

# PARENT *Leadership* AWARD

## DIANE SIMON SMITH 2011-2012

When her son Andrew was born in 1985, 14 weeks premature, severely disabled with cerebral palsy and overcoming tremendous odds to live, Diane Simon Smith promised she would do for him in the world what he could not do himself. Her son Matthew was born three years later with fragile X syndrome. Diane immersed herself in the special needs world to advocate not only for her own sons, but for others as well.

When Andrew was in preschool, he was one of the first children to participate in Mobility Opportunities Via Education (MOVE). Diane served as the first president of Friends of MOVE and was a catalyst to have the MOVE program implemented locally at the Lohantz Special Education Center where Andrew attended school.

Diane had earned a master's in public health from the University of California, Los Angeles School of Public Health in 1978. In 1991, she returned to school, shifting her focus from health education to marriage and family therapy, with a focus on supporting children with disabilities and their families in group settings and individual counseling including families receiving early intervention services. She graduated in 1993, earning her license as a marriage and family therapist from the California Board of Behavioral Sciences in 1997.

Diane then developed a specialized private practice, working with families of children with disabilities as well as families of very young children. For the past 14 years, she has run support groups for parents and sibling workshops and developed two retreats: Healing the Mother's Heart—now in its eleventh year—and The Journey Together, a couples' retreat. Diane is an author of articles and a presenter at local and national conferences, where she speaks about marital relationships, grief and loss, sibling issues, and strategies for thriving as they relate to childhood disability and the family. Diane is an active member of Infant Development Association, where she represents the family voice at the local, state, national, and international levels. She is also adjunct and visiting faculty to the Phillips Graduate Institute, teaching classes on the family and disability in the master's program in psychology and for numerous disability-related organizations locally and nationally.

Diane is a devoted mother. She experienced the unthinkable when Andrew passed away in 2002 at the age of 17. Matthew is now 23. Both of her sons were and are the lights of her life and endless sources of joy.

Diane's contributions have greatly enhanced awareness of and increased access to services for young children and individuals with disabilities; promoted parent-professional partnerships; and empowered parents in advocating for their children. She is a dedicated and compassionate person who has made a difference for hundreds of others and is a most deserving individual of the 2011 ICC Parent Leadership Award.

