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**For Immediate Release**

## **Illinois Principals Association Awards 2024 Reaching Out & Building Bridges Award to Lighted Way Association, Inc.**

Springfield, IL - Jessica Kreiser, Executive Director of Lighted Way Association, has received the 2024 Reaching Out & Building Bridges Award for her partnership with the City of LaSalle, City of Peru and local school districts in serving special needs students ages 3-22. The award is presented by the Illinois Principals Association and sponsored by Horace Mann Companies.

The Reaching Out & Building Bridges Award was created to recognize an IPA principal or assistant principal, and an agency, association, or community member displaying an outstanding effort in creating partnerships between schools, principals, associations, and organizations for the betterment of all.

Lighted Way Children's Developmental Center, located in LaSalle, has forged relationships with 28 local school districts, serving 56 special needs students. Lighted Way strives to improve the quality of life for individuals with disabilities. Quality of life is improved by empowering students to make choices, thereby giving them some control over their environment. Lighted Way staff and administration demonstrate a positive impact in education by assisting families and districts with advocating for special needs children.

Lighted Way partners with local communities in many ways, including assisting with the beautification project for the LaSalle Business Association, volunteering to collect donations at the annual LaSalle Celebration of Lights event, and planning an accessible playground in Peru. The partnerships forged with the local community gives Lighted Way staff an opportunity to educate the public about how to build and maintain relationships with special needs students.

“Students who attend Lighted Way are served every day by staff who come to work with one idea in mind...to change the life of a child. This goal is met by 65 staff from across the Illinois Valley area as they use many resources to make each day an unbelievable experience for our differently abled students. Assimilating our students into the community while volunteering and combining efforts to educate the community demonstrating how to accept and welcome our students, is one of the most important goals we reach every day,” shared Jessica Kreiser, Executive Director of Lighted Way.

“In my years as a school administrator in the Ottawa Elementary school district, there were several opportunities for our students to work with Lighted Way,” said Ryan Myers, Assistant Regional Superintendent, Regional Office of Education #35. “Lighted Way has been instrumental in fostering a sense of community and understanding among families with special needs individuals. Their dedication to enhancing the lives of individuals with special needs is truly remarkable.”

The Illinois Principals Association serves over 6,500 educational leaders statewide, whose mission is to develop, support, and advocate for innovative educational leaders. The Reaching Out & Building Bridges

Award is supported by Horace Mann Companies of Springfield, IL. For more information about the IPA, please visit [www.ilprincipals.org](http://www.ilprincipals.org).

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