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ACDS Launches Alternative Augmentative Communication Center

On Wednesday, May 21st, ACDS unveiled their new Alternative Augmentative Communication (AAC) Center during a special ribbon cutting ceremony and reception. The AAC Center will serve children with significant language impairments who may require speech generating devices. Funds raised during a live ask at ACDS' Gala this past November helped to finance the new state of the art Evaluation Center. Staff, families and supporters attended the event.

"Nassau County Department of Health Office of Children with Special Needs indicated a strong need in Nassau County for an Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Evaluation Center which would service preschoolers," explains Jessica Litwack, Speech Language Pathologist at ACDS.

The number of evaluation requests for toddlers and preschoolers has increased in the past two years and include children with, but not limited to, Autism Spectrum Disorders, Down syndrome, Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA), cerebral palsy, and significant speech and language disorders.

"The goals of ACDS' Speech Lab is to provide these children with an objective evaluation utilizing a variety of speech generating devices (SGDs) to determine a child's readiness to use a device and to match them with the most appropriate system available to augment their communication," said Litwack. "These devices provide a voice to children who otherwise would be unable to communicate verbally which impacts every

aspect of their functioning."

Once a child receives an SGD, he or she will have the ability to communicate with loved ones, peers, teachers and other members of the community, fostering inclusion, social interaction, self-esteem building, and for some, the ability to express basic wants and needs.

All AAC evaluations will be conducted by New York State Licensed and ASHA Certified Speech-Language Pathologists with extensive experience and training utilizing AAC devices with young children with developmental disabilities. Consultation services for implementing the devices will also be available.

"Since there is a lack of evaluation centers in Nassau County designed to perform AAC evaluations with a wide range of up-to-date devices, we are thrilled at the opportunity to offer these essential services," said Michael M. Smith, Executive Director of ACDS. "Launching our AAC Evaluation Center will enable children to find a voice to express themselves and greatly improve their quality of life. ACDS is grateful to our amazing donors who helped make this program come to life."

"Launching our AAC Evaluation Center allows us to not only service the children in our school who may be approved for an evaluation, it will enable us to reach a broader community of children who may also qualify and benefit from these devices," said Cecilia Barry, Principal of ACDS. "We want to reach as many individuals as we can through our services."