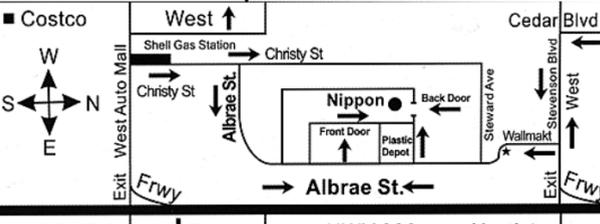




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Ambassadors of Compassion

SUBMITTED BY KARIN CONN

Palo Alto Humane Society invites 7th and 8th grade students in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties to become Ambassadors of Compassion by writing a fiction or nonfiction story on the theme of animals and people helping each other. There are many ways that animals help people such as companionship, therapy and healing, safety and rescue, support for soldiers, and helping on the farm, and people help animals in return. Stories submitted should illustrate a sense of kindness in their characters.

The winning author will receive a prize of \$500 and two runners-up will receive \$200 each. The winning stories will be published by Palo Alto Humane Society (PAHS). They will join PAHS' library of stories about animals and kindness and will be a highlight of PAHS' 2021 Creating Compassionate Communities campaign.

The contest is open to students in schools located in the counties of Santa Clara and San Mateo. Stories must be original and between 800 and 1,000 words, and they must be submitted by midnight on May 31, 2021. Competition guidelines and a submission form may be found at <https://www.paloaltohumane.org/humane-news/palo-alto-humane-society-announces-2021-story-writing-competition>.

The contest is now in its third year. Vandana Ravi's winning story in 2019 was about a lonely girl who came across a donkey who also needed a friend. Her story along with factual information about donkeys around the world was turned into an original PAHS book, Snapshot, which is being sold



Vandana Ravi

on Amazon. The winning story for the 2020 contest was "The Sun," written by Aaron Huang. It depicts the life of a mother dog trapped in a puppy mill from the dog's point of view. It is a timely piece, especially now during the pandemic when people seeking animal companionship have emptied shelters and rescue organizations and puppy mills are again on the rise.

Ambassadors of Compassion Story Writing Contest
Deadline: May 31, 2021
www.paloaltohumane.org
<http://bit.ly/37axsu8>

continued from page 1

Have a heart give a heart!



Cali Arellano

In early January of 2021, Anderson's students told her that they felt isolated and depressed, and just wanted to be able to come back to school and see their friends. Soon after, she had a conversation with her friend Tammy Williams, Executive Nutrition Director for Valley InterCommunity Council (VIC) in the San Fernando Valley. They discussed how many of the seniors VIC delivers food to were also hit hard by the

Many senior citizens across the nation have lost their spouses due to COVID-19, and others have not been able to see their grandchildren for over a year, so these cards truly brought a smile to their faces.

pandemic. Anderson thought, "There must be some way that we can get these two generations together," and Bay Area Kids Care was born.

The next day, Anderson pitched the idea of having her students make seniors Valentine's Day cards to her principal, who loved it and asked her to pitch it to the rest of the staff and Parent Teacher Organization. Within two days Anderson's students agreed to participate, other teachers and their classes at Rose Elementary joined in, and the PTO advertised the idea to the rest of the community. A local girl scout troop asked to join the effort, and even a children's choir director in St. Paul, Minnesota heard about the project and volunteered to help make and distribute cards in his area.

Families were encouraged to come to the school's office and pick up a card-making kit. Inside were materials like cardstock paper, stickers, crayons, markers,

and anything else they might need to create Valentine's Day cards. Students were also given the option to create digital cards and send those to the seniors.

One student wrote, "Dear Valentine, Its been rough during the Corona, but I wanted to tell you that you are amazing. Never give up, and never change for someone you don't know. You're perfect, I love you."

Another student said, "Dear Valentine, I am a third grader at Rose Elementary School. I would like to wish you a very happy Valentine's Day. I hope you have a wonderful and exciting day. What are you planning to do on Valentine's Day? Well I have not planned on what I'm going to do on Valentine's Day but I may stay home and play games. I have a special Valentine's joke for you. What did one raspberry say to the other on Valentine's Day? I love you berry much! I hope you have a great Valentine's Day!"

Once all of the finished cards had been delivered to the school office on January 27th, they were quarantined for two weeks before being distributed to the seniors to eliminate any possibility of spreading COVID-19.

Anderson, with the help of Williams, reached out to Meals on Wheels, distributors at Second Harvest Food Bank, nursing homes, memory care facilities, and several other senior programs, who all agreed to help distribute the cards. By the end of the project, 710 Valentine's Day cards were distributed to six locations across the nation! "It really was like an uplift for the people that were involved throughout this whole project," said Anderson.

Not only were students excited to make cards, but seniors were overjoyed to receive them and distributors felt lucky to deliver the loving messages.

Many senior citizens across the nation have lost their spouses due to COVID-19, and others have not been able to see their grandchildren for over a year, so these cards truly brought a smile to their faces. Drivers for Meals on Wheels felt like they were getting a Valentine's Day gift too because they got to hear the seniors' reactions to the cards.

What's next for Bay Area Kids Care? Anderson does not want this project to end. For now, she is trying to get 501c3 verification for Bay Area Kids Care to make it an official non-profit organization, and is planning another round of cards soon, this time Spring themed. "That's exactly what this project is about, is putting a smile on people's faces and letting them know that we are still out there. Just because they're inside their home they're not alone," she said. She is also trying to put together a virtual student choir for summer to give students a way to socialize with each other during the pandemic. They will record songs together and share these recordings with communities online to spread more joy and connectedness.

"One person can spread kindness. And when we get together and we think of other people and we try to show them that they're loved and wanted, it makes such a difference," Anderson said.

Those interested in learning more about Bay Area Kids Care can go to their website, bayareakidscare.com.

LEAF's Community Garden is seeking volunteers to greet visitors. Very time flexible. ADA Handicap accessible. Location: California Nursery Historical Park in Fremont, at Mission Blvd/Niles.
FremontLEAF@gmail.com 925-202-4489