

For Immediate Release:

Celebrating Niagara's Early Learning & Child Care Professionals at the 2023 Awards of Excellence

St. Catharines: This very special annual event was coordinated by the Early Childhood Community Development Centre (ECCDC) on November 23, 2023. Eighty-nine early learning professionals, programs, volunteers, and students received recognition at the Niagara Early Learning and Child Care Awards of Excellence celebration at Club Roma in St. Catharines, with event host Aiko Iwashita of Niagara's Move 105.7.

More than four hundred and sixty guests attended the celebration, sponsored by **Louise Kool & Galt**, Canada's leading suppliers of classroom resources and equipment. Nine local organizations also supported the event, including: **Mountainview Building Group, District School Board of Niagara, YMCA of Niagara, A Child's World Family Child Care Services, Niagara Catholic District School Board, Frontier Distributing, Beam Construction, Steele Contracting Inc., and Beatties**. The ECCDC is also grateful to the many community partners who sponsor awards, and other local businesses who contributed items to the silent auction fundraiser. This year's gala also highlighted the 30th Anniversary of the ECCDC, with special highlights and presentations offered throughout the evening.

This year we welcomed Chris Bittle, Member of Parliament, Terry Ugulini, Mayor of Thorold, Satinder Klair, Director of Children's Services at Niagara Region, Beth Deazeley, Registrar and CEO of the College of Early Childhood Educators, Erin Filby, Community Organization at the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario, Megan Robinson, Manager at Six Nations Polytechnic, and Jackie VanLankveld, Manager at Niagara Children's Centre, to bring greetings.

Many awards were presented throughout the evening, including The **Licensed Home Child Care Professionalism Award** presented to Munazza Ansar, Laetitia Kankindi and Kimberley Somerville and the **EarlyON Child and Family Practitioner Award** was extended to Angela Marino, Natasha Freitas, Melissa Orozco, Shelby Ryerse, Samantha De Prophetis, Alicia D'Aurizio, Athena Harris, Michaela Kills Enemy, Joscelene Perry and Anita Sansalone for their outstanding efforts. Michael Folino, Elizabeth Jaynes, Josie Tachjian, Mari DiPietro, Deanna Cullen, Theresa Oborowsky, Susan Pemberton, Casey Cerminara, Paula Lohr, Maria Anderson, Lee Ann Fajta, Stephanie Iker-Russell, Katy Sroka, Dana Martin, Cherlyn Whiteford, Brandy Matthews were the commendable recipients of the **Kindergarten Team Excellence Award**, and both the **Eco Friendly Child Care Practices Award** and the **Nurturing Children's Connection to Nature Award** were presented to Rosalind Blauer Centre for Child Care. The **Kelly Albanese Memorial Inclusion Award** recognized the team at YMCA Child Care – Our Lady of the Holy Rosary, and Lori Stewart was honoured with the **Licensed Child Care Centre Administrator Award for Exceptional Leadership and Commitment**. Shayla Rutledge was recognized for her outstanding efforts as the recipient of the **Margaret Hamilton Graduating Student Award**, and the **Commitment to Continuous Professional Learning and Community Collaboration Award** was presented to Ashley Belanger for her extraordinary achievements. The **Exceptional Volunteer and Contributor Award** honoured Lindsay Belford, Evelyn Bianchin, Maria Caro and Niagara College Accelerated Early Childhood Education Program Team Members, while the largest award category of the evening, **The Early Childhood Educator Professionalism Award**, recognized Sydney Anderson, Chantel Appel, Helen Aza, Ashley Bergen, Tracy Biggar, Maranda Bossert, Wendy Browne, Sarah Brunton, Jessica Cheng, Tammy Czaban, Laurel Davis, Courtney Dick, Sarah Dumont, Lindsay Duncan, Mikayla Ferguson, Sarah Gasim, Treina Gautreau, Robyn Gignac, Jessica Greenough, Casey Harris, Darda Hartleib, Laura High, Carrie Huckle, Jessica Huisbrink, Alisha Kajar, Nicole Laurenti, Melissa Limone, Lhex Mandanas, Chantal May, Jennifer McCreath, Jennifer Millan, Melinda Pontes, Brittney Fraser, Bele Kasa, Caitlin Malloy, Jade Ralph, Emily Sabourin, Gurwinder Singh, Sana Sleiman, Katrina Slingerland, Heather Stephen, Shyamala Subakaran, Tanya Tavender, Fabienne Theramene, Hope Vanatte, Maryann Vanknotsenburg, Jessica Williams, Nikki Winger and Shannon Yungblut for their valuable contributions.

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The ECCDC is a charitable organization inspiring excellence in early learning and child care through thought leadership, cutting edge training, innovative resources and coaching services highlighting best practices and emerging trends. In the more than 30 years since its creation by local volunteers, the ECCDC has become Canada's leading early learning training, resource and referral organization.