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## **Celebrating 10 Years of Support for Children and Families Across NJ's Early Childhood Centers**

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ - Prevent Child Abuse-New Jersey, the nonprofit leading efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect through strong family support programs, gathered more than 600 family workers from across the state to celebrate the tenth anniversary of NJ's Family Outreach Program on Thursday, May 26th at the Hyatt Hotel in New Brunswick.

Conference keynotes, delivered by Cecilia Zalkind, Executive Director of Advocates for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ), and the Reverend Darrell Armstrong, formerly of the NJ Department of Children and Families, emphasized the importance of engaging families to support their child's learning during their preschool years, a formative period of development which sets the potential for future learning. Prevent Child Abuse-New Jersey Executive Director Rush Russell welcomed the crowd of professionals devoted to improving the education and health of very young children.

Speaking of her own experiences as a mother and growing alongside her children, Zalkind inspired the audience with words of wisdom and support. "I had resources to get help if I needed it, and I still felt helpless, inadequate, and very much alone," Zalkind explained. "Being a parent is hard enough without all of these extra challenges. And that is where you as family workers come in. You are the support and the reassurance."

The Family Outreach Program reaches more than 23,000 families each year, establishing positive relationships that engage parents and caregivers supporting a child's healthy development and early learning, both at home and in preschool centers. The program is a collaborative effort among early childhood education centers under contract in districts formerly known as Abbott school districts, local community-based agencies, a statewide technical assistance center delivered by Prevent Child Abuse-New Jersey, and the program's funder, the Division of Family Development of the New Jersey Department of Human Services. Family Workers engage families to connect them to health and community services, teach them about the importance of reading to their children, support their growth, screen for developmental delays, and prepare them as successful learners. Prevent Child Abuse-New Jersey trains a force of Family Worker Coordinators who guide workers teaching parents in child care centers and groups across New Jersey.

Two Family Worker Coordinators, Virginia "Ginny" Workman from Vineland IMPACT Center, and Sr. Deborah Humphreys from Ironbound Community Corporation, Newark, received special recognition for 10 years of service with the Family Outreach Program, supporting families throughout New Jersey since the Family Outreach Program's inception. Sixteen Family Workers also received the "Shining Star" award in acknowledgement of their dedicated service to children and families, specifically acknowledging their compassion and level of service.



*Family Outreach Program Statewide Coordinator Monica Townsend presents the "Shining Star" awards to this year's recipients.*

Learn more about the Family Outreach Program's work to support healthy child development at [www.preventchildabusenj.org](http://www.preventchildabusenj.org) or by calling 1.800.CHILDREN.