



“The first few years, staff were unsure of the process and of people coming into their rooms from YoungStar. Now, they look forward to it.”

- April Niemi, Assistant Director, Early Head Start and Child Care CAP Services, Inc., Children's Discovery Center, Stevens Point

Program Goal is “the cutting edge of child care”

YoungStar from the Start

April Niemi has been with the CAP program for 19 years, currently as the Assistant Director of Early Childhood Development, responsible for the Children's Discovery Center child care center. Samantha Zimmerman, Site Manager for the center, has been with CAP Services for 6 years. Both women recall when the program took on YoungStar the first year it began, earning a 5 Star for their first rating and maintaining it steadily until today. “Our program always strives for high quality services to children and families,” said April. Taking on YoungStar just meant “tweaking a little bit of the systems we had in place...and making changes overall that actually improved the quality of services.” Such changes included giving staff more office time for planning and self-assessment, educating families on the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards (WMELS) and implementing Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQs). Promoting 90 minutes of quality gross motor activity for the children has also been a huge focus, said Samantha. “It’s having staff consider; what is your intention behind that physical activity and the process? How are you using that time?” Since starting YoungStar, the program has worked through these changes with the same Technical Consultant (TC), Carrie Steinke from [Childcaring, Inc.](#) They wouldn’t have it any other way. “I could not ask for a better coach,” noted April. “She promotes YoungStar in a positive way, she knows the materials, and if she doesn’t, she is able to find the answer. Childcaring has been very supportive of our program.”

Families at the Foundation

At the core of changes the program has made through YoungStar over the years, are the families they serve. “Involving families and parents, that makes it even more rewarding,” emphasized Sam, describing how parents will stop in to compliment changes the program has implemented. Parents are highly encouraged to be a part of their children’s early education experience, through volunteer opportunities, monthly parent meetings and family events, parent surveys, and parent trainings based on parent feedback and interest. Parents even take part in the interview process for new staff. “The family involvement piece, it is the foundation of our program,” said April. “Their input and involvement is very important to us.” The program’s family-focused approach and their philosophy that play is important, continues to thrive with the support of their YoungStar TC and [the incentives](#) that come with maintaining their 5 Star. “Your coach [TC] is not there to judge, they are really there to support you,” said April. “In the end, it is well worth it.”

Wisconsin’s Stars are Shining

YoungStar informs parents, recognizes quality providers and brings resources and support to programs committed to improving quality. But what it’s really all about is helping Wisconsin children shine bright.