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NEWS RELEASE

GOVERNOR AND COMMISSIONER WALDMAN TOUR HEALTHY FAMILIES PROGRAM, VISIT GROUP HOME IN MIDDLESEX COUNTY

Gov. Christie Whitman today visited two programs to underscore the achievements of Human Services Commissioner William Waldman, who announced his resignation last week.

At their first stop, the Governor and Waldman visited a group home for the developmentally disabled in Edison. Moving people with disabilities from large institutions into community placements has been a high priority for the Department of Human Services under Waldman.

The Governor and Waldman also marked Child Abuse Prevention Month with a visit to a Perth Amboy program that aims to prevent abuse before it occurs.

The Options Group Home in Edison provides services for eight adults with cerebral palsy. It is operated by Options, which is a division of the Cerebral Palsy Association of Middlesex County.

The Governor and Waldman met with residents of the group and their families to discuss the advantages of community living.

At the second stop, the Governor and Waldman visited a Healthy Families program in Perth Amboy. With 18 locations throughout the state, Healthy Families programs are community-based services for new and at-risk parents. Parents are targeted early -- usually during the third trimester of pregnancy -- and receive long-range services, typically for about three years. The program in Perth Amboy is operated by the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey.

Research on home visiting programs for at-risk infants has consistently confirmed that child abuse could be significantly reduced by providing education and support to parents from birth through the first few, critical years.

Each year in New Jersey, the Division of Youth and Family Services finds that about 10,000 children have been the victims of abuse or neglect.

"The Healthy Families program is unique because these are not parents who are under DYFS supervision. These are not children who have had to know what it feels like to be abused by the very people who are supposed to love and care for them," Gov. Whitman said. "Healthy Families literally stops abuse before it starts. It is a model for a true prevention program."

Typically beginning with weekly home visits, families gradually reduce their visits over a three-year period as the family development progresses.

The Healthy Families program was started under Waldman two years ago and now serves nearly 600 families with a total appropriation of \$1.3 million in funds from the federal Family Preservation and Support Services.

"Both of these programs demonstrate why Bill's legacy in state government will be not as a state bureaucrat but as a compassionate leader who strives to create better lives for everyone living in New Jersey -- whether a newborn child, a pregnant teen, a welfare recipient, or those with mental or developmental disabilities.

Waldman announced on Thursday his resignation. Effective July 1, he will assume the job of executive director of the American Public Welfare Association in Washington.
