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CHATHAM, N.J. – Jamie Willard, who teaches at ECLC of New Jersey's school in Chatham, was chosen as the Region II "Educator of the Year" during the annual ASAH convention earlier this month.

Each year ASAH recognizes outstanding staff at private, special education schools across the state. The nonprofit organization represents 135 private special education schools and agencies serving students with disabilities. Willard was chosen as the winner from among educators at member schools in Hunterdon, Morris, Somerset, Sussex and Warren counties.

ECLC was Willard's first teaching job in 2000, after graduating from the College of St. Elizabeth's in Morristown. She teaches a Lower School Social Communication, Emotional Regulation, and Transactural Support (SCERTS) class where she works on developing social competence, communication skills and emotional regulation with students who are on the autistic spectrum. She individualizes lesson plans and uses new technology to make learning interactive and enjoyable.

She also launched the school's after-care program in 2003 because parents needed it. "They had no place for their kids to go," said Willard. "We were able to get some funding from the Foundation for additional support, and the parents pay a fee."

What started two days per week has grown to four days with as many as 30 students per session. In addition, the program brings in peers from other schools, including Pingry, for socializing and homework support. "Jamie is an energetic and dedicated teacher who can quickly identify what a student needs and responds to that need," said Principal Diane Gagliardi.

ABOUT ECLC

Founded in 1970, ECLC has grown from a small, early-intervention program into a comprehensive network of non-profit agencies serving more than 600 special-needs children and adults

throughout central and northern New Jersey. These students and adult clients have severe learning and/or language disabilities, Down syndrome, autism or multiple disabilities.

At schools in Ho-Ho-Kus and Chatham, ECLC educates more than 300 students, ages 5-21. For its graduates and other adult clients, ECLC provides job placements and transition services after high school through Community Personnel Services (CPS) and vocational skills and independent living skills training in its P.R.I.D.E. day/evening programs.