



Episcopal Children's Services Receives Staff of the Year Award from the Florida Head Start Association

For Immediate Release

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TALLAHASSEE, FL – November 1, 2022 – The association representing Head Start programs in Florida selected Maria O'Donnell, Senior Director, Comprehensive Services of Episcopal Children's Services, as their 2022 Staff of the Year, Early Childhood Development/Health: Mental Health Emphasis for her thoughtful, methodical leadership and service to Head Start and the children and families.

Ms. O'Donnell has served Head Start with Episcopal Services for more than 15 years. During that time, she's contributed to many vital roles, including Center Manager, Coach, Education Manager, and Director of Health Services. She was promoted in 2020 to her current position.

Ms. O'Donnell is a member of Florida Association for Infant Mental Health and attained her bachelor's degree in Elementary Education in 2001 from the College of Charleston. She maintains certifications as a CLASS assessor, Train the Trainer (Infant/Toddler, Preschool), and holds a Masters in clinical social work from Florida State University. She is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW), as well as a certified yoga instructor. She has integrated yoga into her work and instituted Family Yoga Night during the pandemic, helping to support Head Start children, families, and staff.

Ms. O'Donnell's leaders and peers note her ongoing, significant contribution to the community, with Vice President of Head Start/Easy Head Start Autumn Tomas remarking that, "Maria is dedicated to helping people improve their lives, through her work at ECS as well as her work as a certified yoga teacher. She has been able to blend both worlds for our HS children and families to help them address issues of both physical and mental health. Maria takes every opportunity to stretch her abilities and learn new skills. She is passionate about Head Start and is a person worthy of being recognized for her work in early childhood education, mental health, and wellness."

The Head Start Grantee Recipient selects nominees and is evaluated by a panel of peers and chosen by the FHSA awards committee. Recipients will be honored during the FHSA annual awards luncheon at the Hard Rock Hotel in Daytona Beach, FL, on February 9, 2023. Full details about the event can be found at www.FLHeadStart.org.

About FHSA

The Florida Head Start Association is a nonprofit organization working on behalf of the 43,000 children and families in Florida. Head Start is an innovative federal-to-local program delivering services from school readiness, comprehensive health, and family support services. The Head Start Program Performance Standards drive programs to strengthen and improve the quality to ensure that all children start school ready to succeed. FHSA has been the voice for Florida's most vulnerable children and families since 1999 and is committed to enhancing and supporting the capability of local Head Start programs in the delivery of high-quality services for our children and families.

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