

North Shore Children & Families

FREE!

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**What Are
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MARCH 2015

Raising Compassionate Children



Teaching Kids to Give Brings Happiness, Healing and Purpose

Spotlight on Grant Recipients: Mary Hannah, Jack, Ella and Michael; 2nd and 3rd graders from Andover

Project: Scrapbook Kids!

by Leah Okimoto

Mary Hannah, Jack, Ella and Michael first heard about *Aaron's Presents* when I presented to their entire elementary school at an assembly back in September. When I came back to meet with any interested kids, they were full of enthusiasm and handed me their completed application describing their project idea: scrapbooking with kids in the hospital. I immediately thought this was a terrific idea, as scrapbooking seemed like an ideal activity to do in this setting because it creates a lasting keepsake and is fun to do with other people, especially a group of kind, creative kids!

Unfortunately, hospitals are not legally able to allow children under the age of 15 to volunteer or interact with patients. So, I broke the news to the group at our next meeting and we started brainstorming other options. When I asked them, "Would you want to scrapbook with older people, like at a nursing home?"

I expected their response to be uncertain and hesitant. But to my surprise, they jumped out of their chairs yelling out, "Yeah!!" I had already fallen in love with these four kids, and this sealed the deal. I was so impressed with their willingness to change course and serve a completely different group of people. Keep in mind that they were only 7 and 8 this past fall! Despite the silliness and fun we had at every one of our meetings, their maturity and fearless initiative inspired me and validated the belief I have held from the beginning of this program that young kids have such a natural capacity to give of themselves and just need an accessible, age-appropriate way to do so.

For the next month or so, we coordinated schedules, developed a list of supplies needed, and reached out to local nursing homes. The group ended up scrapbooking with residents at Academy Manor in Andover and Wingate Andover on a Sunday afternoon in November and



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in January. True to form, they jumped in and took the lead in teaching the residents how to make scrapbook pages, in some cases making pages with them and in other cases making pages for them, depending on their capabilities. At both locations, there were some residents with significant physical and mental limitations, and the kids acted a little shy for about a minute! Then they just went about their business and communicated as much as they could with the residents and showed everyone respect, kindness and patience.

I am so proud of their commitment to their project and the way in which they carried it out. They practiced empathy and compassion with members of our society who love interacting with children and who need to feel that they are not being forgotten. In Ella's words, "Thank you for donating money to us so we could scrapbook with the older people...I learned that scrapbooking with other people and making them happy made me feel really good!"

Mary Hannah, Jack, Ella and Michael's project received a total grant of \$287.23, 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 hope that this story will inspire other kids to think of ways they can give of themselves!

Leah Okimoto is the Founder and Executive Director of Aaron's Presents, a grants program for children in 8th grade and below to dream up and carry out positive projects that benefit others. She is also a North Shore mother who lives 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.



Over and Under the Snow

Continued from page 13

On the final page, beautiful animal constellations shine brightly against the darkness, floating high in the cold night sky. Down below, snug in her warm bed, our heroine curls up and falls asleep after a busy day. This cozy ending ties everything together perfectly, making **Over and Under the Snow** a wonderful book to share on a chilly winter night.

Cathy Ballou Mealey is a picture book writer and mom to two great kids. She lives in Lynnfield, MA and shares book reviews through Twitter via @CatBallouMealey. Cathy borrowed Over and Under the Snow from her local library, where she discovers wonderful new stories every week.