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First Lady Mary Pat Christie Honors Mary Robinson, Founder and Executive Director of *Imagine* as 46th New Jersey Hero

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Mountainside Organization Recognized for Commitment to Helping Children and Families Cope with Loss



Trenton, NJ - First Lady Mary Pat Christie today named Mary Robinson, founder and executive director of *Imagine* in Mountainside as her first New Jersey Hero of 2017 and 46th New Jersey Hero overall. Ms. Robinson began *Imagine* in 2011 to help children and families grieving and dealing with loss of a loved one by providing free support services that foster resiliency and the emotional well-being for those impacted.

"The loss of a loved one can have a tremendous effect on young children and teenagers," said First Lady Mary Pat Christie. "I applaud Mary for reflecting on her own childhood experience with loss and recognizing the incredible responsibility we have as adults to help children successfully cope with these life events in healthy, nurturing ways and to give them hope for the future. With a passion that continues to make a difference in the lives of so many grieving children and families, I'm proud to name Mary Robinson as my first New Jersey Hero of the year."

Imagine serves children and teens coping with loss due to the death of a parent or sibling, and children and teens coping with an adult family member with a terminal, chronic or life altering illness. The 501(c) 3 organization provides support for young adults 18-30. Since its founding, it has also provided educational workshops, presentations and on-site support for over 7000 adults and youth.

As a grassroots organization and community-based model, *Imagine* operates with the dedicated support of over 75 adult and teen volunteers who make the center's programs possible. Each of these volunteers donates more than 100 hours a year to this work and currently serve over 230 children, teens and adults from 48 New Jersey towns every two weeks.

"I'm so grateful and honored to be recognized by First Lady Mary Pat Christie as a New Jersey Hero," said *Imagine* founder and executive director Mary Robinson. "Our staff, volunteers, board, and the broader community, are ensuring we realize our mission of normalizing grief in our society and help grieving children and teens grow up emotionally healthy and able to lead meaningful and productive lives. The landscape for grieving children has completely changed from when I was a child. Back then there was no support, but today we not only have a national organization devoted to advocating on behalf of grieving children, but over 500 programs like *Imagine* now exist around the country, all of us committed to ensuring that no child has to grieve alone. The impact of that alone on our society is enormous. But much work remains to be done which makes me doubly grateful for this recognition and its help in spreading the word."

Imagine uses the peer support group model, the healing arts (paint, music, writing, clay,) physical play and movement, service to others, and community gatherings to provide a safe and healing environment for coping with the painful feelings that accompany loss. Children, teens and adults learn lifelong healthy coping skills, build on their natural resilience, and make meaning from their loss that allows for growth, healing and transformation.

For more information about *Imagine*, visit <http://www.imaginenj.org/>

New Jersey Heroes is an initiative First Lady Mary Pat Christie began in 2010 to showcase the positive and unique ways people and organizations are impacting New Jersey and their communities. To nominate a hero, go to newjerseyheroes.org and follow the application instructions to submit the person you believe is a true New Jersey Hero.

Press Contact:

Brian Murray
609-777-2600



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Office of the Governor
PO Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625
609-292-6000