

DELAWARE INSTITUTE FOR
Excellence in
Early Childhood

**Kid's Cottage
Not Missing "A Beat" During the Pandemic**

If you are driving north on Route 1 coming out of Rehoboth, if you look to the right, you'll see a billboard that says, "You Never Missed a Beat, Thank you, Team KC."

According to Sheri Mark, Director of Operations at Kids Cottage, an Early Childhood Center in Rehoboth, this public thank you is one way to express gratitude to a staff that went "above and beyond" to serve Sussex County's children during the pandemic.

When Sheri reflects on the year, she keeps coming back to her motivated staff, who, from the beginning of COVID 19, rallied in many ways, adopting the hashtag #KCstrong.

Kids Cottage operated as an emergency child care site in March and April to serve essential personnel's children. The typically thriving center with more than 100 children went to two classrooms with 17 children in a matter of days.

In addition to thinking, "what do we do?" as the world came to a halt, Sheri and the owners of Kids Cottage thought, "how can we help?" Kids Cottage proactively reached out to Beebe Hospital and different local emergency personnel to offer spots at their center, so they could continue to work during quarantine. As a result, many of the children at Kids Cottage during the early days of COVID were new.

The staff, which was reduced by half, didn't "miss a beat" and got the students quickly acclimated, so they felt comfortable and safe in their new setting.

"Our staff stuck by us to meet every challenge," said Sheri. "They took on whatever was required to welcome back children and keep them safe."

"They helped us paint rooms, clean, all while making sure they were pursuing their professional development training. Most importantly, they modeled normalcy for our children, so they weren't afraid."

These efforts to maintain a sense of normalcy also included each employee wearing a badge with their photo so the kids could see their faces.

Relationships are at the center of every strategy Sheri used to operate successfully – from encouraging her dedicated staff to the relationships she formed with other directors by attending Stars Community of Practices.

Alyssa Stein, Stars Technical Assistant, especially noted Sheri's leadership with other programs. "Sheri also volunteered to help other providers that were closed as they reopened, talking through procedures and answering questions in other CoP meetings," said Alyssa.

"COVID was challenging in so many ways, but I am thankful for the opportunities we had to get on calls with our colleagues, " said Sheri. "Supporting each other helped ease the fear of adopting new guidelines to continue to stay open. I hope those relationships continue post-pandemic."