

SCHOOL ON WHEELS IS A LESSON IN GOOD WILL

Supporting students impacted by poverty is lifelong mission for Giannaros family

CONTRIBUTED BY ATHENA GIANNAROS, RESIDENT



Sami, Athena and Nico Giannaros helping out at SOWMA family shelter

Main Street resident Athena Giannaros has been actively involved with School on Wheels of Massachusetts (SOWMA) since 2009. As the current Board Chair, she and her family of five actively volunteer to support the academic, social and emotional growth of Massachusetts students impacted by homelessness and poverty.

Both Athena and her husband Spiros grew up in Brockton and are Boston College alumni. They, along with their children Sami, Niko and Marco, volunteer as tutors in local family shelters and orchestrate school supply drives. They are also involved in fundraising and events to help generate awareness and educational support for students facing homelessness.

School on Wheels' programs have offered tutoring, mentoring and customized backpacks for at-risk students throughout the Commonwealth for the last twenty years. These children, teens and young adults face the same challenges as all students, with the added pressure and stigma of homelessness. SOWMA programs are made possible through hundreds of volunteers, who ensure these

students, from pre-K through college-age, have the support they need to develop a love for learning and the confidence to believe in themselves and their potential.

"The average age of a homeless person in Massachusetts is eight years old," said Giannaros.

So many members in our Hingham community have embraced SOWMA and offer support on many levels through donations, volunteering and hosting school supply drives. "We had an unbelievable amount of support at last year's gala where our Hingham community came together to support our mission and kids," she said.

"As a mother of three, I want all children to have the comfort and safety of home and the opportunity to express their interests and develop their capabilities in a safe and trustworthy setting," she added. "It's what we all want for our children."

There are 24,000 students in our public schools who are identified as homeless, according to Giannaros. SOWMA is always looking for volunteers to spare an hour a week to tutor a child, help a high school or college-age student explore educational and career options, or stage a backpack



Community shows support at last year's gala



Spiros Giannaros sharing time with a student



Resident and SOWMA Board Chair, Athena Giannaros



Siblings Niko, Sami, and Marco volunteering at SOWMA backpack program with their cousin Ariana Lymberopoulos and her fiancé Jake Mezelsky

drive to ensure students have what they need to succeed in school.

"I am so inspired by the love and compassion that exists in our Hingham community," explained Giannaros. "The generosity from my friends within the Hingham community has been heartfelt."

Giannaros was visibly proud when she pointed out that last year the Hingham community raised more than \$20,000 in addition to volunteering.

"I will forever be grateful for the overwhelming generosity and support I receive via phone calls and texts

asking, "Athena, how can I get involved with School on Wheels?"

With each contact, she hopes to keep spreading SOWMA's mission to more Hingham residents and reignite the SOWMA club at Hingham High School, where a handful of students serve or have served as SOWMA tutors.

For the Giannaros family, being part of an organization that educates kids as a way to stop the cycle of homelessness is a life-long mission. To donate, volunteer or learn more about School on Wheels of Massachusetts, visit www.sowma.org or call (508) 587-9091.



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