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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Lt. Gov. Kim Guadagno Helps ECLC of New Jersey
Cut through the Blue Tape to Open Center for Adults with Special Needs**

PARAMUS – On April 11, ECLC of New Jersey, with help from Lt. Gov. Kim Guadagno, officially opened a new P.R.I.D.E. Center for adults with special needs at a ribbon-cutting ceremony that also underscored the need for more services to support people with autism spectrum disorder and other disabilities.

“The demand for education and services for people with disabilities has skyrocketed,” said Dot Libman, director of the P.R.I.D.E. programs. “In response, ECLC has always been at the forefront.”

The urgent need for such programs was emphasized by Lt. Gov. Guadagno, who said, “It’s not very hard to stand up and talk about how important a facility like this is, not only to the clients, that’s obvious, but to the parents who know they have a safe place, a safe, welcoming, open place, that’s going to give opportunities to their sons and daughters.”

ECLC is a nonprofit serving children and adults with special needs, such as Down syndrome, autism and severe learning disabilities, with schools in Chatham and Ho-Ho-Kus. ECLC also runs a supported-employment agency for special needs adults and the P.R.I.D.E. programs. P.R.I.D.E. focuses on independent living skills, vocational work opportunities and community participation, from grocery shopping and volunteering to book club in a coffee shop and fitness at the Y.

The ribbon-cutting marked the second P.R.I.D.E. Center to open, since the program’s launch in 2008. All graduates of ECLC’s schools in Chatham and Ho-Ho-Kus are guaranteed a spot in P.R.I.D.E.

Last week’s grand opening event was also aimed at highlighting Autism Awareness Month, which seems to grow in importance every year. Last month, a study was released by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) showing that about one in 50 children, ages 6 to 17, nationwide are diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, according to a survey of parents by CDC researchers. Previously, the CDC had found that 1 in 88 children nationwide had autism, with the rate in New Jersey at 1 in 49 children.

In addition to Guadagno, the event included state Sen. Bob Gordon (D-Bergen), state Assemblyman Timothy Eustace (D-District 38), Bergen County Freeholders Maura DeNicola and Joan Voss and representatives from Paramus and the state Office of Autism.

About ECLC of New Jersey

ECLC of New Jersey was established as a nonprofit in 1970 by a group of parents who wanted children with special needs to have a more focused and dedicated learning environment to provide them with the most appropriate education. ECLC has grown from serving a handful of young children in a one-room “school” to offering a network of lifelong services – education, enrichment and employment – to nearly 700 children and adults with special needs across the state.

About P.R.I.D.E.

P.R.I.D.E. stands for Promoting Responsibility, Independence, Decision-making and Employability, and those are the aspirations shared by adults with special needs in this day and evening program. Created in 2008 for graduates of ECLC’s two schools in Ho-Ho-Kus and Chatham – and expanding rapidly ever since -- this program is available to adults with developmental disabilities, ages 21+. A defining hallmark of P.R.I.D.E. is that clients choose their activities and are rarely in the center all day. It is a lively, self-directed program in which the day is divided into one-hour increments, targeting key areas for habilitation. Eligible clients qualify for funding through the N.J. Department of Human Services, Division of Developmental Disabilities (NJ DHS/DDD). All ECLC graduates are guaranteed a spot in P.R.I.D.E. For adult clients who are able to work, ECLC’s Community Personnel Services (CPS) finds meaningful jobs in the community for adults with disabilities and boasts a 95 percent employment rate for its clients! Learn more about ECLC at www.eclcofnj.org.

ECLC is a member of the Alliance of Private Special Education Schools of North Jersey, a coalition of more than 30 state-approved private special education schools in Northern and Central New Jersey dedicated to helping parents and educators better understand and access appropriate program options in special education. Learn more about the Alliance at <http://specialeducationalliancenj.org>.

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- **Independent Living** – Clients build a foundation for future success and self-help by practicing daily living skills such as food prep and cooking, music appreciation and money skills and participating in leisure activities, such as karaoke or yoga.

- **Community Participation** – Visits to Panera Bread for book club, volunteering in the community and other field and walking trips are incorporated into their regular schedule.

- **Social Appropriateness** – Clients experience continual peer-to-peer interaction and also participate in group discussions and role-playing activities aimed at nurturing their social skills. These activities are augmented and reinforced through volunteering in the community and field trips.

P.R.I.D.E. Centers offer ECLC graduates a dynamic, self-directed program, from cooking class and book club to volunteering in the community and paid work opportunities. ECLC's Community Personnel Services finds meaningful jobs in the community for adults with disabilities and boasts a 95 percent employment rate for its clients!

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