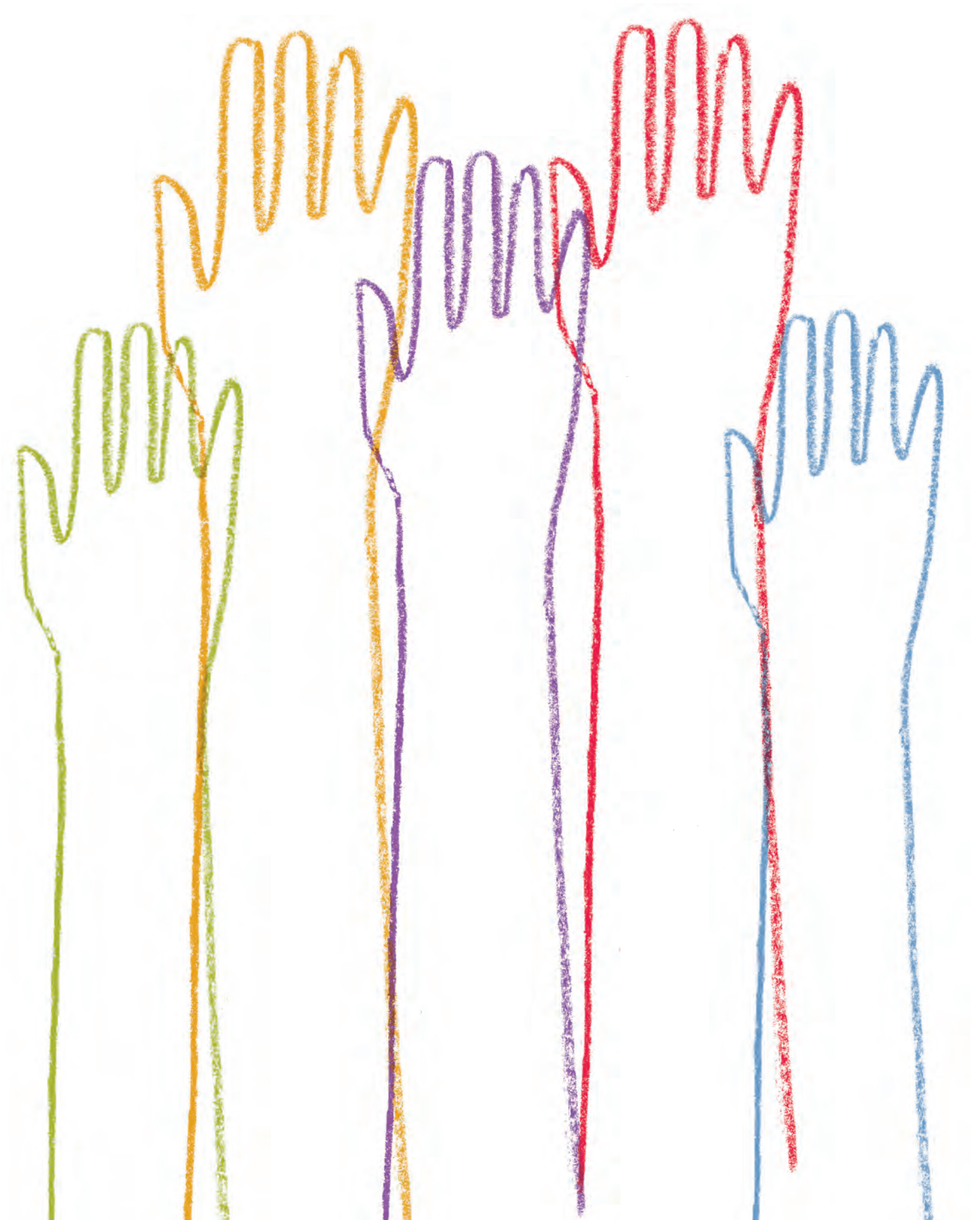


# the montessorian

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## Giving Back at All Levels

by JEFFREY LEVINE

Whether in Toddler Community or about to graduate, everyone at Near North Montessori has something valuable to contribute to the school and the community.

It was this belief that led to the school expanding the Walk-a-Thon into Montessori Moves: A Week of Giving Back to NNM. Over the past two years of Montessori Moves, classes have done everything from cleaning up the first-floor hallway and baking treats for the maintenance staff to reading with younger students and constructing a “buddy bench” for the playscape. But giving back isn’t something that happens just one week out of the year.

Although some students at the 3-6 level can’t make it through the day without taking a nap, they are never too young to learn about the importance of charity. Last year, for example, Lydia Lewis-Brandt’s class elected to do extra chores in order to raise money for Meals on Wheels. In addition to donating the money they earned, the students also gave of themselves by decorating blank placemats and writing messages to the recipients, which the younger children dictated to the older ones. The cash donation and the bulk of the laminated placemats were then delivered to Meals on Wheels, while a smaller stack was taken by a student to deliver in person on his grandfather’s Meals on Wheels route. In this way, the project was designed to convey the idea that the thought behind a donation is as important as the donation itself. “This was about making those connections real for the children,” Lydia explains. “They were so proud to share what they did.”

Students in 6-9 participate in the Toy Sale, a Near North tradition inaugurated almost 40 years ago in Jackie Bergen and Maureen Peifer’s 6-9 class. Students go through their possessions and bring in items that they then invite 3-6ers to purchase. Not only do the children need to make tough decisions about what to keep and what to sell, but they’re also responsible for organizing and pricing

the items, helping the younger students navigate around the sale tables and making change. After the proceeds have been collected, the students discuss where they should donate the money and why. Jesse Thompson, who now oversees in his own classroom a sale like those he took part in as a student, says that this gives the students ownership over what they’ve done and shows them what they can accomplish together as a community.

As students get older, they’re able to start giving back in more self-directed ways. Two years ago, 9-12ers Lucy Norris, Veronica Piechnik and Cameron White thought about children their own age fighting cancer and resolved to raise \$600 for Lurie Children’s Hospital. After reaching that number through a very successful

*“Even though we’re young, we can still make a big impact.”*

bake sale, they decided to hold a second sale and get the donation up to at least \$1,000, which Cameron describes as “a big, striking number!” This was no easy task, but, Lucy says, “all the trips back and forth to Anne’s office to make arrangements were worthwhile.” In the end, the students were able to deliver a \$1,000 check to Lurie in person. Asked to reflect on what she learned from her experience, Cameron says, “Even though we’re young, we can still make a big impact.”

At the Jr. High level, Sandwich Shoppe not only operates like any other restaurant—sourcing food, setting prices, reinvesting in itself—but also incorporates giving back as a key element of its business model. This past year, Sandwich Shoppe allocated almost \$1,500 to help fund teacher salaries, kitchen supplies, children’s clothing and the farm program at Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos, the organization for orphaned children that Near North has built a





partnership with in Guatemala and Honduras. Although monetary support is always welcome, this was especially meaningful because the students were able to do a needs assessment when they visited the schools in April. As a result, they are not only able to support their brothers and sisters at NPH in the most effective way possible, but they'll also get to deliver the items in person this coming spring.

"If we are truly preparing our students to be active citizens in their local and global communities, they must be given the opportunity to form and nurture authentic and sustainable partnerships," says Sandwich Shoppe teacher Jamee Warrenfeltz. "No mindful business can operate successfully in isolation, and it is for this reason that community giving and exchange is at the heart of Sandwich Shoppe."

## Expanding the Circle

by JEFFREY LEVINE

Near North has long emphasized the three I's—be informed, be involved, be invested. Alongside these, though, is a fourth I—be inclusive—that might be the key to our strength as a school community.

The term "diversity" has traditionally been used to identify an important goal: ensuring that the makeup of an institution reflects the makeup of the society around it. The idea behind inclusivity is to go further—to put diversity into action by giving everyone an opportunity to be heard and an opportunity to listen.

In order to help foster this sense of inclusivity, the Diversity and Inclusion Committee invited speaker Gyasi Ross to visit Near North in October to discuss race, privilege and equality. A member of the Blackfeet Nation, Ross uses traditional Native American storytelling techniques to highlight voices and points of view that have often gone unheard.



Students will also encounter new perspectives through the Listening for Justice project. With the help of StoryCorps, a nonprofit organization that records and shares stories from ordinary people, NNM families will collect personal narratives from people in their network about their experiences as upstanders, bystanders, or survivors of systemic oppression and injustice. The stories will be shared in January as part of our ongoing engagement with the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

"When you stop talking and start listening amazing things happen," Diversity and Inclusion Committee chair Miriam Klevan explains. "At Near North an ideal student isn't the one who raises their hand and says 'I know the answer'; it's the kid who can listen to others and then works collaboratively with them."

For more information on upcoming events focused on inclusivity, check your email, read Diversity Director Brian Corley's blog ([diversity.nnms.org](http://diversity.nnms.org)) and stay tuned.

# An Invested Community

by JEFFREY LEVINE



From ozobots to graduated cylinders to goats, benefits of the Annual Fund can be found everywhere you look at Near North Montessori.

Though it's impossible to quantify the impact these benefits have on daily life at Near North, there's one important number standing behind them: 90. That's the percentage of parents who felt strongly enough about the school and what the Annual Fund achieves to invest in that vision. Much more than just a way to purchase needed items, the Annual Fund serves as a continuation and extension of the Montessori philosophy.

"Rather than try to suppress the children's need to climb, Near North was able to use money from the Annual Fund to purchase and erect a set of monkey bars," 9-12 teacher Molly Miner says. "By doing so, we were able to further our commitment to the whole child and our quest to follow the child's needs, rather than dictate them. So far the monkey bars have been a hit, and numerous children around the school have the blisters to prove it!"

While creating outlets to channel students' energy is certainly important, the Annual Fund also provides students with opportunities to approach new challenges and shift their perspectives.

"The Annual Fund allowed us to enhance our lab and redesign our approach to emphasize skills like critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, collaboration and digital literacy," Educational Technology Director Janeen Cohen says. "It's not about preparing kids for a future career; it's about teaching a mindset, a behavior and a skill of lifelong learning. We are not trying to just build the next generation of engineers and coders. We want to ignite their passion, unleash their inner inventor and build up their own creative confidence."

Intrinsic to the nature of Montessori education is the idea that lessons learned in the computer lab aren't so different from those learned at the Farmessori.

"Students benefit from the Annual Fund because they find themselves in a rich, thriving prepared environment where they are free to uncover within themselves an innate connection with agriculture in its most fundamental sense," Farmer Joe Phillips says. "They learn to grow their own food, prepare it and eventually run an actual restaurant business. By doing so they are literally creating their own food-based community and living Dr. Montessori's dream of a peaceful and productive society that values a continuum of good, meaningful work."



# NNM Cares: Connecting with Community

by LIZ BRANDT

Even the youngest Near North students easily grasp the concept of community, as it's so deeply rooted in their daily classroom experience. Several NNM parents sought to expand on this awareness by providing Near North families with opportunities to perform volunteer work together. Calling themselves NNM Cares, they began to look for ways children and parents could take the Montessori ideals of cooperation and helpfulness beyond the school doors.

Currently led by NNM parents Sylvia Tamashiro, Antoinette Kavanaugh and Meredith West, NNM Cares was inspired by a group founded by other Near North parents, the Honeycomb Project, which draws its volunteers from all over the city. The goals of NNM Cares are both to develop lasting connections—with other schools and organizations, and among families—and to demonstrate that the benefits of volunteering flow in multiple directions.

"Everyone needs something and has something to offer; everyone has a chance to take from and give back to our community," Sylvia explains. "In this way, strong social supports and networks are created and our community is improved."

In February 2015, the group partnered with the Northeast Levy Senior Center to host its kickoff event, the first in a series of multigenerational bingo parties. NNM Cares has gone on to foster ongoing relationships



with local public Montessori schools as well. In the past year, it's held a holiday bazaar with Suder Montessori, a party to build an edible garden at Oglesby Elementary and an event to help the Montessori School of Englewood prepare its new building for the school year.

"The children understand community-building very well," Sylvia says. "We provide additional 'window and mirror' experiences, which allow parents and children to see themselves as sharers of the unique Montessori culture and to connect with the larger community."

NNM Cares is holding several events in November, including a dance party for the seniors at the Levy Center and a Thanksgiving dinner for teens in need. In January the group will host a sorting and packaging party for Bernie's Book Bank, which provides books for local at-risk children.

For further information on NNM Cares please contact Sylvia Tamashiro at [sylvia@1530design.com](mailto:sylvia@1530design.com).

# Dads Make a Difference

by LIZ BRANDT

POPS, Near North's club for dads, has a two-part goal: get fathers together and get them involved. While it can be difficult for many working fathers to participate during the school day, POPS creates opportunities for dads to meet at evening and weekend events throughout the school year.

POPS' lead organizer, NNM parent Lafayette Williams, envisions fathers gathering to take part in activities, sharing resources and collaborating on family-oriented activities that welcome the entire community. Recognizing the vital role that mothers play at Near North, Lafayette feels that the presence of fathers is equally important and hopes to close the gap in parental involvement.

"Being actively present at school demonstrates real interest in your child's environment," Lafayette says. "Fathers are role models, and POPS affords another opportunity to be seen as community leaders and partners who are willing participants even when taken out of their normative roles or comfort zone."



Lafayette is optimistic that POPS will bring the Near North community even closer together and encourage dads to share their opinions and ideas.

"Sometimes fathers need a reminder that spending an hour or two conducting a field trip, reading a book or simply being a chaperone fosters our community," Lafayette says.

POPS is open to all NNM dads and holds monthly meetings; the group will host an all-school dance on February 10.

For further information please contact Lafayette Williams at [lafayetteww3@gmail.com](mailto:lafayetteww3@gmail.com).

# Corner on Culture

by BRAD DORFMAN



On summertime Tuesdays, the Polish Triangle area near the school fills with music and dance, and Near North Montessori is integral to the festivities.

Near North students, faculty and staff have been involved with the Tuesdays at the Triangle program since it began four years ago as a part of neighborhood attempts to develop the plaza at Milwaukee, Division and Ashland.

Each May, Near North band, violin and dance students perform an after-school concert as commuters come up from the Blue Line station below. This year, violin teacher Sylvia Myintoo, drum teacher Vance Okraszewski and saxophone teacher Corbin Andrick also

performed with their own musical groups during the summer.

On top of that, Near North also carts chairs, tables, and sound equipment to the triangle each of the 16 weeks of performances.

"It's a way to model to children that we are involved. We aren't just visitors to the neighborhood," says Mieko Yoshida, Near North's Operations and Facilities Director, who has been involved with developing the Polish Triangle area for years as the school's representative to the Polish Triangle Coalition.

"One of the tenets in Montessori is to be global citizens," Mieko says. "The neighborhood is the doorstep to the rest of the world."

## Get to Know Mieko Yoshida, Near North's Operations and Facilities Director



**What is your job at the school?** I am responsible for the daily operations of the building and grounds, security, technology system, managing the budgets for these areas, and general operations of the school.

**How long have you been at Near North?** I came to NNM in 1978 as an assistant and subsequently took Montessori teacher training and was certified in 1980. In my time at the school, I have also been office manager/assistant administrator, business manager, finance director and project manager in the renovation of the existing building and the construction of the Bergen Building.

**What do you like most about being part of the NNM community?** It's the best place to learn something new every day. This community of children, staff, parents, grandparents, friends, contractors and vendors has given me the opportunity to truly

"become myself." It is a place where you can take an idea, do research and develop it, receive useful feedback and support, and have that idea come to life. I also enjoy working with staff who were toddlers or just a "bump" when we first met. Now we work side-by-side for the benefit of children here and for children yet to come—the legacy continues.

**What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?**

Swimming, flower arranging, cooking and baking, taking and printing digital photos, hiking and traveling.

**Tell us something about your family.** My husband and I have been together since 1972. We have no children but many nieces and nephews—and of course, all the children here at NNM. My mother, at almost 92 years old, lives in a condo a few blocks from our house. My father passed away in 2007. He was a die-hard White Sox fan and was beaming when they won the World Series.

# Eighth-Grade Jobs: Real-World Experience

by JEFFREY LEVINE

By the time most Near North Montessori students reach eighth grade they've already spent a decade in a curriculum that emphasizes the value of practical life skills. Every May, these soon-to-be graduates put all that preparation into action when they step into the working world as part of the eighth-grade jobs program.

The program requires our oldest students to locate and contact a prospective employer, through either their own research or the parent community, and arrange to spend 35 hours in the workplace. Beyond giving them greater confidence in their ability to adapt to new situations, manage time, and navigate the city, the experience allows eighth-graders to develop relationships with potential mentors.

"Adolescents respond incredibly well to experts in their field," Jr. High Director Chris Ambroso explains. "If they can connect, it's a very powerful match."

For many students, this professional mentoring allows them to delve further into the work they started during their independent study

projects, or to pursue an outside interest that could one day develop into a career. As one might expect, the jobs selected by our eighth-graders are as diverse as the students themselves. Accounting office, bike-repair shop, bakery, vet clinic—name an interesting work environment and there's a good chance that at least one of our students has found a job there. Regardless of field, all participants are expected to work under real-world constraints. That means not only taking steps to secure the job but also negotiating a schedule, asking questions and responding to feedback to ensure that they are meeting expectations.

The program's benefits to Near North students are clear. It may not be as obvious, though, why employers are willing to devote so much time and energy to trainees who will soon return to school.

"I think that businesses take our students on because it's the students who make the initial contact," Mr. Ambroso says. "When they hear what the students are trying to do and why, they're intrigued and excited. They want to help the student succeed."

## The Community Song

by JEFFREY LEVINE

For anyone keeping track of music careers coming out of Near North Montessori, the Mile of Music festival in Appleton, Wisconsin, was the place to be this past August. In a lineup of 240 acts, eight of the performers were NNM graduates: **Spencer Tweedy** ('10), **Henry Mosher** ('09) and **Hayden Holbert** ('09) with their band the Blisters; **Alaina Stacey** ('09) with her band Maybe April; **Sima Cunningham** ('04) as part of the duo Homme; **Lane Beckstrom** ('06); and **Juliet** and **Maddie Kelson** (both '12), who sing and play guitar as the indie-folk duo the Kelson Twins.

Although their graduation dates span almost a decade, there is a sense of camaraderie among these NNM musicians. "It's weird because a lot of the people at the festival were in different grades," Juliet says. "But I feel like whenever I see someone from Near North, regardless of whether they were in my level, there's an immediate connection."

That connection brought the Kelsons to Albany, Wisconsin, in July for Postock, a music festival started by Sima in 2008, and also resulted in an album, the first that Maddie's produced—an independent project that places music by the Kelson Twins and classmate **Sydney Smith** ('12) alongside that of other NNM graduates and teachers.



LEFT TO RIGHT: HAYDEN HOLBERT, ALAINA STACEY, SIMA CUNNINGHAM, JULIET KELSON, MADDIE KELSON, SPENCER TWEEDY AND HENRY MOSHER

"Just going to this school since we were little kids gave us the mentality and confidence and mindset to know that we'd be taken seriously," Maddie says. "We were booking our own gigs when we were 14. It taught us so much more about the industry as opposed to our mom doing it for us."

After spending the summer at Near North as camp counselors, the Kelsons parted ways, as Maddie moved to Nashville to spend a gap year working on her music while Juliet began her freshman year at Macalester College, focusing on computer science and international studies. Not to worry, however: the twins will be reunited at Macalester next fall when Maddie begins classes.

# the montessorian

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## SAVE THE DATE **Big Night** **Goes Big Time**

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A PUBLICATION OF NEAR NORTH MONTESSORI · PRODUCED BY THE PARENTS, STUDENTS AND FRIENDS OF NNM

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