

EveryChild California is happy to recognize Candace Leonard of Family YMCA of the Desert as the January 2019 recipient of the Circle of Excellence award. The Circle of Excellence is awarded to a member of EveryChild California who has supported the Associations' endeavors and has shown outstanding leadership within the ECE community.

Candace has worked in the Child Development field for over fifteen years. Her experience includes working as an administrative assistant, teacher's aide, teacher, site director and now as a program director. Currently, she oversees a non-profit program which serves over 700 children from ages 2 through 13 years old. Candace is passionate about working with young children, their families, and the community. She enjoys helping teachers improve their understanding of development and appropriate practice in order to better serve children and their families. Her special interests and skills are in classroom management, program administration and regulation maintenance. Candace first joined EveryChild California for access to quality trainings for herself as well as her staff. In recent years, she has fallen in love with the culture and community of EveryChild California and the great opportunities it brings for networking, personal and professional growth.

Congratulations Candace Leonard and thank you for taking time to answer our questions.

*What has been most rewarding about your career in early education so far?* The most rewarding so far, has been the opportunity to help mentor and guide new teachers. Lighting a fire in teachers, knowing that they are going to bring that spark back to the classroom, positively impacting the lives of so many children is very rewarding.

*If you could give advice to someone who is new in the administrative role, what would it be?* There is so much to learn and experience, but the first thing I would say is to focus on building relationships with everyone you work with. From state consultants to licensing analysts, teachers and families. Those relationships will help guide you on a daily basis. Also, networking is invaluable. We work in an amazing field, where seasoned administrators WANT to help you succeed – take advantage of them!

*What is your proudest accomplishment in your career?* I take pride in every little accomplishment, which is probably what makes me most proud. From raising quality start tier levels, to building positive relationships with families, obtaining grants, to starting new programs – they all build up to make me feel great pride in the work what I do. But, most of all, I am most proud when someone on my team learns something invaluable during a training or coaching session that I provide – the joy and pride from that keeps me going!