

“A Treasure Forever”



Lauren Knight-Daily Times

Second grade teacher, Valerie Bishop, at Blackrock Elementary School will receive an award for her help with two adopted students last year. Photographed above is Bishop with Carly, 8, and Joseph, 8, of Blackrock Elementary School.

Two women to be honored for their work with adoption, foster care

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In honor of National Adoption Month, two women will be recognized tonight at the State House for their efforts that have gone “above and beyond.”

Valeria Bishop, a second grade teacher at Blackrock Elementary School, will receive the Beacon of Hope award.

“She has a really special story,” said Donna Rivera, the communications coordinator at Adoption Rhode Island.

Rivera explained that last year, Bishop had two children in her classroom who had been adopted. Carly, now 8, had been adopted when she was 1-years-old. Joseph, also 8-years-old, was adopted midway through school last year.

“He didn’t really want to talk about it. He was kind of shy,” said Bishop. “I knew a little girl in my classroom who was outgoing and who was also adopted.”

So, she proposed an idea to both students.

“I asked if they wanted to

stay after and write a book together,” she explained. “And of course they said yes.”

For a period of two months, Bishop, Joseph and Carly stayed late after school once a week. As a team, they compiled the text that told the story of both their adoptions.

The process encouraged both Joseph and Carly to talk about families and what it feels like to be adopted, according to Bishop.

Joseph and Carly also took turns illustrating the pages.

“We always had to have the right crayons and colored pencils,” said Bishop, adding that “it is important for an illustrator to have the right tools.”

One of the last pages had a drawing of a treasure chest with the words “Being adopted means you are a special gift to a family that treasures you forever” beneath it.

“[They] said it was easier to talk about,” said Bishop after the completion of the book.

She later said that they enjoyed the project so much that “they wanted to keep on going.”

Bishop, Joseph and Carly selected four possible titles and presented them to the entire class. The class voted and named the book “A Treasure Forever.”

“We tried to include everyone in on it,” said Bishop. “The kids were so excited that they wrote a book. It really took off.”

One of the mothers printed copies of the book for Joseph and Carly, as well as a hard copy for Bishop to read to future classes.

“The students wanted to read it over and over again,” she said. One year later, “I still share it with my classes.”

Afterwards, Bishop said that she “saw a difference. They talk about it more and are so much more open about [their adoptions].”

Bishop was selected for the award from Adoption Rhode Island after they heard her story.

According to Adoption Rhode Island, Bishop’s efforts exemplify above and beyond the regular classroom teaching

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Book tells stories of adoptions

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and the experience will, they believe, have a lasting affect on Joseph, Carly and the entire class.

"We commend Valerie for her creativeness and dedication to children, and most of all her kind and caring heart," stated the press release from Adoption Rhode Island.

"I was very humbled. I would have done it anyway," she said. "It helped the children so much in terms of self-esteem. They are proud of being adopted."

At the ceremonies tonight, Suzan Morris, the regional director at the North Kingstown office of the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF), will also be honored.

She will receive the Above and Beyond Award that was created to recognize social workers and administrators for distinguished service.

"She has been responsible for facilitating the community in-

formation meetings," said Rivera. Once a month, the office hosts a meeting to help interested families learn about the adoption process and foster care.

According to the press release, over 400 families have attended these meetings.

"She has been instrumental in providing permanency for children in foster care," said Rivera.

Rhode Island's 7th Annual Heart Gallery will also be unveiled at the ceremonies. According to Rivera, the display showcases portraits of Rhode Island children in foster care waiting for families.

Each year, more than half of the children photographed in the gallery have found families, according to the website.

The public is invited to join the ceremonies tonight, Nov. 17, at the State House from 5 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. There will be a brief speaking program and refreshments.