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Paying Tribute to 25 Years of Celebrating Exceptional Early Learning Professionals in Niagara

St. Catharines: Forty-Seven Early Learning Professionals, programs, volunteers, and students received recognition Tuesday evening at the 25th Annual Niagara Early Learning and Child Care Awards of Excellence celebration, which took place at Club Roma in St. Catharines, with event host Aiko Iwashita of Niagara's Move 105.7. The event was coordinated by the Early Childhood Community Development Centre (ECCDC), a longstanding charitable organization.

Four hundred and fifty guests attended this special anniversary gala, sponsored by **Louise Kool & Galt**, Canada's leading supplier of classroom resources and equipment. Four local organizations also supported the event, including: **Mountainview Building Group, The District School Board of Niagara, The Niagara Catholic District School Board,** and **Beatties**. Several other local businesses contributed items for the silent auction fundraiser. The ECCDC is also grateful to the many community partners who sponsor awards and support this valuable event.

In attendance to bring greetings were Regional Chair Jim Bradley, Satinder Klair, Director of Children's Services, and Beth Deazeley, Registrar and CEO of the College of Early Childhood Educators. Representatives from the Kiwanis Clubs of Niagara were honoured with the Exceptional Volunteer Award for their ongoing support of the early learning community. Throughout the past twenty years, the Kiwanis Clubs of Niagara have donated close to \$400,000 on projects that have directly impacted early learning and child care programs in Niagara with a variety of resources and training opportunities.

Several awards were presented including the **Eco-friendly Child Care Practices Award**, presented to A Child's World - Woodlawn. Rachel Henry and Marc Savain were honoured with the **Exceptional Volunteer Award** for their outstanding efforts in early learning programs. **The Nurturing Children's Connection to Nature Award** was presented to A Child's World – Lookout Ridge. Jessi Pretty and Winnifred Willems were the proud recipients of the **EarlyON Child and Family Practitioner Award**, while the **Kindergarten Team Excellence Award** was presented to Becky Bartel, Alison Witcomb, Donna Iconomopoulos, Krista Smith, Sarah Cukierski, Roxane Manners, and Melissa Taddeo. **The Licensed Home Child Care Professionalism Award** was extended to Karen Dryce, Shannon Fletcher, Dorene Gahite, and Salve Raro for their valuable contributions, and La Boîte à soleil – Franco Niagara was honoured through the **Kelly Albanese Memorial Inclusion Award**. Jennifer Westveer was recognized as the winner of the **Continuous Professional Learning and Community Collaboration Award**, and the **Margaret Hamilton Graduating Student Award** was presented to Damian Lloyd. Melissa McLauchlan was honoured as this year's winner of the **Licensed Child Care Administrator Award for Exceptional Leadership and Commitment**, and **The Early Childhood Educator Professionalism Award** was presented to Paige Bernie Reid, Cindy Boles, Nicole Doan, Robynn Doolittle, Brittney Fraser, Elizabeth Gervasio, Laura Jutras, Andrea Lavoie, Lisa MacKay, Grace MacLeod, Lhex Mandanas, Afaf Motssim, Olivia O'Reilly, Cassandra Poitras, Maegan Price, Breann Russo, Suzanne Sheehan, Andie Shepherd, Heather Stephen, Erin St. Pierre, Debbie Tracey, Sabrina Vautour, and Jennifer Westveer for their meaningful contributions.

For further information, please contact Lorrey Arial Bonilla, Executive Director, Early Childhood Community Development Centre at 905.646.7311 ext.321 or larial@eccdc.org.

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. The ECCDC exists so that early learning professionals are supported in offering exceptional opportunities for children to grow, learn and develop. In the 28 years since its creation by local volunteers, the ECCDC has become a leading early learning training, resource and referral organization.