



Connecting for Kids

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Connecting for Kids to Honor Five Local Residents Including Two Kind Kids at Carnival-Themed Fundraiser

Westlake, Ohio... Connecting for Kids will honor five individuals at its carnival-themed Annual Fundraiser on Saturday, February 9, 2019, from 6-11 p.m. at Ahern Catering & Banquet Center, 726 Avon Belden Rd. in Avon Lake. In addition to a grand raffle featuring Indians Club Seats, a silent auction and other raffles, the event will feature a new room of carnival games plus traditional carnival fare such as cotton candy and popcorn. Tickets are \$65 per person, visit <https://connectingforkids.org/2019Fundraiser> for more information.

Kind Kid Winners

The Kind Kid award is given to a child under 13 years of age who demonstrates kindness and compassion to peers. This year, Connecting for Kids is excited to recognize two Kind Kids:

- Elizabeth Carroll of Westlake
- Ella Kloppman of Highland Heights

The Parent, Professional/Educator and Board Member of the Year Awards

These awards are given to those that exemplify the mission of Connecting for Kids to provide education and support to families concerned about their child. The following individuals will be honored:

- **Parent of the Year:** Paula Nwankwo of Avon
- **Professional/Educator of the Year:** Christina Meecha, MEd, Intervention Specialist, Hilliard Elementary School in Westlake. Meecha resides in Amherst.
- **Board Member of the Year:** Rebecca Baker, CPA, of Westlake

Kind Kid Award Winner: Elizabeth Carroll of Westlake

Elizabeth volunteers each Saturday morning at a dance class with her sister and four other girls with special needs. She has the ability to guide each of the girls and help them to grow. In addition, Elizabeth many times filled in as an extra player on a kickball team for children with special needs. She was such an encouraging and positive force on the team, knowing exactly what to do to make certain each child was successful and engaged. While at school, Elizabeth goes out of her way to make others feel included and is the first person out of her seat to help another student.

Kind Kid Award Winner: Ella Kloppman of Highland Heights

Ella inherently accepts and advocates for students with differences. She is a fiercely loyal friend. One of her friends developed Tourette's Syndrome over the summer. Though many children have backed away, Ella has become an even stronger advocate, helping her friend when she can't speak up for herself, walking with this student when she needs a break, and remaining steadfast although her friend's disability can bring out difficult behaviors.

Parent of the Year: Paula Nwankwo of Avon

Paula has been actively involved in the Connecting for Kids Parent Match Program for years, providing advice and a listening ear to countless families receiving a new diagnosis for their child. She helped to organize the 'Parents of Color in the Special Needs World: Unique Challenges and Opportunities' Coffee and Chat and assisted in implementing the ideas received from that program. She has mentored numerous area families through the waiver application process and shares information on grants that may be able to help a child with medical or therapy needs. Paula continually reaches out and remains engaged in the lives of families who have children with moderate-to-severe special needs and brings them together at events periodically. She recently threw a "thank you" party for all of the professionals and families that have helped her with her son. What was truly an example of Paula's kindness, however, is that most of the families invited spoke about how Paula had helped them. Paula truly is an amazing example of kindness and support in our community.

Professional/Educator of the Year: Christina Meecha, MEd, Intervention Specialist, Hilliard Elementary School in Westlake. Meecha resides in Amherst.

Christina Meecha was nominated for this award by the mother of one of her students who indicated that, "Each and every time I have a question, a concern or a need related to my daughter, Mrs. Meecha is there. She has spent countless hours listening to me, reassuring me, and providing her guidance, knowledge, and wisdom all for my daughter's benefit. Mrs. Meecha is truly one of those teachers who intrinsically knows how to work with children of every ability. She observes children so closely—she knows by watching my daughter when she needs a break. She has managed to calm my daughter, a child who really struggles with anxiety, by encouraging her to use self-talk strategies and then enthusiastically and unabashedly reinforces her every accomplishment. Mrs. Meecha sees my daughter's inner strength, beauty, potential, perseverance, and gifts. She is truly a remarkable person and educator. Our lives have truly been so blessed and have been made so much better because of her."

Board Member of the Year: Rebecca Baker, CPA, of Westlake

Rebecca Baker's dedication to the mission of Connecting for Kids is exemplified in her multiple accomplishments on the Board of Directors. She helped to take Connecting for Kids from a \$20,000 budget in 2013 to a \$180,000 budget in 2018. She has been instrumental in developing the organization's financial policies and procedures, including a solid budgeting and review process to ensure a clean audit. Rebecca has spent countless hours reviewing the 990, audited financial statements and budgets. According to Board President Andrew Mangels, "Rebecca exhibits an extraordinary duty of care when it comes to asking questions about the finances and ensuring that we are being fiscally ethical and responsible." Rebecca provided Connecting for Kids the financial structure needed to grow very rapidly and yet still be in solid financial footing where costs were well managed.

About Connecting for Kids

Connecting for Kids (CFK) provides education and support to families with concerns about their child. We serve all families, including those children with and without formal diagnoses. CFK offers educational programs, support groups, a Parent Match Program and numerous resources.

For more information about Connecting for Kids, visit: www.connectingforkids.org, email: info@connectingforkids.org or call: 440-570-5908.

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