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**THE NJCDD SPEAKS OUT AGAINST BULLYING AND THE “R-WORD” AT THE 2ND ANNUAL
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES AWARENESS DAY AT SIX FLAGS GREAT ADVENTURE**

JACKSON – On **Saturday, September 1** – in typical Labor Day Weekend fashion – thrill-seekers, family groups, and others from all across the region descended upon **Six Flags Great Adventure in Jackson, NJ** looking for a fun way to spend one of the last days of summer. While expecting a day filled with rides, games, shows, and music, thousands of park-goers, young and old, were also met with a powerful message to take with them on their way.

That day, Great Adventure once again hosted the **New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities (NJCDD)** for its **Second Annual Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day (DD Awareness Day)** to promote respect for New Jersey’s active and diverse developmental disabilities community.

During the day-long celebration, NJCDD staff and volunteers were stationed at the park’s main entrance where they greeted kids, families, and others with eye-catching displays and materials promoting the Council’s **R-Word** and **Anti-Bullying** campaigns, which call on the public to help put an end to use of the words “retard” and “retarded” in everyday speech and to join together against bullying in our schools and our communities.

Joining the NJCDD were staff and volunteers from nine other developmental disabilities service and advocacy organizations, who were stationed at tables throughout the park to hand out materials and educate the public on the work that their organizations do in the community.

The NJCDD’s partners for this year’s DD Awareness Day were: **The NJ Dept. of Disability Services; The NJ Coalition for Inclusive Education; The Statewide Parent Advocacy Network of NJ; Community Access, Unlimited; The Supportive Housing Association of NJ; Spectra Academy; The Family Resource Network; Allies, Inc.; Bancroft; and Community Options.**

The event kicked-off with an opening ceremony, where the Council was joined by several honored guests including Jackson Township Mayor Michael Reina, Jackson Township Councilman Scott Martin, NJ State

Assemblyman Ron Dancer (D-12), and a representative from the office of US Congressman Chris Smith (D-4).

Addressing park-goers from a podium set at Six Flags' Main Street Water Fountain, NJCDD Deputy Director Shirla Simpson welcomed the crowd and introduced the Council, explaining that the organization works with individuals and families along with public and private agencies to "make sure that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are able to live, work, and play just as fully and freely as any other NJ resident."

"It's with that in mind that we've been so excited to bring this great event to the community for another year," she added.

Township Councilman Scott Martin, who is the father of two young daughters with developmental disabilities, spoke next. After presenting the NJCDD with an official citation commemorating the occasion on behalf of representatives from New Jersey's twelfth legislative district, State Senator Sam Thompson and Assemblymen Rob Clifton and Ron Dancer, the councilman went on to express how community events like DD Awareness Day let people know the pain that bullying and hurtful language can cause – especially for kids, who may already feel separate from peers because of their disabilities.

Before officially opening the park to the public, Mayor Michael Reina spoke about the community environment he hopes to promote within Jackson Township. "When I look out on this crowd, I see that everyone here is special and has something unique to offer. It doesn't matter what your ability level is, how you look, or who you are...everyone in our community has value, and that's something that should be celebrated," the mayor said.

Back at the park's entrance, park-goers were invited to visit the Council's table to receive complimentary **R-Word** and **Anti-Bullying** materials including T-shirts, buttons, bracelets, bumper stickers, and more; as well as to sign the NJCDD's **R-word Pledge**. The pledge is a promise to stop the use of hurtful language, including the "R" word, and to let family, friends, and peers know that such language is hurtful to people with developmental disabilities and those who love them. By day's end, thousands of people had stopped by the Council's table to sign the pledge and to receive T-shirts and materials – many of which were visible throughout the park as visitors wore them proudly all day.

"That's the idea behind this," said Frank Latham, NJCDD Youth Leadership Coordinator and one of the Council's DD Awareness Day organizers. "When everyday folks take these materials and wear them in the future, their peers will be able to see the messages that are promoted and ask questions about what they mean. It's all about increasing awareness and encouraging dialogue."

The **R-Word Campaign** originated in 2008, when members of the NJCDD's Statewide **Monday Morning Network** of individuals with developmental disabilities first began to work with the Council to raise awareness that casual use of the "R" word in everyday language and in the media is hurtful and offensive to people with developmental disabilities and those who love them.

Since then, the Council and its **Monday Morning** self advocates have reached thousands of individuals throughout the state at public events, schools, and various community groups to spread the word to kids and adults alike. Their efforts even made an impact on New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, who, in 2010, signed legislation to remove the "R" word and all its variations from state laws and regulations.

This year, the NJCDD expanded upon the message presented by its **R-Word** campaign to shed light on the high incidence of bullying that individuals with developmental disabilities of all ages face in schools, the workplace, and within the community. Armed with its slogan, ***"Together We Are Stronger Than Bullying"***, the Council is calling on all members of our communities to work with them to put an end to all types of bullying, and letting individuals know that help is available to end bullying in their lives.

To learn more about the NJCDD's **R-Word** and **Anti-bullying** campaigns, its **Monday Morning** or other leadership and advocacy programs, or to view photos from this year's **DD Awareness Day**, visit **www.njcdd.org**

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