

Donohoue will push for daycare provider professionalism

Nurturing Center Welcomes New Director



Eileen Donohoue has been hired to be the new executive director of the Nurturing Center in Kalispell. - Lido Vizzutti/Flathead Beacon

By Molly Priddy , 08-30-09

Eileen Donohoue understands the importance of multitasking.

In the last month, she moved to Kalispell from Helena, took the helm at the Nurturing Center and, in her words, “married off” a daughter. Just 48 hours into her new job, she had already attended several meetings, a summit and was able to give a tour of her inherited facility.

“You have to dive in,” she said. “I want to immerse myself and get involved in the community.”

Donohoue took the reins at the Nurturing Center on Aug. 25, after co-founder and former director Susan Christofferson died of cancer complications in February. Donohoue spent nearly 15 years in

Helena, where she worked as an official in the statewide “Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies” program.

The Nurturing Center is a natural fit, she said.

“I’m here because I love working with families,” Donohoue said.

Donohoue’s past job experiences include being a daycare provider, a manager and working with the national Child and Adult Care Food Program. When she came to work at the Nurturing Center, Donohoue said employees pulled a cookbook she had written for the CACFP off the shelves.

Another important part of understanding family dynamics has been raising five children and enjoying four grandchildren with her husband of 35 years, Donohoue said.

The Nurturing Center is known in the valley for its family-based programs, which are aimed at helping parents and grandparents with the challenging task of rearing the next generation. Donohoue said she is proud of what the center can offer, such as helping parents find safe, accountable childcare through a referral database.

There are also parent and grandparent support groups, along with a large library full of resources on many childcare topics, she said.

Donohoue’s first major goal as executive director is to encouraging daycare provider professionalism in the Flathead. To do so, she hopes to coordinate with the state Early Childhood Services Bureau’s program, Star Quality, which seeks to improve childcare provider quality through a series of incentives.

The Nurturing Center faces its share of challenges, Donohoue said, with funding as an all-too-familiar mountain to climb. But Donohoue is optimistic about the future.

“This is an organization that’s moving forward and building on 30 years of excellence,” Donohoue said. “We’ve got an excited and committed staff. Be looking for good things.”

Moving to the Flathead has more perks than just a satisfying job, Donohoue said. The outdoor environment is definitely a bonus, she said, but not because she is an avid skier.

“I love to garden,” Donohoue said. “Flowers grow better up here; the growing season is longer.”

Donohoue, who doesn’t seem to stop smiling, said she understands the challenge of becoming part of

the Flathead community, and it's a challenge she is happy to meet head on.

"This is the right fit," she said. "I feel like I came home."