

My name is Lela Arney and I have been a T.E.A.C.H. Recipient since fall 2011. Growing up, I endured a lot of trauma and spent many years using drugs and drinking heavily. This damage affected my self-esteem and confidence in school. I also had extreme anxiety during my adolescence. I did not complete high school and felt as though I was not smart and persevering enough to be successful academically. At nineteen, I submitted my life to Jesus and underwent immense healing. I went back to school to earn a GED. I had no aspirations of a college education. From janitorial work to convenient store and retail work, these jobs helped to form a capacity to work hard and serve well and I was satisfied with my employment. While I worked several child care jobs from the time I was seventeen, I had not determined it would be a career choice. However, after being a preschool teacher for two years, my director introduced me to the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood program, causing me to really consider early education as a career path. I remember the anxiety and excitement I had my first semester at TMCC! I was unsure if I was intelligent enough to accomplish assignments successfully, but to my shock, I completed both classes with A's. This greatly increased my confidence.

In August of 2012, just after two semesters at TMCC, I was offered a director position at my current center. As I was learning about developmentally appropriate practice in college, I really analyzed the curricular model my preschool was following. With autonomy to direct and lead my program, I switched out our formal Christian curriculum with a play-based approach. I also implemented a series of trainings that increased our awareness of social emotional development by partnering with Technical Assistance Centers for Social Emotional Interventions (TACSEI). I have grown as proficient early childhood leader, contributing to the field by training and coaching emerging professionals and advocating for societal change that recognizes and supports the importance of quality early learning opportunities for our youngest learners. I completed an internship with The Children's Advocacy Alliance, which allowed me to understand the legislative process and how to participate in systemic change through county, state and federal regulations. Last week, I completed all the classes I need to graduate with a Bachelor of Science in Human Development and Family Studies with a 3.8 GPA. Beginning this fall, I will begin my studies to earn a master's degree in Management and Leadership. I am not the same person that I was seven years ago, and this program deserves much of the credit. My heart is filled with overflowing gratitude for all the support, both financial and motivational. You have made me a competent professional and advocate. From the bottom of my heart, thank you!

Lela Arney
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Lela Arney is a Preschool Director at His Kids Preschool in Reno, Nevada. She has earned her Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education, and Bachelor's Degree in Human Development and Family Studies, both were earned with T.E.A.C.H. scholarships. She is currently pursuing a Master's Degree in Management and Leadership.