Blackrock Teacher Recognized for Helping Students Embrace Adoption

Adoption RI is honoring Valerie Bishop for initiating a special project with two adopted students to help them communicate with others about their experiences.

By Lauren Costa

Last year, when second grade Blackrock teacher Valerie Bishop discovered that her student, Joey Weisman was having a difficult time communicating to others about his adoption, she decided to create an opportunity for him to become comfortable with the situation, while befriending another student with a similar history.

Bishop approached Joey and classmate Carly Carroll, who had been adopted from China when she was a year old, and asked if the pair wanted to write a story about their adoption experiences that they could share with others.

"When I first met Joey, he had a lot of difficulty sharing that he was adopted," said Bishop. "He felt embarrassed and I wanted to help him find a way to get past those feelings."

The three met once a week after school for two months and discussed both student's experiences, feelings and thoughts about their adoption processes and Bishop helped put the conversations on paper. Both students illustrated individual pages of the book, using memories, goals and in Carly's case, photos from China that her mother gave her to help remember her beginnings.

"Joey and Carly really had a lot of fun doing this and learned a lot from the process. They really had to think hard about the words they wanted in the book before illustrating the pages, because they had to match up, " explained Bishop. "There were a lot of different kinds of learning being done and on the last day of working on the book, both kids still wanted to do more."

When the book was complete, Joey and Carly read it in front of their second grade class and then asked the students to vote on the book's title from four choices. The title "*A Treasure Forever: A Story About Adoption*" was the winner.

"The class responded so well to the book and everyone was really excited that Joey and Carly did this," said Bishop. "It really made them both proud to be adopted."

"You already knew you were special," she said to the students, now both eight-year-old third graders. "But now you have a way to show others just how special being adopted makes you."

Joey's mom brought the book to Staples and had copies made for the kids and Bishop, but eventually, the goal is to professionally publish copies to share with children in the same situations. Joey's mom also submitted the book to Adoption Rhode Island who recently contacted Bishop, wishing to recognize her for her efforts.

"They were really impressed and excited that a teacher did this, and they want to recognize me in honor of National Adoption Month, (November)" said Bishop. "I would have done this with the students anyway. I just figured it was something that anyone would do."

She is being recognized by Adoption RI at ceremony held at the State House on Nov. 17, along with others who have made contributions to the adoption community. Both Carly and Joey, along with their parents, will attend the ceremony, as well as some of Bishop's former students.

"We are thrilled to honor Valerie on Thursday night," said Adoption RI Director of Development and Community Relations, Judith McSoley. "We give awards to people in the community who are really sensitive to the issues of adoption and we think that she really exemplifies that. We feel that it is a wonderful example of something that everyone in the community can do."

"At a time when we maybe don't appreciate educators enough, we just wanted to point out that Valerie stayed after school for two months on her own time with the two children to create this lovely book that has helped them so much," McSoley went on to say.

Both students agreed that they are much more comfortable talking to others about adoption now and they believe that their book will help other kids and families someday.

"Our goal is to publish more copies to sell and give some of the money back to Adoption Rhode Island," said Bishop.