

North Shore **&** Children & Families

FREE!

IN THIS ISSUE

**Our 8th Annual
Summer Camps &
Programs Showcase -
Part 2!** See pages 9-12.

**Mascara, Old Friends
& Other Superheroes -
Going Home**

**Helping Your Teen Deal
with Disappointments**

**Ask Dr. Kate Q&A:
My Daughter is Going to
Prom with an Older Boy**

Your Family's Health

**Children's Book Review:
Scaredy Squirrel
Goes Camping**

**Aaron's Presents:
Spotlight on
Humble Hearts**

Community Calendar

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APRIL 2015

Raising Compassionate Children



Teaching Kids to Give Brings Happiness, Healing and Purpose

Spotlight on Grant Recipients: Zoe, Omara and Crystal; 7th graders from Lawrence

Project: Humble Hearts



by Leah Okimoto

Zoe, Omara and Crystal are active members of the Torch Club, a group focused on community service at the Lawrence Boys & Girls Club. I met with the group in December, and in late January, these girls applied for an Aaron's Presents grant to run a Valentine's Day bake sale at the LBGC to benefit the American Heart Association. Several members of their families have suffered from heart disease, so this was a cause that was very meaningful to them.

At first I wasn't sure if it would be possible to pull off an event with just a couple of weeks to prepare, but they were committed and determined! They came up with a list of supplies they would need, and I dropped off everything a week before their bake sale date. As I entered, I noticed a beautiful hand-drawn poster on the door which was advertising the event, and a few more signs were scattered on the walls inside. A couple of days later, Zoe emailed me with another poster she had designed and told me that they had permission to use the kitchen at the LBGC the day before the sale to bake the cookies and brownies.

The day of the bake sale, my daughter and I showed up and saw the three girls and other helpers stationed at a fully decorated table, with kids swarming around them who wanted to buy their baked goods and bags of candy! They sold out of the brownies and cookies very quickly and after an hour and a half,

they had raised \$230 for the American Heart Association!

In their post-project surveys, Zoe commented, "I learned that I really can do anything in such a short period of time and it made me realize I'm capable of a lot of things." Likewise, Omara wrote, "I learned that [by] applying dedication to a project, anything could be accomplished." And Crystal noted, "I learned that you could pursue anything as long as you put your mind to it." They agreed that they were able to accomplish their goal because they were "organized," "persistent," "creative" and "interested in changing the world."

One of the things I love about all of our kids' projects is that they benefit both the giver (the kids) and the receiver, in this case the American Heart Association and its programs. By supporting our grant recipients and giving them an opportunity to develop their leadership skills and realize their potential to make a positive difference in the world, we are also given a chance to contribute to the important work of other individuals and organizations. Thanks, Zoe, Omara and Crystal for taking the initiative!

This project received a total grant of \$91.71, which was sponsored by Andover Family Dental (Dr. Aparna Sharma). 100% of Business Sponsor contributions are used 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 how they might give of themselves!

Leah Okimoto is the Founder and Executive Director of Aaron's Presents, a grants program designed to empower 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 and infant daughters. 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.

Publisher's Note: Congratulations on the birth of your baby daughter, Leah! So very, very happy for you and your family. Best wishes to all of you! Leah, you are a true example of a multi-tasking, determined, committed, inspiring, thoughtful woman and role model, who makes a very positive difference in the world. For all that you are and all that you do, thank you, Leah!



Milena Mnatsakanyan, an 11 year old 5th grader at Swampscott Middle School, won First Place in the Crescendo International Music Competition, held at Carnegie Hall in New York City in January 2015. With participating musicians from 13 countries, this award is in recognition of dedication to music and outstanding performance. Milena would like to thank her music teacher, Alex Foaksman, for her musical achievements, as well as her Grandmother, who encouraged her to play the piano.