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Elaine Buchsbaum, *Chair*  
Alison M. Lozano, Ph.D., M.P.A., *Executive Director*

## Press Release

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**Contact:** Jonathan Waller; [Jonathan.Waller@njcdd.org](mailto:Jonathan.Waller@njcdd.org); 609-633-8280

**For Immediate Release**

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### The New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities shares its message at the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day at Six Flags Great Adventure

**Jackson** - When park-goers entered through the front gates of Six Flags Great Adventure in Jackson, New Jersey on Saturday, September 3, they once again were met with smiling faces and eye-catching displays. But it wasn't costumed characters or bright advertisements that greeted them. Instead, volunteers and staffers from the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities' *Monday Morning* project were on hand to pass out materials and promote understanding about the everyday lives of people with developmental disabilities during its **1<sup>st</sup> Annual Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day (DD Awareness Day)**. Joined by additional volunteers from several other organizations dedicated to providing services to people with developmental disabilities and their families, the volunteers – forty in all – set up booths throughout the park to engage the crowd in dialog and pass out materials.

The centerpiece of the NJCDD's display was the promotion of their ***R-Word*** campaign, which calls on the public to eradicate the words 'retard' and 'retarded' from everyday vocabulary and in the media, raises awareness that the word is hurtful to people with developmental disabilities and their families, and encourages community members in promoting tolerance and respect for people with developmental disabilities within their communities. Throughout the day, *R-Word* materials including t-shirts, buttons, stickers, and more were offered to park goers.

Volunteers also encouraged visitors to sign an *R-Word* pledge, promising to be mindful of their speech, to remember that the r-word is hurtful to those with intellectual disabilities and those who love them, and to spread the message of tolerance and understanding to others. At the end of the day, the NJCDD and its partner organizations had collected almost 1200 pledges. 3000 t-shirts, along with buttons and stickers, were passed out to park goers – many of whom wore the materials through the park as they went on their way.

"Public response to this event was fantastic", said Barbara Lee, program coordinator for the NJCDD's *Monday Morning* program, who organized the event, "Throughout the day, we received an incredible amount of support

and interest from members of the public.” Indeed, public response for the event was strong. In the weeks leading up to the **1<sup>st</sup> Annual Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day**, *Monday Morning* promoted the event by working with Six Flags to offer admittance to the park at a discounted rate to those interested in lending their support, and 600 tickets were reserved. But public support far surpassed what was expected, with many people participating who had no prior knowledge that a developmental disabilities awareness event had been planned for the day.

Among **DD Awareness Day** attendees was Jackson Township Mayor Michael Reina, who, at a ceremony on the steps of Six Flags’ Liberty Square Gazebo, was sworn in as the 2011 Mayor of DD Awareness Day. During the ceremony, which was attended by Six Flags officials, members of the developmental disabilities community, and the public, Mayor Reina presented the NJCDD with an official township proclamation commemorating the **1<sup>st</sup> Annual DD Awareness Day**, and recognizing the importance of raising tolerance, awareness, and visibility of people with developmental disabilities within New Jersey communities.

Exhibits from several other state and local agencies and organizations were also stationed throughout the park to share additional information with members of the public about the services they provide; promote understanding about the everyday lives of people with developmental disabilities; appropriately recognize and celebrate New Jersey’s diverse population which includes people with developmental disabilities; and promote inclusion, dignity, and independence for individuals with developmental disabilities. Among them were: The Arc of Mercer County; Allies, Inc.; Community Access; Community Options; Collier Services/ASAH; and Hinkle, Fingles & Prior, P.C.

## **BACKGROUND:**

### **Monday Morning Project**

Founded in 1995 by the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities, *Monday Morning* is an organization of self-advocates concerned with the issues affecting the developmental disability community. Made up of county-based networks, *Monday Morning* is the voice of people with developmental disabilities speaking out for systems change, and a greater voice in community planning. To learn more, visit [www.njcdd.org/MondayMorning/mmhome.htm](http://www.njcdd.org/MondayMorning/mmhome.htm).

### **The New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities**

The Vision of the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities is that all individuals with developmental disabilities are contributing members of their neighborhoods and communities; make real choices and have control over their own lives; have the freedom to strive, excel, and make mistakes; are in a position to achieve personal goals, are in a position to affect policy and process decisions that affect their lives; and have the same rights, privileges, responsibilities, and opportunities of citizenship as does any other New Jersey resident. To learn more or to get involved, please visit [www.njcdd.org](http://www.njcdd.org).

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