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

Name of Center: Hand in Hand-35th Avenue **Enrollment:** 180 **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:** 319-373-3363

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

Date(s) of Visit: 04-10-2025

Licensing Visit X **Unannounced Visit** X **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: 03-20-2024

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: 1

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:** 05-21-2025

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 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 180.

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 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 supervisors of Hand in Hand - 35th Avenue are Brooke Holub and Jessica Sivertsen. 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. Ms. Sivertsen has been on on-site supervisor for Hand in Hand since 2022 having moved to the 35th location as on-site supervisor in February 2025. Ms. Sivertsen has experience working with children and continues to participate in child development related training.

On 4/10/2025, 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, Inc. - 35th Avenue will be in their 11th year of operations 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 and state quality initiatives. This site has achieved an IQ4K 1-Star. 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 supervisors. 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 also lead to 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 enhanced hiring practices for room lead staff including having new leads rotate shadowing seasoned teachers and hosted semiannual lead staff meetings, (e.g. welcoming idea generation, tapping into specific staff/room expertise, collective linking of resources). In 2023, Hand in Hand added 3 new Marion Independent Community School District school-age childcare locations as well as an additional school-age coordinator position. In 2025, Hand in Hand management will continue to build sustainable systems that stick, simplify processes, and create a culture of accountability that attracts, retains and inspires high-quality and talented employees.

Since the last monitoring visit, Hand in Hand - 35th Avenue has retained seasoned employees as well as hired a few new ones. Staff throughout the classrooms reported celebrating 6 years, 4 years and 2 days of employment with Hand in Hand. One staff shared how they felt their most successful moment over the last year was offering a child some special duties which lead to improved classroom dynamics. 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 - 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, local librarian), graduate luncheon, muffins with mom, donuts with dad, fundraisers (e.g. popcorn) and giving back community service projects. Ms. Simmons discussed improvements to newsletters to help increase the understanding of all the daily "magic" that goes into preparing the classroom for learning.

Building and grounds are well-maintained. The kitchen is sanitary and organized. The culinary chef is knowledgeable of food safety and sanitation. Since the last review, the program obtained a grant that helped them purchase and install a state-of-the art commercial-grade outdoor play area shade structure. Management talked about future goals of establishing a "Model Room" for training and quality purposes as well as "prop-theme boxes" for all children to experience quality curriculum.

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, "No one should feel invisible" celebrating individual beauty and masterpieces wall). 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. Simmons talked about many future goals related to curriculum.

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.

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. Cleaning checklists and reminders were observed in various areas of the center. The program has policies and procedures in place for food service, hand washing, diapering, cleaning, disinfecting, and sanitizing.

On the day of the monitoring visit, staff were nurturing and attentive to the children's needs. Areas of study throughout the classrooms included spring, down on the farm, butterflies and space. Activities observed throughout the classrooms were many (e.g. infant cares, group discussion, center play experiences, large outdoor gross motor activities). Children had access to an array of materials (e.g. books, imaginative play options, sensory items, building materials, journaling, crafts, letter people puppets) that encouraged innovative play. In the 3yo childcare room, a small group of children had an imaginative track meet happening with blocks and figurines. The 4yo room had bulldozers with dirt capturing children's attention. Some classrooms were overheard practicing songs for upcoming preschool graduation events. When perusing the 3yo preschool classroom, it was noted how any child could easily be launched into space with the cleverly thought out and planned activities offered to peak child interest (e.g. moon rocks, telescope observing, space ship imagination, moon sand, rockets). 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, engaging children in much meaningful discussion and fostering the use of social graces. 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:

Replace the toilet seat in the 2yo restroom and child proof the cabinets.

Ensure all diaper stations are free of clutter and ready for use (e.g. 2yo room).

Licensing strongly supports increasing privacy in the older children's restrooms with open toilets (e.g. 3yo restroom, 4yo restroom).

Repair areas of chipping drywall and paint.

The program's license remains in full status. 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.