency fire and tornado procedures and evacuation diagrams were posted by the main program door and outdoor exit inside the indoor classroom. A daily schedule was posted and a lesson plan was available for review.

There are two sinks in the classroom and procedures were posted. There is a bathroom in the hallway. It has one toilet and one sink. Handwashing procedures were posted. There are additional bathrooms in the church the children can use if necessary.

Cots are used to nap for the children who utilize the extended day program.

For the voluntary four-year-old preschool program the teachers use the Creative Curriculum and Waldorf philosophy to create lesson plans. Lesson plans are prepared jointly by all teachers. Activities are based on themes. The length of the theme is determined by the interest level of the children. Themes are typically adapted around the season. Ms. Hayes will complete Creative Curriculum GOLD assessments on each child. The program follows the Iowa Early Learning Standards as part of the voluntary preschool program.

Teachers make home visits for each family participating in the four-year-old voluntary preschool program prior to the beginning of the school year.

The children take river walks every Tuesday and Thursday.

I reviewed documentation of monthly fire and tornado drills. I reviewed documentation of outdoor classroom inspections. The radon test was completed in October 2025 and is good for five years because the program does not have a radon mitigation system. Results were within EPA guidelines. The church is completely geothermal so fuel burning inspections are not necessary. A carbon dioxide detector is on site in the classroom. Outlets were protected. The fire marshal inspection occurred on 02/13/26.

The program is not on the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) but follows the guidelines. The center provides snacks. Parents pay a snack fee twice each year (September and January) to assist with the expense of providing the children with all-natural, primarily organic, homemade snacks. The Waldorf philosophy believes in rhythm and consistency. There is a snack assigned to each day of the week and the snack calendar remains the same all year. The snack menu was posted. The children who stay for the extended day program bring their own lunches. They are checked to make sure the CACFP guidelines are followed. If the children stay for extended care, they also bring their own afternoon snack.

The children eat snacks and lunch inside the classroom. There is water available to the children outside throughout the day.

The center uses Hydrogen Peroxide to sanitize the food tables.

Dishes are washed using a dishwasher in the church kitchen.

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There is a refrigerator in the kitchen area of the classroom. There was not a thermometer in the freezer and the thermometer in the refrigerated area was broken. Ms. McDonald has ordered new thermometers. The program is having problems with the refrigerator tripping the breaker because it is old. They currently have to run an extension cord through the classroom to plug it in to an outlet away from the kitchen. The refrigerator is also old and unstable/wobbly. Snacks are made fresh each morning. Food items are stored according to NHSPS guidelines.

The parent information is located on a bulletin board inside the entrance near the indoors classroom. The mandatory reporter, childcare consultant and the handbook availability were posted. The license was conspicuously hung. A no-smoking sign was posted at the entrance.

2. Identify Observed Strengths of the program

This program provides a unique and fun outdoor learning experience for children. Staff members are patient and calm while also showing enthusiasm for what they are teaching. They allow children the opportunity to explore and learn through play while using nature to do it. On the day of my visit, some of the children were threading leaves. Staff members have great communication and teamwork with one another. They sing during transitions. Staff members modeled good manners and thanked the children for using good manners. Staff members counted the children several times. They offered the children choices and were actively engaged in activities with the children. They encouraged children to use their imaginations. Ms. Hayes communicates with children that it is okay to get there feelings out but they cannot direct them toward other children. The children were laughing, playing, and enjoying their time at the program.

Ms. McDonald states they recently had an emergency preparedness meeting to update plans and they would like to have an active shooter training.

Ms. McDonald states the program has Luther College work study students.

Ms. McDonald states the program receives community support. Staff members have been supportive since Gracie Platt left the program.

Ms. McDonald states the board is mostly made up of former parents.

Ms. McDonald states the parents want to support one another. They get together outside of school.

Ms. Hayes states the program has festivals three times each year for the parents to attend. The festivals are in the fall, at Christmas and in the spring.

Ms. McDonald states they are trying to partner with Red Oak Outdoor School in Decorah. It serves children who are five years old and older and meet one day each week. Ms. McDonald states since they do not have class on Friday, they would like to partner with the program to share staff members and provide the option for a pseudo five day per week program.

Ms. McDonald states the time they spend outside is great. The Waldorf curriculum in general; the learning experience outside allows children to freely explore. She states they are unique. They start with play-based learning and add in teaching letters and other lessons.

Ms. McDonald states they have two fundraising events each year. They have a concert in the spring and they have an ice cream booth at Nordic Fest during the summer.

The program uses the Brightwheel app to share pictures and for parents to pay their tuition. They primarily communicate with the parents through text or email.

The program is flexible for parents. They try to be flexible because they realize families have different needs and wants.

The children spend a lot of time outside and the emphasis they place on outdoor activity and imaginative play is beneficial. They do not put all their emphasis on academics. They take walks every Tuesday and Thursday to the river where they roll down the hills, play in the woods, climb trees and throw sticks in the water.

They provide a unique learning opportunity to children. The program promotes the mental, emotional and physical development of the children through outside play.

The families can receive financial assistance through HAWC (state funding for income qualifying three-year-olds), Child Care Assistance or a KinderGrant (an in-house grant for qualifying families).

The program has weekly staff meetings every Wednesday morning.

3. Identify the aspects that fall below the standard

There are no violations.

4. Any corrective action plans, provisional license, and safety plans-steps to get into compliance

N/A

5. Special Notes/Recommendations

A full license is issued for the remainder of the licensing period. All HHS licensing standards and procedures must be maintained during the renewal period.

I have determined that the center would benefit from the Growing Iowa Funds to meet HHS licensing standards, Health and Safety Policies and Implementation. The program needs a new refrigerator. Their current refrigerator continually triggers the building breaker box. The program currently must use an extension cord to plug the refrigerator in to an outlet not near the kitchen. It is very old and unstable. When I opened the door to look for thermometers the refrigerator was very wobbly. A new refrigerator would provide a safer environment for the children.

I believe as the childcare licensing consultant, this program does qualify for Growing Iowa funds to meet these regulatory requirements.

Targeted Assessment: Behavior Management:
I discussed with Ms. McDonald her oversight of behavior management related to helping childcare staff: 1) Understand expectations, 2) managing frustrations, 3) monitor performance. Ms. McDonald states they discuss students and concerns at least once each week during staff meetings. As a standard practice, they have staff above ratio so that there is support and so a staff member can step away and take a break if necessary. They discuss that staff members need to recognize their own red flags or triggers. They can ask Ms. McDonald for help and she will step in. Afterwards, they debrief and discuss what led to the situation and how they can learn from it. If co-workers recognize frustration, they can ask a teacher if they need help and allow them to take a break. Ms. McDonald states one of the things they have discussed is how staff members can model using the “calming spaces” for children in the program, because that is how they teach everything. Staff members can use the calming space to show children it is okay and normal to use the space.

Ms. McDonald states to monitor the situation she has continuous conversations with staff members. If the children are in the classroom, she can hear them and if she is outside, she can look out the windows from the lobby. She states they “debrief” for everything. They discuss what happened, how they responded, and they provide feedback.

An administrative change is being made to name Mary McDonald as the director. Gracie Platt is no longer with the program.

Date: 10/12/2026

HHS Licensing Consultant: Becky Frost

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Non-compliance with any of the mandated regulatory requirements listed above may lead to the cancellation or revocation of your Child Care License. Please take steps necessary to completely address each of the violations noted above.

Child Care Resource and Referral is an excellent resource for providers to access training options and support in your area. You can reach Child Care Resource and Referral at **https://iowaccrr.org**.