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Awards Presented for Child Abuse Prevention Efforts

Awards to recognize two outstanding individuals and one child abuse prevention program for their efforts to prevent child abuse were presented at the annual Child Abuse and Neglect Conference on Thursday, Sept. 25, at the Clarion Meridian Hotel and Convention Center in Oklahoma City. The 2008 award winners are Rep. Darrell Gilbert for the Marion Jacewitz Award; Kelley Nedbalek for the Mary Ellen Wilson Award; and Smart Start Central Oklahoma is winner of the 2008 Outstanding Program Award.

Winner of the 2008 **Marion Jacewitz Award** is Oklahoma House Rep. Darrell Gilbert for his significant contributions to help increase the Child Abuse Prevention Fund at the Oklahoma State Department of Health so that more at-risk families can receive prevention services statewide. Rep. Gilbert serves on numerous boards focusing on children and mental health needs including the Tulsa Children's Consortium and the Parent Child Center's Advocacy Committee. He was instrumental in establishing a pilot project that addresses the needs of families who have a child with mental illness, and in passing legislation to place unused prescription drugs from nursing homes in the county pharmacy for indigent use. He was inducted into the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy's Child Advocates Hall of Fame in 2003 for his contributions to reforms in children's services over the past 20 years.

Since 1997, Rep. Gilbert has been committed to making a difference for children, the elderly and the disabled. He has been a strong advocate for children's issues, especially children at risk, and a constant crusader for mental health issues. Some of the bills he's authored or co-authored that have been approved by the Governor are HB1241- modifying the procedures for child support and paternity, HB1870 - the Children with Special Health Care Needs Program, HB2375 - expand duties on Commission on Children and Youth, SB1110 - expand/modify qualifications on Child Abuse Training and Coordination Council membership, SB2627 - the 2004 Healthy and Fit Kids Act of 2004, SB1329 - modified the child custody Subsidized Adoption Act, and SB1649 - created the Task Force on the Promotion of Children's Health.

The Marion Jacewitz Award recognizes an individual in Oklahoma who has made significant statewide contributions to the prevention of child abuse, and is named after Marion Jacewitz, Ph.D., a respected leader, friend and child abuse prevention advocate. Jacewitz helped draft and win support for Senate Bill 559, the Child Abuse Prevention Act, enacted in 1984 and presided over Oklahoma's first State Interagency Child Abuse Prevention Task Force until her death in 1985.

(More)

Winner of the 2008 **Mary Ellen Wilson Award** is Kelley Nedbalek, with the Center for Children and Families Inc., where she has been a senior program specialist for the Teenage Parenting Program since 1997. Kelley offers compassion, education and support to more than 375 pregnant and parenting teens each year in Cleveland County. She is a strong community leader in promoting the prevention of child abuse and neglect through her work as a board member at the Oklahoma Association of Infant Mental Health and her involvement in District 3 Child Abuse Prevention Task Force. She trains other social work professionals and educates the public about the needs of teen parents. This year she was one of five individuals in Oklahoma to receive an endorsement in Infant Mental Health.

Kelley provides remarkable leadership and child advocacy through her involvement with coalitions and task forces in the community, including Healthy Start and Success by Six. She is a founding member of the Baby Steps Coalition. She was a presenter for the Oklahoma Summit on Welfare Reform and received the 2004 Prothro Award for Outstanding Contributions to the Health and Well-being of Oklahoma Children presented by the Oklahoma Public Health Association.

The Mary Ellen Wilson Award is given to recognize an individual who has demonstrated outstanding commitment and dedication to child abuse prevention leadership activities in the community and is named after the child victim in the first successful prosecution of a child abuse case in the 1800s in the State of New York.

The Outstanding Program Award winner is Smart Start of Central Oklahoma, which provides high quality early childhood education in our community. Research shows children who are provided educational services such as those delivered by Smart Start of Central Oklahoma are less likely to be victims of abuse and neglect. Additionally, these children tend to perform better throughout their school years and tend to become more prosperous as adults, thereby reducing poverty. Research also shows that adults who avoid poverty are less likely to commit child abuse and neglect.

Smart Start of Central Oklahoma did all this in addition to coordinating with the Oklahoma State Department of Health to plan Oklahoma Child Abuse Prevention Day at the State Capitol. Many individuals and groups contributed to the event this year, but Central Oklahoma Smart really stands out as pivotal. It provided funding for the lunches and worked on the logistics to make the event a huge success.

“The individuals and program being recognized have shown outstanding commitment and dedication to child abuse prevention efforts in Oklahoma. We congratulate them knowing that Oklahoma is a better state because of their dedicated service,” said Secretary of Health and Commissioner of Health Dr. Michael Crutcher.

The State Interagency Child Abuse Prevention Task Force and the Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) Office of Child Abuse Prevention co-sponsored the annual Child Abuse and Neglect Conference and awards presentations.

For more information about ways you can be involved in child abuse prevention programs, contact the OSDH Family Support and Prevention Services, Office of Child Abuse Prevention at (405) 271-7611.

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Editor's Note: Three photos attached of award winners.

Rep. Darrel Gilbert, winner of the Marion Jacewitz Award



Kelley Nedbalek, winner of the Mary Ellen Wilson Award



Smart Start Central Oklahoma: Mary Ellis, Lindsey Stafford and Allison Briggs

Smart Start Central Oklahoma winner of the Outstanding Program Award

