

GRAHAM RECORD

Message from President & CEO, Kimberly Watson

Dear Graham Community,

I am thrilled to announce that Graham is launching a community volunteer program! Like the idiom “It takes a village,” Graham recognizes we cannot do this important work alone and we are searching for people in the community, who are for the community, to come together to empower and lift each other up.

Volunteers are not new to Graham. For over 30 years, a dedicated group of volunteers called the Bronxville Friends supported the young people who lived on Graham’s campus in Hastings-on-Hudson, NY. With the closing of our campus operations in 2020, this group shifted its efforts and continues to volunteer to make the holidays bright for children and families in all of Graham’s communities. It has been my goal since becoming President to expand on the efforts of the Bronxville



Friends and build a volunteer program across all of our sites in Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Harlem.

By increasing our volunteer base, we will be able to forward our mission and reach more people. Volunteers will also bring a diversity of skills to Graham, helping us increase our quality and efficiency of services.

Perhaps most importantly, my hope is that by having a committed group of volunteers, we will be able to strengthen our

ties to the communities we work with.

We are in the early stages of building out this program but volunteer opportunities might include stationing service dogs at our mental health clinics to bring comfort and relieve anxiety, organizing collection drives (e.g., holiday gift cards, winter coats), tutoring youth at our community centers, or providing pro bono services (e.g., yoga workshops, accounting).

If you would like to make a positive difference in the Graham community, please reach out to us to learn more about our current volunteer opportunities and share your ideas.

I hope you enjoy this quarterly newsletter, which highlights one of our current volunteers as well as Graham’s 217th birthday celebration.

Upward,
Kym



CARING FOR KIDS AND FAMILIES SINCE 1806



Graham celebrated its 217th birthday on March 15! To honor this anniversary, our Youth Success Team hosted a month-long Legacy Celebration that brought everyone across Graham together by e-mail, Zoom, and in person. Each week was filled with fun activities, from rocking out in karaoke to solving tricky teaser challenges or putting our skills to the test in Quordle.

Animals have been an important part of Graham’s history—one example is beloved dog Bristles Norris (1925-1937) who is buried at our historic

campus in Hastings-on-Hudson with the headstone “This small dog was a friend of children.” In celebration of this history, the Youth Success Team put together a charming video highlighting our staff’s pets.

Also back by popular demand was March Madness, a bracketed tournament of various virtual games, from "Grahamily" Feud to UNO, where staff brought their competitive spirits to battle for the championship and yearlong bragging rights. It was a memorable month filled with laughter and joy!



Volunteer Spotlight: Valentina Ramdas

“It’s super important to keep others in mind and help them in any way you can.” Sixteen-year-old Valentina Ramdas believes that everyone should do whatever they can to help others, no matter how small it may seem.



Over two years ago, she and her mom, Sandra Fontenla, decided to make "birthday boxes" each month for children 8 to 15 years old in foster care with Graham. Ten birthday boxes per month grew to 30 boxes some months. A two-person team eventually became a group of 10 teens who now make up the Birthday Boxes Club that Valentina founded at her high school. To date, they have made over 460 birthday boxes.

Valentina was moved to give gifts to children in foster care after hearing about a fellow middle schooler who had lost both of his parents in the midst of the pandemic. This led her to think about other children who were struggling. She decided to create personalized birthday boxes containing a handmade card with a birthday message and inspirational quote, a friendship bracelet, a brain teaser/puzzle, some origami cranes, and a sweet treat to enjoy on their special day. She finds joy in knowing how much Graham’s children appreciate their gifts and dreams of being able to give gifts to even more children.

On March 20th, Graham presented Valentina with an appreciation award. We are extremely grateful that she gives of her time to bring joy to Graham’s children and youth.

DID YOU KNOW?

Graham Windham is the oldest secular child-caring organization in the United States.