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From Our North Shore Family to Yours ~ May Your Holidays Be Filled With Family, Friends, & Love

GIVING
Thankful
Volunteer
Love

HELPING
Hope

PEACE

SHARING

CHARITY

CARE AUDIT

GRATITUDE

GOODWILL

FRIENDS

CARING

FROM OUR NORTH SHORE FAMILY TO YOURS ~ MAY YOUR HOLIDAYS BE FILLED WITH FAMILY, FRIENDS, & LOVE

WINTER ISSUE: DECEMBER 2014 - JANUARY 2015

www.northshorefamilies.com
Teaching Kids to Give Brings Happiness, Healing and Purpose

Editor’s Note: Last month, we told you about Aaron’s Presents, a non-profit organization that offers grants to local kids who want to help others. This month (and in future issues), we feature a recent grant recipient and her project.

Spotlight on Aaron’s Presents Grant Recipient: Holly, 3rd grader from Andover

Costume Collection Project

by Leah Okimoto

Holly first heard about Aaron’s Presents when I presented my program at her elementary school’s assembly in September. Shortly after, she told her parents that she would like to apply for a grant to provide Halloween costumes for homeless children. This idea was completely hers, and her parents supported her initiative. She completed the application on her own and wrote, “I would like to find a homeless shelter that [has] children… so a homeless child will be able to trick or treat.”

Holly’s project is the first to be completed in the 2014-15 school year, and it perfectly captures what the Aaron’s Presents program is all about. Holly, at 8 years old, noticed a need in the world—the fact that she and her brother and friends are able to enjoy a fun childhood holiday experience while other children cannot—and she asked herself what she might do about it. Acting as a true leader, she went ahead and filled out the application, putting together a plan and a budget, got her parents’ permission and submitted it.

We then connected with FINA House in Lawrence, MA, which houses and provides services for women survivors of domestic violence, and the staff was thrilled at the prospect of being able to give the 21 children living there Halloween costumes in...
Aaron’s Presents
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Time for their Halloween party. They gave Holly a list of the children’s ages, genders and their requested costumes.

When we told them about Holly’s project, Spirit Halloween generously agreed to give us a significant discount on the costumes, and because of their huge selection, Holly was able to find most of the requested costumes! She then took them home and packaged them in Halloween bags and created cards for each child, with personalized messages and jokes, depending on their age and interest. In addition, she devised a sticker coding system to help the staff identify two groups of children and more easily distribute the packages.

Lastly, she and her family delivered the packages and met with the staff to learn more about the house and the children living there. Everyone in the room could not help but be moved by the joy that these children were going to experience, simply because Holly had thought about how she might help other people and had chosen to make the effort to put her thoughtfulness into action.

Holly’s project received a total grant of $375.99, which was made possible by The Dr. Alan Metwally Presents Fund, a fund started by Dr. Metwally’s loved ones to continue his legacy of generosity and love towards children. 100% of Presents Funds contributions are used solely for project expenses.

Please visit www.aaronspresents.org to learn more about how a child you know can apply for a grant or to support our work in some way. We would love to hear from you!

Leah Okimoto is a North Shore mother who lives in Andover with her husband and 6 year old daughter. Her son, Aaron, lives on in her heart and through her work with the amazing Aaron’s Presents grant recipients who bring her and others joy and inspiration every day.

Individualized Education Programs
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Be proactive in asking for information prior to the meeting, including the rough draft of the IEP, what is on the school’s agenda and any evaluations or reports that were done.

Get Personal: The most important information that I can give you is to develop a positive, professional relationship with one or more members of your child’s team. You will feel that you have an ally and it will be easier for you to feel supported in the meeting. Volunteer at your child’s school or in the classroom, as often as you can. It will be eye-opening to see what is happening, both negatively and positively. In addition, when you are a volunteer, it is easier to develop relationships with those professionals who are working with your child because you are in front of them more often. These relationships can be invaluable in many ways.

The greatest reward that can come out of working with your child’s special education team is to see your child receive the services that he or she needs, to have a wonderful school year and to progress. This is best achieved when you are feeling organized, confident and strong when working with your child’s team. It is important that the team communicates, is open to other opinions, builds trust and works towards a goal. There will be adversity in most cases, and if you are prepared, you will be able to face it and move forward.

Developing organizational skills and fostering relationships with as many professionals as you can will be to your best advantage. The reward will come with your child’s progress.

Lisa Rau Staff, a mother from North Andover, has graduate degrees in clinical mental health and business administration. She is working on a handbook for parents of children with special needs, and consulting to a Hollywood film.