

NEWS

Pupils' kindness pays off

Pair receive bikes from On the Move Inc.

By Aaron Curtis, acurtis@lowellsun.com – Lowell Sun
Updated: 07/11/2019 11:11:40 AM EDT

LOWELL — Julianna Chan, 9, and her brother, 8-year-old Jordan Chan, were unsure what awaited them when they were told to be at their school, McAuliffe Elementary, during their summer vacation to collect a prize.

According to their father, Sopath Chan, Vice Principal Patti-Jean Corrente told them they should be there Tuesday afternoon to receive a reward for "how good and polite they are in school," he said.

As it turns out, after careful consideration, school officials decided Julianna and Jordan would be the beneficiaries of bicycles donated to McAuliffe Elementary by the nonprofit On the Move Inc.

"They were so happy," said Sopath, shortly after his smiling children received their brand-new bikes.

On the Move, created by Methuen-resident Bill Haddad three years ago, has distributed roughly 80 bikes to area children.

In handing out bicycles, the nonprofit aims to meet one of its goals: to promote a healthy lifestyle among youth.

In their latest round of charity, the nonprofit gave four bikes to McAuliffe Elementary and another two bikes to Abraham Lincoln Elementary, also in Lowell.

The schools work through a list of students to determine who should receive the bicycles. In addition to the bikes, On the Move provides a helmet and a bicycling safety manual.

The goodwill doesn't only involve the local schools and On the Move. The Digital Federal Credit Union got it all started by donating these six bicycles to the nonprofit.

The children's bikes were built by members of the DCU Financial Insurance Services during a recent team-building exercise. With the exercise complete and the bikes constructed, the question became, "What to do with these bikes?"

DCU wanted to provide the bicycles to a local nonprofit, and after some research, felt On the Move was the ideal choice.

"As we look to expand our branch network — with the opening of our new Methuen Member Service Center in late fall, DCU Insurance sought to earmark an organization within that region who is contributing to and advancing educational opportunities for local youth both recreationally and in the classroom," according to a statement released by DCU.

As referenced in DCU's statement, it doesn't stop at handing out bicycles for On the Move. The organization has another mission aside from encouraging children to live a healthy lifestyle.

On the Move also works to promote literacy among children in need by providing them with books.

Through donations and grants, On the Move has been able to distribute around 14,000 books to several Merrimack Valley communities to date.

Of that total, around 9,000 books have been donated to schools and other community organizations based in Lowell.

"They've brought a lot of good to our school," said McAuliffe Elementary School Principal David Anderson.

McAuliffe Elementary has been working with On the Move since February, according to Anderson. To go along with the four bikes, the Centralville-based school has received approximately 1,500 books for their students.

"The work (Haddad) is doing is invaluable," Anderson said. "One of the big pushes at McAuliffe, and across Lowell, is to establish a love of reading among the kids, and access to books can be hard."

On the Move worked particularly hard to meet its mission when the summer months arrived.

Haddad points out that over vacations and summer break it has been found children lose two to three months of reading skills that they've learned during the school year.

In 2013, the Annie E. Casey Foundation put out a report with research that shows children from low-income families who have access to books during the summer months counteract this summer-learning slide.

It also improves state reading assessments scores.

With this in mind, On the Move used funding to buy enough books so each McAuliffe student could bring home two books during the summer months.

At an assembly to celebrate the closing of the school year, it was revealed to students they would receive the books.

"The reaction from the students was priceless," Anderson said. "The energy in the room was amazing. There was one first grader who couldn't believe he was taking home the books. He thought they had to come back to school."

"That's what we want," he added. "We want them to be excited about books and be excited about the journey books can take us on."

The mission isn't complete for On the Move. As Haddad points out, the organization provided the Lowell Police Department with 150 kids books on Monday morning, allowing officers to distribute them to children they come in contact with.

The nonprofit also recently gave another nonprofit organization, the Greater Lowell Community Foundation, with around 500 kids books to distribute to Lowell homeless shelters.

"Anywhere we can get them to the kids," Haddad said.

For more about On the Move, visit their website at otminc.org.

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