

## Arizona Teacher Recognized with Rising Star Award

Arlington, Va., February XX, 2026 – Kelly Wilson, a Teacher of the Visually Impaired and Adapted Physical Education Teacher at the Foundation for Blind Children, received the 2026 Rising Star Special Educator of the Year Award from the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). This award recognizes a CEC member teacher in the first five years of their special education career who has shown exceptional potential for leadership in teaching, service, and scholarship.

Kelly wears many hats, teaching in a preschool classroom, providing itinerant TVI services across the Phoenix region, and teaching in the Saturday and Summer SHARP (Sports, Habilitation, Arts, and Recreation Program) at the Foundation for Blind Children. Through her many roles, Kelly goes above and beyond to ensure the students and families she works with feel supported and informed.

“Her warmth, patience, and genuine care made all the difference during such a pivotal moment in their lives,” shares Joy L. Calles, M.Ed, Senior Director of PreK-12 Services with the Foundation for Blind Children.

Her nominators both shared anecdotes of Kelly’s commitment to her students and their families. During her first years working as a preschool teacher at the Foundation for Blind Children, Kelly accompanied a family on school tours to potential schools and talked through all upcoming steps, in order to ease the students’ transition to kindergarten.

More recently, Kelly worked to support a student who had recently moved from Mexico and who had never received special education or vision services before. She ensured that the family had access to translation services and that the student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) was implemented, even after enrolling in a different school.

She is noted for her commitment to professional growth for both herself and her fellow special educators. Dr. Ashley Barkel from the University of Arizona notes that Kelly’s willingness to contribute resources for new special education teachers speaks volumes about her dedication to the field.

“Kelly’s heart and passion for the field of vision education are undeniable. She approaches each day with kindness, enthusiasm, and an unwavering dedication to her students' success,” shares Julie Oliver, Vice President of Programs with the Foundation for Blind Children.

Wilson will be recognized this March, along with other CEC Professional Award recipients at the CEC Convention & Expo in Salt Lake City, Utah.

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The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) is the largest international professional organization dedicated to high-quality education that is inclusive and equitable for individuals with disabilities. Learn more about CEC at <https://exceptionalchildren.org/>.