



January 9, 2017

Dear Friends and Family,

We hope the New Year is finding you well. As we settle into 2017, we wanted to take a few minutes to thank you for your continued support and encouragement. Here are a few highlights from the year!

This past Spring as the school year came to a close, we were invited to host our program in the community center of the neighboring apartment complex. We were honored by this invitation and excited by the new opportunities and friendships this space would bring. After ending our summer programming, we officially moved First Door to the Cathedral Gardens Community Center. This transition has been a huge success; not only has it helped to reduce program costs, but it has opened our doors to many new students and their families. It has been a joy to expand our community, while at the same time continuing to serve the same core group of students from the past three years.

One of the highlights of 2016 is the relationship we're forging with one of these new families. This family of five has two kindergarteners who are now joining us every day after school, a three-year-old, and a baby brother, all being raised by a tenacious single mother. We'll call the oldest boys Johnny and Carter. We quickly learned that both Johnny and Carter are having a hard time transitioning into school. Similarly, the boys were having a hard time with us after school. Many of their first days with us ended early, with Marissa or I walking one, or both boys home to talk with their mom and make a plan for tomorrow. It is this space that we are most passionate - creating a place for all students to be successful, and inviting their families to share in their growth and success. Two months into the school year, we had a breakthrough day; one of our volunteers saw Carter carrying a thick Super Hero anthology and asked if they could read it together. Carter smiled and climbed into the volunteer's lap. He listened intently to these Super Hero tales for nearly an hour. Amazed, Marissa and I watched him fall deeper and deeper into the stories. When it was time for the volunteer to head out for the day, I told Carter it was his best day ever and offered to write a note for him to show his mom. The next day he ran in shouting, "My mom is so proud of me! Can I take a note home today?" Since this initial note, Johnny has been motivated to earn a 'good day note' as well, and Mom has been coming to check in and see the boys in action. We continue to have hard days, but they are quickly becoming fewer and farther between. It has been such a joy to witness this mom celebrating and cheering on her boys as they learn.

As we look into the year ahead, we are eager to find more ways to involve families in the successes of their students. Our first plan is to host a reading workshop with parents whose students are struggling to learn to

read. Our hope is to intentionally partner with parents and students, giving both the tools and strategies to be successful at home and at school. To launch this initiative, we hope to get a collection of early readers that students and parents can check out to read together. We will use these books in the workshops as we teach specific reading strategies and would send additional copies home for families to put the strategies to practice. Please let us know if you are interested in helping us build this library.

Again, thank you for your continued care and support for both our students and their families. This work would simply not be possible without you.

With love,

Haley Durham
haleymariedurham@gmail.com

Marissa Ranno
mranno@bridgetowninc.org

