

**“Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not.”**

— Dr. Seuss

It's graduation time and across the district, our graduates are preparing for that final walk across the stage. While we're all excited for them, and we're looking forward to many celebrations in the upcoming weeks, I wanted to take a minute this week to focus on a more poignant story that illustrates the wonders of living in a small and caring community.

We have a graduate, we shall call her Jennifer for the purpose of this article, who has been dealing with the loss of both parents in the past week to ten days. This student, on the cusp of graduating from high school and going away to college, has had her world shattered in unimaginable ways BUT out of despair has come hope.

As soon as we heard about her situation, we immediately got our team together to see what we could do to help this young lady. First, thanks to her counselor and principal, we were able to stage a very personal “early graduation” so that her mother could witness her daughter receiving her cap and gown. Fortunately, we were able to pull that off in time, but sadly, Jennifer's mother passed away just a few days later. Our homeless outreach team was able to put together a little care package for her with some gift cards to help with immediate expenses.

Working through our networks, and discreetly sharing her story as appropriate, we've contacted some incredible community organizations that have pledged their support for her, and that's what I want to focus on today.

Within 24 hours, our friends at United Way had figured out how to pay the current utilities at the home where Jennifer lives and had put together an impressive array of gift cards totaling several hundred dollars to help her buy groceries, pay for gas and get through to graduation. That's an incredible response for which we are eternally grateful.

Then we set our sights on the next phase of life for Jennifer, who knows she wants to go to college to be a nurse to give back to her community. Working closely with our friends at Gulf Coast State College and Florida State University, it appears we've managed to find, and fund, an apartment, tuition and money for books for our graduate thanks to their generous support. A local attorney has also offered his services to help settle The state of Jennifer's parents which is a huge relief.

All of this in about a week's time.

It's so easy today to get caught up in the negative headlines and the constant social media messages of division, but I want you to know that there's good in the world and, specifically, good in our community. Good people who are dedicated to the success of our children live here, and they are willing to do whatever it takes to support our kids in times of need.

Good people have moved mountains this week for one very special young lady they do not even know, and they've done so because it's the right thing to do.

And because they care.

Once again, in the darkest of times, humanity and kindness win!

So if the headlines become overwhelming and you feel like there's not much hope in the world, I hope you remember this story. Former President Ronald Reagan once said, "We can't help everyone, but everyone can help someone," and that's exactly what we're doing, one graduate at a time.

Thank you for your continued trust and partnership and for always being willing to step up when we ask or need assistance. We are blessed to live in such a generous and supportive community, and Bay District Schools is honored to play a role in taking care of our children. Stay safe, and God Bless!