

Educational Service Unit 13 (ESU 13): Valuing Partnerships During Week of the Young Child

"I know I have a great child care provider in Bertie because when I kept Otis home for Christmas break, she cried the day I brought him back because she missed him that much!" Ali Manley is a working mom of Otis who is two. Otis goes to see "his" Bertie every day while Ali works for ESU 13 as a Services Coordinator for the Early Development Network (EDN).

The week of April 6th through April 12th is a nationally recognized week celebrating early learning, young children, their care and education professionals, families, and communities. All week long we intend to showcase the ways ESU 13 values partnerships with families and early childhood professionals in doing the work of caring and educating young children in our region throughout the year.

Ali's story is a wonderful example of partnership and of why we celebrate Week of the Young child at ESU 13. Ali is a homegrown mom, a product of the Panhandle. She was raised in Garden County, graduating from Chadron State College, marrying her beau Tanner, and eventually landing at ESU 13 to use her social work degree in supporting families of young children through EDN. Through her work at ESU 13, she has gained knowledge about what good partnerships look like for young children and she trusts her partnership in raising Otis with her child care provider Bert Sayaloune at Country Bear's Daycare in Scottsbluff.

Bert knows all about building trust with the children and families she serves. Because trust is important to her, she became a partner with Rooted In Relationships prior to the pandemic. Rooted in Relationships is an initiative focused on the social emotional wellbeing of young children. It is funded by Nebraska Children and Families Foundation to the Panhandle Partnership and ESU 13. Bert has been using the skills that she gained through the professional development and coaching she received to build a strong healthy relationship with Otis and his parents since he came to her as an infant.

Even Bert has partners in her work as the owner of her child care program. Working parents must trust their child care professionals because they are literally helping them not only raise their children, but in developing their brains during the most important time of their lives. Did you know that 90% of brain development happens between the time a child is born until they turn five? Ali knows this and it's why you as parents, grandparents and community members should care about how invested your partners are in raising the children of our communities.

Did you know that all licensed child care providers are required to have 12 hours of continuing education every year? Did you know that ESU 13 provides these professional development opportunities through a program called Early Learning Connections? The coordination of this program is funded through the Nebraska Department of Education and the Child Care Development Block Grant, to provide learning opportunities throughout the 11-county region. Programs who are caring for your children are growing by learning about early childhood

standards called Early Learning Guidelines and Safe with You practices to better care for your children and help their brains grow.

Another way that Ali knows that Bert is growing in her knowledge and sharing that every day with Otis, is because Bert's family home child care program is a Step 5 with Nebraska's quality rating system Step Up to Quality. A Step 5 is the highest rating that a child care program can get in Nebraska and is based on all types of quality indicators, including education, program practices, and observation of how she interacts with children, to name just a few. GO Country Bears!! In her partnership with Sixpence Sprouting Success, staff helped her to navigate the rating process and attain her Step 5. Sixpence supports programs with coaching and learning partner events that helped Bert put program processes into place like developmental screenings, use of a curriculum, and individualization for each of the children in her care, just to name a few. Sixpence also provided Bert with funding to help her set goals for her program's environment both inside her home and the play space in her backyard.

Otis is a lucky kid. All these partners his mom has found through direct or indirect intent, they support the people and the environments that help him grow. He will start preschool next year at Scottsbluff Public Schools, Bear Cub Preschool, and Ali will trust them to be a partner in raising Otis and developing his brain even further. She knows that all the practices, language and experiences he has gotten with Bertie will follow him to his new learning environment.

What a celebration! We have only mentioned a few of the ways that ESU 13 celebrates Week of the Young Child. Our partnerships go beyond this one story. Other kids and professionals like Otis and Bert are partners with our other early childhood programs like Head Start, Early Childhood Multi-tiered Systems of Support, and Coach Consulting. Community partners help us in this work including all our other community child care providers, University of Nebraska - Lincoln Extension's Early Childhood team, Western Nebraska Community College and Chadron State College providing opportunities for higher education, early childhood trainers for the Early Learning Connections, and school district early intervention teams and PreK, Planning Region support. Thanks to all of you who make this system happen!

To the biggest partners of all, to PARENTS, who are trusting us every day to help raise the next generation of citizens in the panhandle, thank you!