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

Name of Center: Hand in Hand-Echo Hill **Enrollment:** 82 **License ID No. (Reapplications)** 51559

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

Mailing Address: 103 N Center Point RD, Hiawatha, IA, 52233

Director's Name: Kathy Kolthoff **Phone Number:** 319-200-4840

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

Date(s) of Visit: 02-20-2023

X **Licensing Visit** X **Unannounced Visit** **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: 11-22-2021

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 05-01-2023 to 05-01-2025
	PROVISIONAL license from
	DENIAL of initial application
	SUSPENSION of license
	REVOCATION of license

Licensing Consultant: Amy Lyons **Date:** 02-22-2023

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 for 21 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 commenced operations on 8/23/2021. Hand in Hand – Echo Hill is a profit program which operates year-round Monday through Friday 6:30am to 6:00pm. During the summer, full days of emergency closing (e.g. snow day), and some breaks (e.g. winter break, spring break), this program has the ability to combine with other Hand in Hand sites. Hand in Hand - Echo Hill serves school-age children. Current enrollment is 82.

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 17 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 multisite school-age coordinator is Katie Little. 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, over 6 years of 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 has been with Hand in hand for over 5 years, has been this site's on-site supervisor since August 2021 and continues to participate in much child development related training.

On 2/20/2023, 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 2023 marks Hand in Hand's 21st year of providing childcare and early learning services to children and their families throughout the community. Congratulations on celebrating 21 years! Specifically, Hand in Hand - Echo Hill will be in their 2nd year of operation during 2023.

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.

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, and specific on-site supervisor. 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 completed NAC training.

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.

Since the last monitoring visit, Hand in Hand - Echo Hill has retained two seasoned staff as well as hired several new staff. Ms. Meza acknowledged being employed with Hand in Hand for over 5 years with this being her second year as on-site supervisor of a school-age program. To help support employees, management has established an annual staff requirements calendar book with necessary forms, materials, and so on as well as a quarterly employee newsletter that includes helpful policy reminders and tips and classroom tools/resources. Management continues to support employees through an accrued point system rewarding staff for their daily dedication, the ability to collaborate among all Hand in Hand sites to share materials, curriculum, joys, challenges, and ideas/planning, and staff incentives (e.g. childcare, snack cart, social media contests, wellness challenges). Ms. Meza discussed having an outstanding team of employees at Echo Hill who work well together.

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.

Hand in Hand - Echo Hill has emergency plans, policies, and procedures in place which are annually reviewed and updated as needed. Hand in Hand sites have successfully navigated through historic local flooding (Flood of 2008), the 8/10/2020 Derecho Storm event and 2019 pandemic. 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 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 - Echo Hill continues to offer a character counts curriculum, a reading incentive program called "Reading Rainbow", and homework time/assistance. Staff reported 2023 summer camp enrollment is commencing for currently enrolled families set to open to the public shortly thereafter.

Hand in Hand collaborates well with many community partners including local small businesses, local school districts, health professionals, and other childcare owners/directors (locally and nationally).

Hand in Hand – Echo Hill supports 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 cleaning, disinfecting, and sanitizing. Cleaning supplies were observed onsite.

On the day of the monitoring visit, staff were nurturing and attentive to the children's needs. Activities observed were many (e.g. warm afterschool staff/child greeting, attendance, small group activities). Children had access to a plethora of materials (e.g. crafts, board games, large gross motor items, card games, imaginative play supplies, marble runs, 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. Routine transitions (e.g. clean-up activities,

snack rituals) worked smoothly into the program's welcoming and cooperative environment. Staff were overheard providing children with many words of encouragement, offering positive redirection when needed, and engaging children in meaningful discussion. Children responded well to staff and appeared to be truly enjoying their childcare experiences.

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

None noted.

V. SPECIAL NOTES/RECOMMENDATIONS:

Continue to ensure a monthly fire drill, a monthly tornado drill and a monthly outdoor play area inspection are conducted and documented each month as required. If the playground is not used in any particular month due to inclement weather, please note this on the monthly inspection form.

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.