

A great read: Toyota Teacher of Year volunteers countless hours with vulnerable families through unique literacy programs

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (September 18, 2017) — Mary Andrews isn't sitting still in retirement. On the contrary, she's building on her 40-year teaching career by expanding family literacy programs throughout the Chapel Hill, North Carolina, community to serve more vulnerable parents and children. Today, Toyota and the National Center for Families Learning (NCFL) surprised Andrews during a reading event with local families with the news that she is the 2017 Toyota Family Teacher of the Year.

Andrews and the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Public School Foundation also received a \$20,000 check to further Family Reading Partners (FRP) program outreach.

In addition, Fernando Gonzalez of Tucson, Arizona, was named Toyota Family Teacher of the Year runner-up for his leadership and efforts in family literacy. Gonzalez and his organization, Make Way for Books, received a \$5,000 grant to continue Fernandez's work engaging families through seven-week programs that meet families where they are — in apartment and mobile home communities, social service agencies, and neighborhood centers.

“We're proud to recognize Mary Andrews as Toyota Family Teacher of the Year and Fernando Gonzalez as runner-up for their dedication to countless children and families through their family literacy programs,” said Mike Goss, general manager, social innovation, Toyota Motor North America.

Goss added: “The work of Mary and Fernando will increase children's upward mobility and ability to break intergenerational cycles of poverty. This will pay dividends for these students, their families, their schools and their communities for generations to come.”

The Toyota Family Teacher of the Year award, a national honor now in its 21st year, recognizes that families play a crucial role in the success of children and salutes educators who are exceptional at using intergenerational approaches to engage students and their families in education.

“Mary and Fernando's leadership and innovative strategies empower families to change the academic and life trajectories,” said Dr. Joshua Cramer, vice president, NCFL. “Their work is in alignment with NCFL's mission to eradicate poverty through two-generation education solutions for families. We are proud to recognize Mary and Fernando for their hard work and commitment to families.”

Andrews' FRP and READ2ME programs are designed to model and encourage reading together as a family. Facilitators teach parents how to interact with their children to promote kindergarten readiness and reinforce that parents are their child's first and most important teacher.

The program also works to address the 30-million word gap many low-income children face upon entering kindergarten.

Andrews' literacy programs began on a small scale during her teaching career and were later adopted district-wide. Once retired, she expanded programming to reach more low-income community members with young children, including teenage parents, recovering mothers, refugee families, parents of newborns, and Early Head Start participants.

Gonzalez works to empower parents to embrace their role as the first, best and most important teacher in their child's life, as well as to become advocates for their children's education.

Andrews and Gonzalez will be recognized for their accomplishments at the annual NCFL Families Learning Conference in Tucson on October 9. The conference convenes the nation's most progressive experts in education, policy, and family and parent engagement to discuss and share the latest information regarding multigenerational approaches to learning.