



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**Contact:** Lynn Patmalnee, Interim Director of Development & Communications  
**Email:** lpatmalnee@fafsonline.org  
**Telephone:** 1.800.222.0047 ext. 324

**Connecting Families Conferences Held**  
*Support and sharing with New Jersey's foster parents*

Monmouth Junction, New Jersey, March 12, 2014 – Foster and Adoptive Family Services (FAFS) recently held their annual Connecting Families Conferences (formerly called Annual Meetings). Close to 100 parents from across the state attended these events, hosted at the Holiday Inn Cherry Hill and the Bridgewater Marriott hotels.

FAFS President Glenda Y. Elie gave the opening message followed by the traditional roll call of counties attending. A summary of new FAFS programs and initiatives was presented by FAFS Chief Executive Officer, Mary Jane Awrachow. Department Directors spoke about FAFS' services, and then Department of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P) representatives made presentations on behalf of two children currently waiting for adoption.

FAFS Director of Education and HR Fran Gervasi offered a training session entitled The Empty Seat at the Table: Resource Parent Loss and Grief. The interaction among the members of the audience and Ms. Gervasi was emotional and cathartic. When children are returned to their biological family, a sense of loss is a common reaction for the foster parents and the other children living in the home. This two-hour presentation is just one of dozens of training opportunities that FAFS makes available to foster parents in New Jersey.

At the conference, FAFS held an afternoon networking session to get ideas and direct feedback from parents. Attendees were able to learn from each other's experiences. The sharing atmosphere stimulated a useful question and answer forum. Question topics ranged from personal situations to state policies and procedures. While FAFS has training opportunities on many of the issues that the attendees mentioned, it was the consensus that it would be helpful to have postings of frequently asked questions placed on the recently started FAFS Online Support Network. This service is more private than Facebook and allows foster, adoptive and kinship parents to converse candidly about their experiences. It also provides them with essential information to help them care for the children in their homes.

As the voice of foster, adoptive and kinship families in New Jersey, FAFS changed the name of these events from Annual Meetings to Connecting Families Conferences because it better reflected the emphasis in relation to foster families and their needs.

The mission of FAFS is to provide support, training and advocacy to meet the special needs of foster, adoptive and kinship families, who provide safe, stable and nurturing homes for children in foster care in New Jersey. FAFS is a federal 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization, with headquarters on Route 1 in Monmouth Junction. The organization serves as a catalyst for positive advances in the child welfare system. Simply stated, FAFS is the voice of foster, adoptive and kinship families in New Jersey.