

## **IdahoSTARS Launched New Opportunities**

Many Idahoans believe parents are their children's first and most important teachers. Many parents of young children are also breadwinners, working outside the home to make ends meet. This means they rely on child care programs to support their children's development and learning during their working hours. Parents begin to ask, "Where is the best child care to take my child?"

Child care continues to play an important role in these economic times by providing care while parents work. Child care is a very viable business in communities by employing people, purchasing goods and services, and adding stability. Therefore, child care providers ask, "How can I differentiate myself in the child care market?"

In July 2009, IdahoSTARS was awarded additional funding from the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare through the American Recover and Reinvestment Act (Stimulus Funds). The specific purpose of this funding is to jump-start Idaho's economy by introducing money into the early care and education system to improve quality, and enhance positive child outcomes. Local and state funders ask, "How can we be sure our investment in child care will produce results?"

IdahoSTARS can help answer these questions. Our vision statement is **Idaho's children have access to the highest quality child care and early education**. IdahoSTARS strives to implement innovative programs in our state. IdahoSTARS moves forward by providing a consumer-driven, consistent structure that educates providers and supports parents, promotes quality inclusive early care and education, and professional development for child care providers.

IdahoSTARS is a project primarily funded by a federal grant managed by the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare. The work of this project has been contracted to the University of Idaho Center on Disabilities and Human Development, who subcontracts work to the Idaho Association for the Education of Young Children (Idaho AEYC). Collectively, these three entities implement the project by assuming the following roles and responsibilities:

### **Idaho Department of Health and Welfare (IDHW)**

IDHW is the IdahoSTARS project sponsor. IDHW issues and monitors the contract under which the work is conducted, provides oversight over fiscal and programmatic issues, and performs program evaluations. IDHW also maintains the statewide toll-free 2-1-1 Idaho CareLine, providing access to clients for IDHW services, including the Idaho Child Care Program, of which IdahoSTARS is a component.

### **University of Idaho Center on Disabilities and Human Development (CDHD)**

The CDHD is the prime contractor implementing the project called IdahoSTARS. CDHD is the contract fiscal agent accountable to IDHW, shares a leadership role in forwarding the vision, mission and goals of the organization, serves as a liaison to educational consortiums that provide input to IdahoSTARS efforts, and subcontracts IdahoSTARS work to the Idaho Association for the Education of Young Children (Idaho AEYC). CDHD maintains lead responsibilities for:

- The coordination of Regional Child Care Resource and Referral Services and monitoring of deliverables
- Parent Referral and Education
- Trainer/Training Approval process
- Development of statewide training for child care providers

## Idaho Association for the Education of Young Children (Idaho AEYC)

Idaho AEYC supports the IdahoSTARS project with responsibility for the:

- Overall project direction
- Implementation of the Idaho Child Care Program (ICCP) Provider Eligibility Program
- Design, maintenance and development of the Professional Development Registry and Career Pathway, i.e., data entry; processing applications including review of training, education and experience; level assignment on career pathway; invoices and payments of incentives to individuals participating in the professional development system
- Design and implementation of the scholarship and incentive process for participants enrolled in the IdahoSTARS Registry to include training and academic scholarships, mentors/coaches, facility assessments, and quality improvement grants.
- Lead in the implementation of the Public Awareness Plan and supporting public awareness activities for the IdahoSTARS project

### Shared Responsibilities

Idaho AEYC and CDHD share responsibility for:

- The training component of the project
- The development of an Evaluation Plan for all IdahoSTARS activities
- Public Awareness
- Responding to IDHW contract monitoring
- Obtaining additional funding
- Database development, input and management
- Generate and implement a Quality Rating and Improvement System for child care providers
- Statewide Multi-Cultural Community Development

The IdahoSTARS 2009 – 2013 Strategic Long Range Plan outlines the work that must be accomplished in order to reach the Vision. The plan emphasizes the following;

- 1) That parents are knowledgeable about what quality child care is and they request it. Then when parents are choosing quality care there are enough quality facilities that are eligible to be Idaho Child Care Program (ICCP) providers in our system to meet parents' child care needs.
- 2) That IdahoSTARS project materials and procedures are inclusive and culturally competent with a comprehensive orientation for potential new child care providers to reduce turnover in the field.
- 3) That there is a statewide network of IdahoSTARS approved trainers, environment rating assessors, and mentors to meet the needs and requests of child care providers and to specifically support child care providers to provide care for children with disabilities and special health care needs. And that these resources will support a statewide Quality Rating & Improvement System that sustains the improvement of quality in child care facilities over time.
- 4) That there is a statewide database, which is both comprehensive and integrated and is accessible to multiple users. IdahoSTARS utilizes the data from the project for research to promote quality child care and to establish a public awareness campaign about IdahoSTARS.

Stimulus funds are targeted toward improving quality and toward preparing child care facilities to support working parents. IdahoSTARS will accomplish this goal by implementing specific events and or activities in three categories listed below:

1) **Additional Incentives to participants in the Professional Development Registry**

- a. Additional cash incentives beginning July 1, 09 to include Level Move cash awards for moving levels on the Career Pathway, Annual Anniversary Awards, training and academic scholarships, and mentor/coaches to assist with implementation of skills and knowledge gained in classes
- b. Development of Specialized Training Certificates – IdahoSTARS participants can qualify for scholarships to attend specific course work that will offer a Specialization Certificate. Specializations will include Strengthening Families Through Early Care and Education, Caring for Children w/Special Needs and in the future Infant/Toddler, Preschool, School-Age, & Director

2) **Building the infrastructure for IdahoSTARS's future**

- a. The IdahoSTARS Regional Child Care Resource and Referral Offices will receive more hands-on technical assistance from the IdahoSTARS managerial team who will increase their face-to-face meetings to add consistency to the project
- b. The IdahoSTARS webpage will be revised to be more customer friendly and provide increased communication between IdahoSTARS customers and staff
- c. IdahoSTARS will hire new staff members – A Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) Coordinator, an Environment Rating Assessment Specialist, 7 Regional Child Care Resource and Reference Consultants to work specifically with Family, Group, and Relative child care providers, a Statewide Bi-lingual Quality Child Care Consultant, and a Training Office Assistant
- d. IdahoSTARS will be contracting with Environment Rating Scale Assessors to establish an assessor network with highly trained and reliable assessors. IdahoSTARS will also purchase the Environment Rating Scale Data System to streamline the assessment and reporting process
- e. To build an infrastructure of trained staff, qualified mentor/coaches, and experienced trainers attendance at national and statewide conferences and train-the-trainer meetings will be encouraged and funded

3) **Additional Support and Resources for child care providers**

- a. The revision of Training procedures/policy & trainer and training development to fill gaps in training statewide along with the on-line registration for trainings will occur

- b. An orientation for new Family & Relative CC providers with special one-time-only start-up grants to reimburse expenses paid out to become licensed and eligible to become an Idaho Child Care Program provider will be available
- c. A Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) will be available to child care facilities wishing for opportunities to improve the quality of care they are delivering to the families and children in their program

The eight Quality Standards that IdahoSTARS has identified as “structural indicators of quality” that have been proven to be associated with positive child outcomes:

- Overall environment for developmentally appropriate practices
  - Education of child care provider
  - Specialized training of the child care provider
  - Inclusive practices for children with special needs
  - Strengthening Families Through Early Care and Education
  - Group size
  - Ratio of children per adult
  - Business Practices
- d. A public awareness campaign to include a November IdahoSTARS Newsletter to announce the events/activities for the next 2 years, new tri-fold brochures for all IdahoSTARS programs, and presentations at Idaho Early Care and Education conferences by an IdahoSTARS representative
  - e. The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) that measures the interaction between teacher and child will be available through the IdahoSTARS Mentor/Coaches program upon request.