



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:
Altoria E. White
Director, Strategic Communications
Episcopal Children's Services
(904) 612-5982 (C)
altoria.white@ecs4kids.org

EPISCOPAL CHILDREN'S SERVICES ANNOUNCES THE 2022 FLORIDA HEAD START ASSOCIATION AWARD WINNERS

JACKSONVILLE, Fla., October 18, 2022 - Episcopal Children's Services (ECS) is honored to announce the 2022 Florida Head Start Association (FHSA) winners, a high honor recognizing the achievement and highlighting the outstanding and vital work of the Head Start and Early Head Start community. These awards acknowledge parents, volunteers, employees, alumni and community partners. Of the established 15 categories, ECS is proud to celebrate five state winners with the organization. The agency is pleased to congratulate the following individuals in the subsequent categories of excellence:

FHSA Father of the Year – Anthony Ray

Anthony's commitment to leadership has been instrumental in the quest for increased male involvement. He facilitates the Male Support Group sessions at the center and also volunteered as the master of ceremonies for ECS' annual Male Involvement event. In his six years being a Head Start parent, he has truly embraced participating with his children. His perseverance to overcome numerous challenges while being the best father and husband he could be has allowed him to remain committed to his family even during the hardest times. He is never afraid to ask for help and he is always accountable to his family.

FHSA Administrator of the Year – Autumn Tomas

Autumn's connection to Head Start began in 1998 when her first son, Markus was three years old and she enrolled him in a Head Start classroom. When she moved to Jacksonville she was thrilled when she found an opportunity to work in the Head Start/ Early Head Start program with Episcopal Children's Services in 2005. Now, 17 years later, she serves as Vice President of Head Start/Early Head Start. As a former Head Start parent, she knows first-hand the kind of support the families in ECS programs need. She is honored to be a part of a team that works passionately and tirelessly to give every one of the Head Start/Early Head Start children the same advantages she received.

2022 Beating the Odds Award – The Fernandez/Nations Family

Erica Fernandez and Dillon Nations are the parents of two young girls. When they began in the Head Start program in 2019 both parents had become unemployed, and the family was experiencing homelessness, forcing them to move in with family members. With the support

provided by the Head Start/Early Head Start program the family began their journey to self-sufficiency in earnest. Dillon found a job as a transmission mechanic and Erica worked to complete her required DCF courses and CPR training after which she was offered a teaching position at one of Episcopal Children's Services centers.

2022 Support Staff of the Year – Kenneth Davis

Kenneth serves as the Center Support Assistant for the Howard Head Start/Early Head Start Center. This center serves almost 60 children and families in Marion County. He began his professional career with Head Start in 2012 when he became a substitute teacher. Kenneth embodies the role of Center Support Assistant as he always provides a warm, nurturing, stimulating, safe, and loving environment. Because of his work and commitment, each child at the Howard center develops language, cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills.

2022 Staff of the Year – Maria O'Donnell

Maria began her career in Head Start with Episcopal Children's Services in 2007 as a Center Manager and has served in a variety of roles within the Head Start organization. She is currently serving as Senior Director of Comprehensive Services where she provides leadership and supervision to four departments within Head Start/Early Head Start: Health Services, Nutrition, Home Based, and Family Services. Maria is a thoughtful and careful leader. She is a passionate health advocate who understands the value of social emotional well-being and takes great care to reduce the stigma of mental health for the children we serve.

"The gratitude our entire team feels for our honorees' commitment to ensuring every child we serve has a strong start in life is heartwarming," stated ECS Chief Executive Officer Connie Stophel. "Our agency's greatest asset is our team and that includes our parents, children and community partners. It is exciting and humbling to be recognized at the state and regional level and we will continue to celebrate our work family."

The Florida Head Start Association awards annually recognizes individual achievements for those making notable and significant contributions in the state. Winners proceed to represent the state of Florida at the Regional and National levels. The winners from Episcopal Children's Services represent the best among its many programs and services in the 14 counties served in North and Central Florida. For highlight video stories and images, click [here](#).

About Episcopal Children's Services

Episcopal Children's Services serves more than 25,000 children and their families in 14 counties in Florida. ECS offers School Readiness, Head Start and Early Head Start programs in Baker, Bradford, Clay, Duval, Nassau, Putnam, St. Johns, Marion, Dixie, Gilchrist, Lake, Levy, Citrus and Alachua counties.

ECS uses research and best practices to help families ensure their children enter school ready to learn. Talented, dedicated teachers and staff work proactively with children from birth to age five and their families to build a strong educational foundation.

###