

# Crocker Elementary School keeps demonstrating caring, support

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FITCHBURG -- When Mia Reynolds lost everything in a massive house fire shortly after Christmas 15 years ago, her second-grade teacher at Crocker Elementary School made sure she and her mother knew how much the school cared.

The teacher, Robin Pierce, told her class to bring in wrapped presents so Reynolds could have a second Christmas holiday. That experience meant the world to Reynolds and her mother, Tammie, who this year decided to pay it forward.

"The love and support our family received from Crocker after this incident was something that turned a terrifying experience into a memory of how much love people have to give, and a beautiful example to me of the good left in this world and community," wrote Mia Reynolds in a letter she sent to her former teacher after deciding to make sure more than 30 current Crocker students have presents of their own this holiday season.

The Reynolds women this year learned that the nonprofit Karing 4 Kidz was seeking donors to buy Christmas gifts for the children of Crocker Elementary School who receive food assistance through the organization.

Tammie Reynolds wanted to help.

"They were so great to my kids," she said, referring to the Crocker school community. "I knew that we could afford to do that instead of spoiling ourselves with stuff that we don't need right now, (because) when we needed stuff, they were here."

On Thursday, 15 years after their life-altering fire, Mia Reynolds and her mother returned to Crocker elementary for an emotional reunion with Ms. Pierce, who now works as a math coach.

Mia Reynolds, 22, walked into the front lobby at 2 p.m. shortly before class let out to see Ms. Pierce waiting for her.

Her mother had already arrived, and so too had Karing 4 Kidz founder Kira Andreucci, 17, her father John and mother Shelley, who all waited eagerly to see Mia reunite with her favorite teacher for the first time in well over a decade.

"Look at you!" said Ms. Pierce, pulling her former student in for a hug.

"I'm all grown up," said Reynolds, now a student studying liberal arts at Southern New Hampshire University.

The group then walked through the elementary school to Ms. Pierce's office, where they discussed how the Reynolds' family helped Karing 4 Kidz meet their Christmas goal this year.

The number of children who qualified for the nonprofit's gift program reached an all-time high this year, in part, because of this fall's natural disaster in Puerto Rico, which prompted many families to resettle in the Twin Cities area, explained John Andreucci, who helps run Karing 4 Kidz with his wife and daughter.

"This year we started with more kids than we ended with the year before, which is unusual," he said.

A few weeks ago, Andreucci was talking on the phone to Tammie Reynolds' boyfriend, who, as a member of the local chapter of Masons, was helping the nonprofit provide presents for children at Reingold Elementary.

Tammie Reynolds overheard the phone call and learned donations were still needed for children at Crocker School. She decided, on a whim, that her family would take that on.

"I was just eavesdropping really, I was just in the right place at the wrong time," said Tammie Reynolds, who teaches U.S. history in Groton-Dunstable public schools.

So the Reynolds' spent weeks scouring local stores and the internet. They got their entire family on board, who all together bought 38 gifts for the students of Crocker Elementary School.

"I have found, in teaching and in life, that people are very very generous, if you just ask," she said.

More than 200 elementary school students received presents this year thanks to Karing 4 Kidz donors at Christ Church, Rollstone Congregational Church, and the Masonic Lodge in Fitchburg, United Parish in Lunenburg, along with family and friends, said John Andreucci

Ms. Pierce, still seated around the table in her office, where hanging on the wall behind her was a motivational poster that bore the word "grow," recalled learning of how that the family of a former student is responsible for bringing Christmas presents to Crocker this year.

She had been sitting in a stressful faculty meeting when she decided to open a letter that arrived at the school with the shipment of gifts through Karing 4 Kidz.

Tears came to her eyes as she read the words Mia Reynolds had written.

On Thursday, in Ms. Pierce's office, Mia Reynolds looked at her former teacher. She thanked her for helping her academically when, as a young student, she had trouble focusing.

And for making sure Mia had clothes to wear after her wardrobe burned in the fire.

"I just don't remember any of the other teachers loving us as much as you did," she said.

Ms. Pierce held Mia's letter and said, "I thank you, forever this letter will stay with me."

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