



December 17, 2014

Dear Friends, Family and Supporters,

I am blissfully putting up my tree with my daughter, Maddie, and an Elvis version of “Here Comes Santa Claus” comes on. I am struck by the line, “he doesn’t care if you’re rich or poor, he loves you just the same.” What the heck? If there really was a Santa he might not care, but there is no Santa. Some kids have amazing, over-the-top Christmas experiences and some get nothing—same day...any day. Who are we kidding in these songs we listen to? Sorry for the shocking opening, but in our work, it’s true. We serve very poor youth and young adults who know what they are missing, but grateful for anything they get.

Learning Works (LW) is the gift for many of our youth and young adults. They have a safe haven and another chance at a diploma. It’s a place of tenderness that can only be truly described in the day-to-day, week-to-week love this place represents. There are many small and large stories of suffering, tenacity and goodwill at LW; these are only from the past few weeks.

- One of our students was abandoned by his mother (no father). Homeless, LW helped him find a long-term homeless placement. Homeboy helped get him one job and he got another job of his own job at McDonald’s. He has no one and nothing, but is smiling now with his jobs and schoolwork. A chaser took him out to buy work boots and clothes to keep going.
- Two of our students are sisters. Last week, their brother was shot in front of their house. He was in a coma for a week and started to come out of it. His girlfriend came to the hospital to disconnect the tubes. He is in critical condition. One girl translates at the hospital for the mom, and the other watches the young children at home that the mom can no longer watch. Both girls showed up this week to do schoolwork to get a break from the stress.
- For years one of our students has struggled with Chronic Panuveitis (congenital cataracts and high astigmatism) that causes blurred vision and eye pain. She has never been qualified for special education. Our social worker tracked down all the medical records, LW will put her on a 504 for special education support and work with Young and Healthy to see if we can get this condition fixed.
- One of our student’s mothers suddenly died (no father). The teacher was immediately on the family’s needs. Our Learning Works Guild started to donate funds to this young man. The teacher attended the funeral and brought/served sandwiches and cookies from the Guild.
- Our registrar went to court to testify for a student. He had been in jail for over a year, now in a trial with the potential outcome of a 16-year sentence. He gets a not guilty verdict! Released immediately!
- See enclosed, “A Day in the Life of Teacher Monica,” Oh my God!

So maybe there is a Santa! My staff inspires me everyday with their unconditional love and irrational commitment to students and their families. They give these students more hope, joy, kindness and tenderness than anything I have ever seen in education in the past 25 years. And isn’t that what Christmas and the holidays are really about?

It’s the end of the year. If you feel like your have a little extra, give to Learning Works. Every dollar counts, and goes directly to student needs, experiences and activities. Donations do not go to running the school. It’s the extra needs of poor students on their last chance to a diploma that need your help. Thank you, and enjoy the holidays! I appreciate you.

With Love, Mikala Rahn, Founder/CEO