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Chattanooga educator named national Family Teacher of the Year
\$20,000 grant will fund literacy programs serving under-resourced Chattanooga families

CHATTANOOGA, TN. (September 20, 2019) – When it comes to student growth and success, Colleen Ryan and her mobile classroom are where the rubber meets the road. Recognizing her students at Rivermont Elementary – a Title I school – were not where they needed to be academically, she and a colleague bought a school bus and transformed it into “a classroom for the community.” Her efforts to go mobile and build parent partnerships earned her the 2019 Toyota Family Teacher of the Year award from Toyota and the National Center for Families Learning (NCFL).

Ryan was surprised today with a \$20,000 check from Toyota and NCFL to be used to continue her family literacy efforts with her mobile classroom.

“Colleen Ryan is a perfect example of how Toyota operates, relying on innovation to help solve societal issues and challenges,” said Mike Goss, general manager, Social Innovation, Toyota Motor North America. “She took it upon herself to create a mobile learning/education center on wheels, tackling the problem of not only improving the education of families, but, also, overcoming the issue of transportation for the recipients. Providing mobility answers to those who need them most is what drives us every day. It is a true honor to name Colleen the 2019 Toyota Family Teacher of the Year.”

To combat transportation challenges, Ryan and her mobile classroom – called “The Passage” – offer a free, four-week series of 20-minute lessons on math, science and literacy. Parents and students build a notebook full of strategies, games and resources that can be used later to help children study.

“Colleen’s dedication to improve the lives of Hamilton County families through two-generational learning is remarkable,” said Dr. Joshua Cramer, executive-vice president, NCFL. “Research shows family engagement leads to student academic success. We are honored to recognize Colleen as our 2019 Toyota Family Teacher of the Year.”

Ryan, a kindergarten teacher, drives the mobile classroom to students’ homes, recreation centers, and daycares to provide services to families. Since its inception in November 2016, The Passage has seen the following results:

- 75 percent of families have increased literacy skills
- 80 percent of families have improved math skills
- 85 percent of families have engaged in more positive behavior

“Hamilton County Schools is proud of Colleen and her innovative efforts to help our students and families meet their potential,” said Dr. Bryan Johnson, superintendent, Hamilton County Schools. “Colleen’s passion for building community partnerships that lift up families and empower parents is inspiring for us all. And, we’ve seen the results in the classroom.”

The Toyota Family Teacher of the Year award, a national honor now in its 23rd year, recognizes families play a crucial role in the success of children and salutes educators who are exceptional at using intergenerational approaches to engage students and their families in education.

Ryan and runner-up Andrea Greimel, of San Antonio, will be recognized for their accomplishments at the annual NCFL Families Learning Conference in Louisville, Ky., on November 5. The conference convenes the nation’s most progressive experts in education, policy, and family and parent engagement to discuss and share the latest information regarding multigenerational approaches to learning.

Greimel, a dual-language educator and prekindergarten teacher at San Antonio Independent School District, was chosen as the Toyota Family Teacher of the Year runner-up. Greimel played an integral part in bringing dual-language education to her school, Carvajal Elementary, and the entire school district. With this recognition, the school district received a \$5,000 grant to continue Greimel’s work to spread the dual-language program.

Since 1997, Toyota’s Family Teacher of the Year winner, runner-up and their respective organizations have received \$575,000.

ABOUT NATIONAL CENTER FOR FAMILIES LEARNING

The National Center for Families Learning (NCFL) is a national nonprofit organization working to eradicate poverty through education solutions for families. Partnering with educators, literacy advocates, and policymakers, NCFL develops and provides programming, professional development, and resources from the classroom to the community that empower and raise families to achieve their potential. For more information on NCFL, visit familieslearning.org.

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