

# LEADERS' *Lagniappe*



ISSUE:  
**OCTOBER**  
**2019**

## FEEDBACK IS A GIFT

**Kathleen Flanagan's leadership journey at the Yaamahana/Chitimacha Child Development Center has helped her realize that community input can strengthen her program, and that feedback is a gift.**

The center is a unique one, where all the children are from the tribal community. When space is available, Yaamahana will accept non-tribal children of employees of the Chitimacha Tribe of Louisiana and Cypress Bayou Casino Hotel. It is this community of support that provided guidance to Kathleen during a staff challenge.

Like many directors, she began as a classroom teacher, who found herself in an administrative role, leading adults and directing a center that serves fifty-two children.

"Kids are my comfort zone," shared Kathleen. As with many new experiences, it has provided many opportunities to grow. She continued, "I have been learning as I go. I am not too proud to get help. I am willing to figure out."

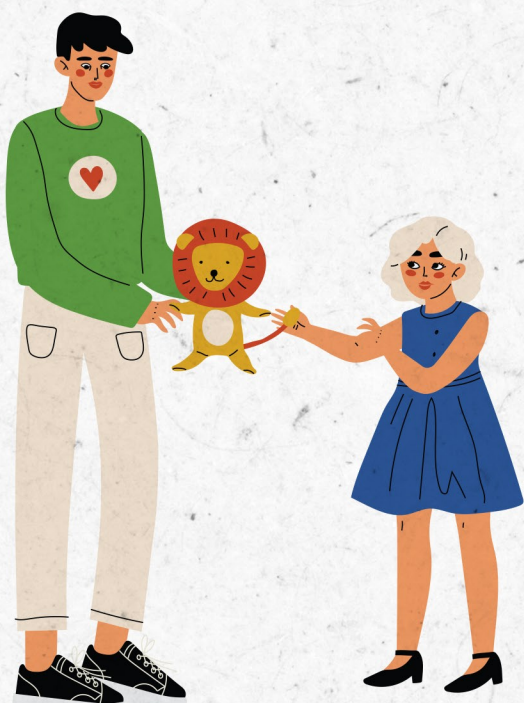
Kathleen is part of the tight-knit community, with tribal agencies providing direct teaching to her children of the Chitimacha language. The local police, fire and public works departments provide support for emergency preparedness. She also works with her local school scheduling bi-monthly field trips with her threes to ensure that the transition to "big school" is an easy one.



*Kathleen Flanagan*  
**DIRECTOR,  
YAAMAHANA/CHITIMACHA  
CHILD DEVELOPMENT  
CENTER**

Kathleen has grown in her work upon realizing that participation and feedback is a gift. This has helped her strengthen her center and increase the quality of her program.

WHEN CHILDREN  
SEE TWO PEOPLE  
WORKING  
TOGETHER,  
IT TEACHES THEM  
COOPERATION,  
AND THAT WE  
CAN ALWAYS DO  
A BETTER JOB.



Did you learn something helpful?  
Want to recommend a leader for Leaders  
Lagniappe? Contact  
[emmy.odwyer@la.gov](mailto:emmy.odwyer@la.gov).

**Families in Kathleen's small community can expect high-quality care and education when they come to Yaamahana.** Happy

teachers are an important ingredient in providing the education that Kathleen envisions. She prides herself on continuity of care, where students stay with the same teacher for two years. The infant teacher becomes the toddler teacher, and the threes teacher becomes the fours teacher. For this kind of looping to occur, teacher retention is key. But not so long ago this vision was threatened. Morale was low, gossip was a challenge, and teamwork was rare. Kathleen was concerned about the culture of her program.

**Kathleen is a lifelong learner, and she knew she didn't have all of the answers.** She decided to bring in a fellow educator from the community who worked in human resources at the local casino. This highly trained professional had new skills to help her address the issue. The process involved being vulnerable about her strengths and areas to improve. Kathleen sat for a number of interviews, discussing the challenges and concerns she saw. Her consultant worked with the teachers in small groups, three or four of them at a time. She brought back a list of recommendations to Kathleen and the staff. With the recommendations came criticism and suggestions to improve her job performance. Kathleen knew it was for her benefit.

"I learned to be open to feedback from my staff, and to give them the opportunity to tell me how I can support them," said Kathleen.

Other important lessons came as Kathleen strengthened her relationships with her teachers. She now works on finding a balance between being fair and being kind, praising staff when it is due, and apologizing if she does something wrong. And her staff knows these efforts will help bring out their best.

Kathleen states that the process of receiving feedback about her leadership has helped her become a better leader. "Now," she humbly boasts, "we work better as a team. People are more willing to help each other out. There's less gossip, better communication, and a group of team players."

As the school year starts and new groups of students come together, Kathleen sees some improvements in how staff engages with each other.

"I see my teachers have changed. One of our teachers is struggling, and her peers are mentoring her and supporting her through the transition. There is a trusting relationship there," said Kathleen.

**With all of this focus on adult relationships, Kathleen is clear that this is all about the children in her program.** "When children see two people working together, it teaches them cooperation, and that we can always do a better job."