

North Shore **&** Children Families

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& Programs
Showcase Series
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Noon, Wed., Feb. 13!**



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FEBRUARY 2019

Your Mental Health

Beating Winter Blues

by Dr. Kate Roberts, PhD

People often talk about staying in front of the stock market, interest rates or the next big sale. It's as important, if not more so, to be proactive when it comes to mental health. Winter is here in full force. A recent weekend was met with snow, ice, sleet-rain and a Nor'easter for many of us, leaving us to feel trapped and house bound, only to be followed by days of bitter cold.

The antidote for the winter blues contains a few basic ingredients. Despite the technology revolution, the needs of a healthy human being have not changed at all. Humans are conditioned to be active for survival and when they are inactive, this negatively impacts their mood. Humans are conditioned to be stimulated and challenged and when they are bored, this negatively impacts their mood. Humans are conditioned to be social animals and when their primary form of connection is gaming



and/or social media, this negativity impacts their mood.

Mind over matter. People often don't want to venture into the cold because they tell themselves it will be too cold or too miserable. If it's truly unbearable, you can always turn around and head home. Get outside. Dress appropriately for it. People raised in the mid-west will tell you that it's never too cold if you are dressed properly. Keep your silk and polypropylene on and dress in layers. If going outside for exercise or play, feet and hand warmers will keep you more comfortable. Instead of fretting over it being miserable outside, tell yourself once you are outside and moving, you will have fun and feel better.

Practice what you preach. Parents who are willing to endure the weather conditions are more likely to have children who will as well. The weather is only an excuse if you let it be one. When my two boys tell me it's too cold to be outside, I say, "Oh yeah, are you going to tell me I can do something you can't?" This usually gets their goat as they grab their coats.

Exercise. Those of you who have cross-country skied know there is no better feeling than coming inside after working up a sweat in the cold. If you are a runner, you can run outside all year round with proper preparation. For wind, a facemask does the trick. It's up to you to fight against the force of air, but then again, it's all part of exercise. Physical movement boosts neurotransmitters in the



brain to increase the release of endorphins, which regulate and elevates mood. This helps fight off winter doldrums! So run around outside or have a neighborhood game of tag or kickball, or head to the nearest hill for an afternoon of sledding.

Get enough sleep and proper nutrition. People naturally want to sleep a little bit more during the winter. Aim for 7-8 hours each night for adults and 10 hours for kids. Try to keep your bedtime and waking time consistent and you'll have more energy. For adults, short naps (15 minutes) help boost energy. Diet can help stabilize mood in the winter. Eat fruits and vegetables as complex carbohydrates, combined with protein, and drink your daily 8 cups of water to stabilize body energy, which can translate into compensating for lowering mental and emotional energy.

Natural sunlight. Not only does sunlight provide much needed Vitamin D, which stabilizes energy, it also boosts mood naturally. Lack of sunlight can cause many people to become depressed – without knowing why! Similar to exercise, sunlight exposure releases neurotransmitters in the brain that affect mood. Time outdoors, sitting in sunlit rooms and having light bulbs in the house turned on full force can all help to keep the impact of sunlight positive during the low light winter months.

Keep healthy. Staying physically healthy boosts immunity to physical and psychological stress. Talk to your doctors and ask about research on probiotics keeping people healthy and helping them to fight disease. Ask about taking Vitamin C routinely to keep your immune system strong while you are playing in cold snow.

Limit technology. The more inactive and tech-driven you and your kids are, the more you all will want to stay that way. It's very difficult to avoid technology altogether and I'm not suggesting that you do. Use technology for entertainment in moderation after being active and outside each and every day this winter!

Dr. Kate Roberts is a licensed psychologist with offices on the North Shore. She can be reached at kate@drkateroberts.com and www.drkateroberts.com.

Raising Compassionate Children



Teaching Kids to Give Brings Happiness, Healing and Purpose

by **Leah Okimoto,**
Founder/Executive Director

We hope you are enjoying the new year and that 2019 brings you and your children many moments of connection, joy, caring and feeling empowered to reach out to others who may be facing various challenges. This year over the holidays, many of our young participants did projects that benefited individual people and families around the Merrimack Valley and North Shore directly. While talking with some of the recipients, I have been struck by how surprised they have been by kindness and generosity. They have described how lonely they have felt at times, not

thinking that anyone cared about them or would want to help them. This feeling of being isolated and needing to bear their challenges by themselves has not surprisingly often

led to depression and anxiety. It has been extremely meaningful to have the kids we work with hear this and experience how simple it is to reach out and make another person feel less alone in the world, to feel cared for and to see that there are good people in the world. This is what ultimately brings hope, the essential source of all good things.

7th grader, Joeury, and 8th graders, Lizbeidy, Nhyira and Shereen, heard about a recent shooting in which a teenage girl was injured. They wanted to help the family, who is struggling to make ends meet and now has a long road to recovery ahead. They brought dinner to the hospital and visited with her



mother, and also shopped for a bunch of items that they urgently need. Our older participants benefit greatly from seeing that behind every headline is a real person, with relatives and loved ones who are deeply impacted, and then knowing that they can help alleviate their pain and isolation in a significant way. As Shereen wrote after, "She has opened my mind to the fact that violence should never be the answer to any problem. Guns are never the answer. Killing is NEVER the answer... Her daughter is truly a miracle and she will make it and endure through all the pain and reach a bright and beautiful destination."

Meanwhile, 6th graders, Makayla, Nhyzayah and Jaziel, planned an amazing appreciation luncheon for the entire Lowell Police Department. They made a poster that will hang in the headquarters and enjoyed interacting with and thanking each officer, detective and staff member

Continued on page 4

North Shore Children & Families



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for our upcoming deadlines.

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Aaron’s Presents

Continued from page 3



who attended. They took great pride in being able to bring so much joy and cheer to adults who put their lives on the line for all of us every day, and now have experienced what a tremendous impact their ideas and initiative can have on their larger community.

Lastly, we want to thank Citizens Bank for awarding Aaron’s Presents their 2019 Champions in Action for Youth Leadership! We are so honored to receive this award and the \$35,000 grant and media promotional support by NBC10/necn/Telemundo, which will help us spread the word more widely about what our youth are doing for their communities and discovering about their own potential in the process. If we can develop a next generation of people and leaders who care about the needs of others and know how to take action to connect, help and build community, we can change the world together!

For more information about how we can help a child you know to create and lead such an experience, please visit aaronspresents.org or contact one of our staff members below. Our application is now on our website in English and Spanish.



Leah Okimoto is the Executive Director of Aaron’s Presents, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that she founded in 2014 in memory of her infant son, Aaron. Feel free to contact: Leah at lokimoto@aaronspresents.org or (978)809-5487; Kimberly LaBonte-Kay, North Shore Regional Director, at kimberly@aaronspresents.org; Ebony White, Lynn Mentor, at ebony@aaronspresents.org; Franchesca Arias, Lawrence Mentor, at franchesca@aaronspresents.org; Jenny-Ann Diaz, Lawrence Mentor, at jenny@aaronspresents.org; Monica Veth, Lowell Mentor, at monica@aaronspresents.org; or Matt Wolterding, Lowell Mentor, at matt@aaronspresents.org.



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Children's Book Review

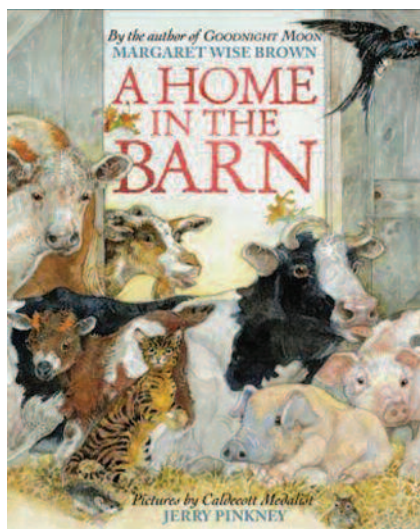
A Home in the Barn

Written by Margaret Wise Brown

Illustrated by Jerry Pinkney

HarperCollins Children's Books

Reviewed by Ann Britton Ranger



Margaret Wise Brown's, *The Big Red Barn*, is among my favorite children's picture books. It was a frequent bedtime story when my children were little, and I remember the day when my toddler-aged daughter, Abby, "read" the memorized tale to her stuffed Winnie-the-Pooh, proudly announcing, "Barn I read to Pooh," one of her first-ever spoken sentences. Given my affinity for this old classic, imagine my delight at finding this new book, which brought me right back to that beloved barnyard.

A Home in the Barn is a never-before-published story by Brown, who also

authored *Goodnight Moon*, *The Runaway Bunny* and countless other well-known tales. Caldecott Medalist Jerry Pinkney honored Brown's legacy with carefully detailed, realistic drawings of furry farm animals, rustling leaves, flurryy snow, and of course, a big, red barn. The outdoor scenes evoke a wintry chill, while inside the barn all appears warm and cozy.

As winter approaches, a parade of insects and rodents follow the horses toward the open barn doors. The creatures crowd in, huddling together. "The breath of the horses rose like smoke in the cold air. And the winter wind told them it was time to move into the big warm barn."

They join the chickens, pigs and a tiger tomcat, settling into the hay. A calf is born, and the barn-mates welcome it along with a flannel-clad farmer. Outside the wind blows and the snow piles up. Back indoors, the bull kicks and the ponies frolic. The cow is milked, and birds make their nests in the rafters.

"Outside in the cold
Hear the wind rattle
Come to the barn
Keep warm with the cattle."

This book is recommended for children ages 4 to 8, but I believe babies and toddlers would also enjoy snuggling up with this cozy tale.

Ann Britton Ranger is the Early Childhood Education Program Director at Beverly Children's Learning Center. She began collecting picture books when her own three children were young, and enjoyed sharing these stories while teaching preschool for many years.

Happy
Valentine's Day

Reader Contribution

Valentine's Day Giving

by Lauri Diamantis

Calendars are marked with red hearts on February 14th. Valentine's Day has become the hallmark of giving family, friends and admirers chocolate, flowers and cards. Valentine's Day, or Saint Valentine's Day as it was originally known, honors an early Christian Saint named *Valentinus*. Before his death, he signed a letter to a woman, *Your Valentine*. In 2017, roughly 190 million cards were exchanged in the US alone, bearing those same words. Today, Valentine's Day has become an astonishing \$18 billion industry.

What happened to handmade cards created with doilies or tissue paper flower bouquets? Dedicating a whole day of telling people you care about them is marvelous, but doesn't need to cost nearly the \$137 per person that Americans are dishing out. Simply spreading the spirit of giving

through a thoughtful act of kindness may be more meaningful and lasting. Expressing gratitude to people we care about can become part of this day and it's free! Why not bake cookies for teachers, paint a picture of something you love to do with your family, cut out paper hearts and write things you love about the person you are surprising, then enclose them in an envelope or a decorated box. Be creative, but thoughtful. Turn your Valentines into gratitude notes by including a message of why this person is important to you and how you value them.

This Valentine's Day, try to give love, not buy it.

(But if my husband is reading this, I do enjoy salted caramels!)

Lauri Diamantis is a former elementary school teacher and mother from Andover. Her blog, www.thethanksgivingfamily.com, aims to enrich family through gratitude.

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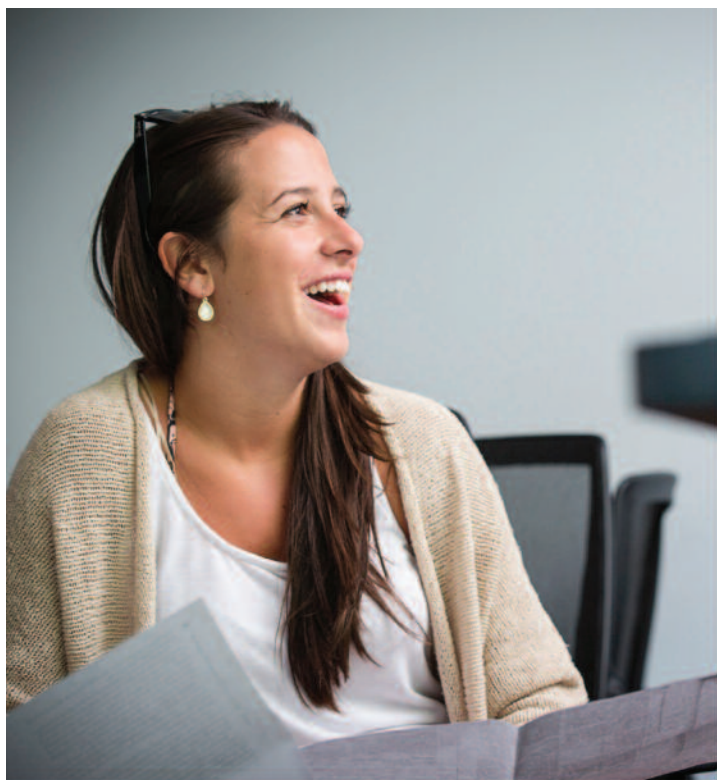
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