

## ***“Celebrating Families: Many Voices, Many Choices”***

**March 25, 2005**

***Celebrating Families: Many Voices, Many Choices***, Statehouse event to culminate the Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month. The theme of this year’s event was Family Support and numerous families from around the state were recognized for their outstanding achievements for being both creative and resilient in their role of supporting a family member with developmental disabilities.

**Emily Murgo Nisenbaum**, former chairperson of MFOFC, received the **Gunnar Dybwad** Leadership Award at the ceremony. The award is given in honor of the late Professor Dybwad, who, with his wife Rosemary, was an internationally renowned researcher and a tireless advocate for securing human rights for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Gerry Morrissey, the Commissioner of the Department of Mental Retardation, presented the Award to Emily. “Emily is a giant,” he said. “Her ideas, her energy, her organizing ability and her commitment to families are all ‘super sized’. She is a passionate and strong believer in the capacities of families and she has been a tireless advocate for inclusive communities and for supports that are more flexible and responsive to the actual needs of individuals and families.”

“Emily has been a bridge builder and collaborator,” commissioner Morrissey said. “She was a founding member of the Massachusetts Families Organizing for Change and served as their chairperson for 13 years. In this role she helped build an organization that provides essential information, leadership training and support to families all across the state. Families who have had the opportunity to participate in leadership training will comment that it was a ‘life changing event’ that provided them with inspiration and a sense of mutual support. She very much represents the legacy Gunnar has left behind.”

In acceptance of her award, Emily cited her daughter Amy as the key person in her life who gave her the courage and the strength to do what she does in her work. She also recognized her husband Louis, who has been there with her in support and who himself is a leader in the field of disability services in the state.