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Monmouth Youth Presented Award for Overcoming Obstacles Making a Difference in NJ

EATONTOWN, NJ – Despite losing her mother to cancer and ending up in the foster care system at a young age, Long Branch native Kristine Gunningham, 21, has never wavered in her pursuit of academic excellence. An extremely hard working young adult with a lot of drive and motivation, Kristine was awarded the Outstanding Youth of the Year Award at Foster and Adoptive Family Services (FAFS) and the state Department of Child Protection and Permanency's (DCP&P) annual recognition awards.

She accepted the award at the Pacific Concord Hotel in front of a crowd of more than 100 foster, adoptive and kinship parents and children, as well as dozens of FAFS and DCP&P staff members.

Kristine's long list of accomplishments includes interning at the Rutgers School of Social Work and serving as a Central Region Youth Advisory Board Ambassador at Rutgers University. She graduated from Monmouth University with a bachelor's degree in social work and she plans on earning her master's degree next year.

This spring break, she used a scholarship from FAFS to fund a service trip to Chile where she lived and worked in a neighborhood to help plan summer camp programs for children in need.

FAFS Chief Executive Officer Mary Jane Awrachow said, "Kristine exemplifies what is so remarkable about thousands of children in foster care across the state – the ability to thrive after some of the most challenging circumstances. We applaud Kristine for her resiliency and courage which are the building blocks for a future of hope and promise."

To earn the award, Kristine met criteria set by the FAFS Board of Directors, which community involvement and contributing to a positive impact on the foster, adoptive and kinship community in New Jersey.

For more than 20 years, FAFS, in cooperation with DCP&P, has recognized individuals and families for outstanding achievement in supporting children in foster care.

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. Simply stated, FAFS is the voice of foster, adoptive and kinship families in New Jersey.