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Positive Education Program to Announce \$4 Million Capital Campaign to Create State-of-the-Art Autism Center for Education, Training and Research

CLEVELAND – April 19, 2010 – As National Autism Awareness Month calls attention to the challenges facing as many as one in 110 children, Positive Education Program (PEP) will begin a major capital campaign to fund a unique facility to serve children with autism.

The new autism center will combine education for children, training for practitioners and academic research into medical protocols and educational strategies, and will facilitate collaboration with Cleveland State University, University Hospitals and other partners. The unique facility, formerly an office building in Fairview Park, is expected to open at the beginning of the next school year.

PEP will announce the public phase of its capital campaign – *Creating a Spectrum of Hope* – at its second annual PEP Rally for Kids, at 8 a.m. Friday, April 23, at Windows on the River in Cleveland. As keynote speaker, Dr. Ronald Berkman, president of Cleveland State University, will discuss “Community as Laboratory.” In addition, Cleveland Mayor Frank G. Jackson and The Junior League of Cleveland will be honored for their ongoing commitment to children.

The capital campaign is the first in PEP’s 40-year history of helping troubled and troubling children and youth succeed and grow. With a goal of \$4 million, the campaign has already received commitments of \$1.8 million – including \$1 million from the Elisabeth Severance Prentiss Foundation that will be formally announced at the PEP Rally for Kids. In celebration of this lead gift – the largest ever received by PEP and the largest amount The Prentiss Foundation has awarded this year, the new autism facility will carry the Prentiss name.

In its service to young people with autism, PEP focuses on developing skills that have real-life utility for each child. Using positive and proactive strategies, PEP professionals teach young people with autism new ways of relating, communicating and behaving. The agency currently operates 10 Day Treatment Centers, all serving school-age children and youth who demonstrate severe and challenging behavior.

“Already well-established as the largest provider of out-of-district autism services in our region, PEP is building this new school, training and research facility to support all known best practices

and growing demand,” said Frank Fecser, Positive Education Program’s chief executive officer. “A core design principle unique to this facility will include the features that have been created to enhance PEP’s ability to serve as a conduit for knowledge-transfer and knowledge-production aimed at better serving all children and families touched by autism.”

This approach is being met with great enthusiasm from leaders in higher education. “As a training institution, we rely on community for laboratory.” said Jay McLoughlin, Ph.D., dean of the College of Education and Human Services at Cleveland State University. “Therefore, the opportunity to partner in the natural environment that PEP will provide through its new autism center will have a profound impact on our ability to provide the best preparation for students.”

Dr. Max Wiznitzer, pediatric neurologist at Rainbow Babies & Children’s Hospital and director of the University Hospitals of Cleveland Center for Autism, added, “The PEP facility can help individuals at University Hospitals of Cleveland because it provides several things. It provides an educational environment for the trainees and lets them see what the difficulties are and learn from individuals who know how to manage these difficulties. It also gives you an opportunity for research – research that would be looking at the underpinnings of autism, on medications that can be effective, on behavioral strategies that can be effective and on educational strategies that can be effective.”

PEP has long nurtured a strong, positive relationship with school districts throughout the region. This strong partnership places PEP in the unique position to leverage its resources to utilize this new facility to support districts in Cleveland and beyond.

“I have watched PEP grow these last few decades and have noticed that all of its growth has been in direct response to the needs of school districts,” said Kathe Shelby, director, Office for Exceptional Children, Ohio Department of Education. “The approach that PEP is taking in this new facility around programming, training and collaboration could serve as a real model for the state.”

The new facility is located at 21755 Brookpark Rd., Fairview Park. Nestled against the Metroparks and easily accessible from several highways, this retrofit of a former 33,000-square-foot office building will become the first green building in Fairview Park.

About autism

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, autism spectrum disorders (ASD) is a group of developmental disabilities that can cause significant social, communication and behavioral challenges. CDC estimates that an average of one in 110 children in the U.S. have ASD.

About Positive Education Program

As Greater Cleveland’s largest nonprofit agency committed to our community’s kids, Positive Education Program’s caring and competent professionals help troubled and troubling children and youth successfully learn and grow through the Re-ED approach, blending quality education and mental health services in partnership with families, schools and communities. Founded in 1971, PEP operates 10 Day Treatment Centers, two Early Childhood Centers, Day Care Plus, Connections and PEP Assist, and impacts the lives of 2,500 children and their families annually.