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Award Winners for Child Abuse Prevention Efforts Announced

Awards to recognize outstanding child abuse prevention programs and individual efforts were presented at the 17th annual Child Abuse and Neglect Conference on Monday, Sept. 21, 2009, at the Moore-Norman Technology Center in Oklahoma City. The 2009 award winners are Help-In-Crisis, Inc. for the Outstanding Program Award; State Sen. Mary Easley for Outstanding Elected Official; Mary Ann Edwards for the Marion Jacewitz Award; and Kathie Bergmann for the Mary Ellen Wilson Award.

Outstanding Program Award winner Help-In-Crisis, Inc. provides services for the battle against domestic/sexual violence and child abuse prevention services in rural northeast Oklahoma. Deana France, the executive director, has been serving as the director for more than 20 years providing community programs like the Helping U Grow (HUG) program, a child abuse prevention program that provides services and parenting classes to new parents.

Trained counselors and parent educators serve new parents in Cherokee and Adair counties. In addition to using the Oklahoma Parents as Teachers (OPAT) curricula and resources, the program works with Smart Start Cherokee County and Community Partnership for Adair and Cherokee Counties (CPACCC) to furnish parents of newborns with *parent packets*. Parent packets consist of educational/informative literature, i.e., childhood immunization, breastfeeding, child development, contraception, newborn and infant care, and are distributed at Cherokee Nation WW Hastings Hospital, Tahlequah City Hospital, and Stilwell Memorial Hospital. In addition, HIC maintains a 24/7-365 crisis hotline.

Outstanding Elected Official winner State Sen. Mary Easley, D-Tulsa, was principal author of SB 1138, which amends the definition of child endangerment to include parents or guardians knowingly letting their children ride in vehicles operated by people who are under the influence of drugs or alcohol. The bill also allows an affirmative defense to a contempt of court proceeding in a divorce or custody action for any person who refuses to allow his or her child to be transported by an intoxicated driver.

The bill was a request from Mothers against Drunk Driving (MADD), which found that 68 percent of the children who died in alcohol-related crashes from 1997-2002 were riding with an adult who had median blood alcohol content of .13. Of those adults involved, 68 percent survived, but the children were killed. The effort for tougher laws and penalties including fines and imprisonment began in 2007 and ended with the new law becoming effective upon signature of Gov. Brad Henry on May 12, 2009.

The Marion Jacewitz Award winner is Mary Ann Edwards, a former foster care parent and current board member of the Oklahoma United Methodist Circle of Care for Children and Youth. She became personally involved in child abuse prevention following the tragic murder of Shane Coffman and was responsible for discovering the Child SHARE program in California and recognized the need for the program in Oklahoma to help recruit and support foster care parents in Oklahoma.

Edwards approached the Oklahoma United Methodist Circle of Care and the Child SHARE program became a program of the Circle of Care. This program celebrates its 10th year anniversary this year and has served more than 240 children daily. More than 100 foster children have been adopted by the Child SHARE foster families and respite foster families. Because of Edwards' vision, hundreds of foster children throughout the state are safer, more secure, and loved.

The Mary Ellen Wilson Award winner is Kathie Bergmann, program director of Parent-Child Connections, formerly Healthy Families. For the past 16 years, Bergmann has worked with parents who are at risk of becoming involved in the Deprived Court System. Many times they are teens that are expecting or have just had their first child. Services offered by Parent-Child Connections provide in-home education and other services for positive parenting and to avoid the dangers of early sexual activity. She does these activities after a full day as a high school counselor.

She has been a long-time active member and leader of the District XIII Child abuse Prevention Task Force, a collaborator with the Delaware County Community Partnership, and the Delaware County Family Violence Council. In 2000, her leadership was recognized when Healthy Families, now Parent-Child Connections, was selected as the Outstanding Child Abuse Prevention Program by the State Interagency Child Abuse Prevention Task Force. Bergmann has mentored other child abuse prevention and family support programs even while facing her own staffing and budget challenges.

Bergmann maintains a warmline pager/cell phone for families, which can be answered 24 hours a day, recently teamed up with a local church to initiate a diaper bank for Delaware County residents, and she was instrumental in the development of an annual "Community Give Away" held each December and July at the fair-barn in Jay where families and community members make donations and participants can fill up their bags with all the items they want. Anything left over is donated to a local thrift store. This outreach has expanded to Delaware, Craig and Ottawa counties. She has presented at numerous conferences, and promotes the Parent-Child Connection through multiple volunteer community activities and is an effective advocate for the overall wellbeing of children and families.

For more information about the award recipients or their programs, contact the Family Support and Prevention Service, a division of the Oklahoma State Department of Health, at (405) 271-7611.



Outstanding Program Award
Help-In-Crisis



Outstanding Elected Official
State Senator Mary Easley, D-Tulsa



Marion Jacewitz Award
Mary Ann Edwards



The Mary Ellen Wilson Award
Kathie Bergmann