

## Insights

# NICHQ Employee Spotlight: Kelly Edwards

In celebration of over 20 years improving health outcomes for children, we're sharing stories from the NICHQ team.



**Full Name and Title**

Kelly Edwards, Project Manager

### **Time with NICHQ:**

8 Months

### **How has your background/experiences led you to join a national children's health organization?**

NICHQ's mission and projects are a wonderful combination of my passions and background. I received my bachelor's degree in Neuroscience and Cognitive science from the University of Arizona (Go Wildcats!) where I focused on the science of development and aging. During this time, I was introduced to the remarkable idea of health being directly linked to early childhood experiences during the critical period of development. I then attended Boston University to gain a Master's in Public Health where I learned how changes in arguably every sector (health care, housing, education, environment) can have a direct impact on the health of individuals. While

attending Boston University, I interned at a variety of organizations, all linked to maternal and child health, reaffirming my passion for this field. Now, as a Project Manager at NICHQ, I am fortunate to work on two early childhood (ages 0-3) projects helping states and communities across the country improve health outcomes for children by working within these sectors. I am proud to say I work at an organization that strives to continue learning and developing as our society learns more and more about best practices and improvements that can be made in order to improve children's health.

**Favorite moment on a NICHQ project:**

One of my favorite memories from working at NICHQ was very early on. During one of my first weeks at work, I assisted with a large meeting for the [Pediatrics Supporting Parents \(PSP\)](#) project. During the meeting, the 18 pediatric practices we work with were invited to share the various changes they had been testing within their practices to promote children's social and emotional development. As a brand-new member of the project, I was blown away hearing how excited and passionate the pediatricians were. Each practice shared how they were connecting with families, improving referrals, and increasing screening for children and mothers in their community. Just by listening to them, I could hear the impact that our project was starting to have. That passion has remained as I've continued to work on PSP and reminds me of the necessity of this work.

**Biggest lesson-learned when working on a quality improvement project:**

Remembering to start small. Making and perfecting small changes will allow for the larger changes down the line to be more impactful. As someone who has many dreams and is passionate about improving children's health, I find myself wanting to jump into the bigger changes right away. However, working in quality improvement has taught me to start small, and in fact, fail small. Failing is a part of life and learning, and no change will be perfect initially. Starting small and making changes that can be adapted and improved before spreading will more likely produce the positive impact we want.

**Funniest thing that ever happened on a NICHQ project:**

While working on the [Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Collaborative Innovation and Improvement Network \(ECCS CoIIN\)](#) project, we held a three day in-person meeting in Atlanta for our 12 state teams to action plan for the next phase of the project. While in Atlanta, it was very apparent how passionate every ECCS CoIIN member is about early childhood systems building. It also became very apparent how passionate we are about good seafood. The last night of the meeting, our ECCS CoIIN team went out to dinner and found ourselves in a friendly competition of "Who can eat the most seafood?" when literal buckets of seafood were served to us. After many laughs, I'm very proud to say I came in 3<sup>rd</sup> place! Having the opportunity to bond and make memories with the many wonderful individuals who work on this project is something I am very grateful for and will not soon forget!

**What are you most proud of from your time with NICHQ?**

I am most proud of being a part of NICHQ's equity team, working towards making sure NICHQ as an organization and each of our projects directly address racial equity. I am proud to work for

an organization that recognizes the importance of addressing racial equity and is committed to doing so.

**What are your goals for NICHQ's future?**

My goal is for NICHQ to continue to be a leader in quality improvement while working hard to be equitable in our work to improve the quality of children's health across the country. I want NICHQ to continue learning and improving as an organization while addressing racial disparities and inequity in communities. I hope that NICHQ plays a major role in closing the current gaps in health care and health outcomes.