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FOSTER CHILDREN'S DAY FOUNDER A FRIEND TO MIDDLESEX COUNTY

*Heather O'Neil partners with Foster and Adoptive Family Services
to distribute special gifts to Middlesex County young people in foster care*

Monmouth Junction, NJ, December 29, 2011 – As a former child in foster care, Heather O'Neil, manager of Designer Light and Fan in Edison and founder of Foster Children's Day, has a unique understanding of the challenges that face young people who have been removed from their homes for reasons of abuse or neglect and placed in the foster care system. Aware that many older teens in foster care never get to experience things young people living with their parents often take for granted, such as learning to drive, selecting an appropriate outfit for a job interview, or getting a special gift for the holidays, O'Neil coordinated donations from local merchants geared towards helping young people in foster care in Middlesex County lead more self-sufficient and happier lives. To distribute these donations, O'Neil chose to partner with an organization who shares her passion; that organization is Foster and Adoptive Family Services (FAFS), a 501(c)3 nonprofit in New Jersey.

FAFS distributed the donations, which included driving lessons, a shopping trip for job attire, free haircuts at a high-end salon, pizza and subs from local restaurants, as well as holiday gifts such as journals, curling irons, make up and lamps, to young people in care in Middlesex County.

"This is a huge need," O'Neil commented on the gifts, especially the driving lessons. "I will do it again next year and ask more [driving] schools to participate. I am so happy these lessons will help the kids."

This is not the first time O'Neil and FAFS have joined forces to help young men and women in foster care. O'Neil's commitment to raising awareness of the challenges faced by kids and teens in care led her to founding Foster Children's Day (December 12), which is a legal state holiday in New Jersey. O'Neil is currently working to make Foster Children's Day a national holiday, and she invited both FAFS Advisory Council member Lucinda Florio and FAFS Director of Development and Communications, Nicky Goodwine-Samuels, to join her on the airwaves of 1450 WCTC, The Voice of Central Jersey, to talk about the issues young people aging out of the foster care system face and the many ways that the public can help them overcome their difficult pasts and have successful futures.

"FAFS was honored to be a part of the Foster Children's Day event organized by Ms. O'Neil," said Samuels. "I was glad to have the opportunity to inform the public of the challenges that young people face when aging out of foster care."

As the administrators of the New Jersey Foster Care (NJFC) Scholars Program, FAFS helps young men and women in foster care pursue their post-secondary education. FAFS also offers private scholarships and opportunity grants to help ease the transition from living in the foster care system to living independently, helping former kids in care become productive members of the community. Most recipients of FAFS' private scholarships, which are funded solely by donations from the public, pursue careers that allow them to give back to society, such as teaching, nursing and law enforcement. FAFS also offers many other programs and services designed to fulfill its mission of providing 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. FAFS, like O'Neil, believes that children in foster care are the community's children, with the same hopes and dreams of all children, and strives to make as many of those dreams as possible come true.

To receive more information about FAFS, visit www.fafsonline.org or contact Nicky Goodwine-Samuels, Director of Development and Communications, at 1.800.222.0047.

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Foster and Adoptive Family Services: The Voice of Foster, Adoptive and Kinship Families in NJ