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Seneca Valley senior's project helps brighten lives of children

BY AMANDA BRUBAKER
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Ali Mascaro, a senior at Seneca Valley High School, has found a special way to touch the lives of children and adults in the Pittsburgh area.

Mascaro used her senior project, a requirement for high school graduates in Pennsylvania, to provide Jewish Family and Children's Services with essential supplies.

Fueled by her own passion for children, Mascaro took on a nine-month endeavor to spread and encourage the joy of adoption.

This venture began in September, when Mascaro chose her senior project topic — promoting adoption as an option for families.

She was inspired by close family friends who adopted multiple times, a family she even accompanied when they welcomed



SUBMITTED PHOTO

ERIN BARR, adoption caseworker for Family Hope Connection, sorts through just some of the art supplies and games collected and donated by Seneca Valley Senior High School student Ali Mascaro as part of her senior service project.

their children into their family, lives and home.

The assignment was then broken down into three phases: a paper, a project and a presentation.

With the paper out of the way, Mascaro moved on to her project, volunteering with Jewish Family and Children's Services in the Family Hope Connection Adoption Program.

Volunteers are not abundant with Family Hope Connection. With privacy and confidentiality requirements from the state, it can be difficult to effectively employ the talents of interested volunteers.

Through some creative brainstorming, the best option for all parties was determined. Mascaro would collect and donate resources that Family Hope Connection needed.

Family Hope Connection provides services to the three populations of adoption: birth parents that are discerning and considering options, perspective adoptive parents who are waiting for children, and children in foster care.

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SUBMITTED PHOTOS

SOME OF the more than 200 items collected by Seneca Valley senior Ali Mascaro for the family Hope Connection Adoption Program are stacked up and await delivery.

Project touches lives of children

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Mascaro's project was to help the children in foster care with her supply drive.

The Family Hope Connection case workers use creative tools to reach the children waiting in foster care.

Tools like paper, glitter and other craft supplies are used to help children make sense of their current situations and prepare for permanency.

Art supplies and toys are used to help children work through and understand their emotions and create a sense of belonging in an unconventional way.

In a campaign to collect items from books to construction paper, Mascaro passed out fliers in her neighborhood, her parents' workplaces and in the community, asking for donations.

Mascaro's mission began in December, and on April 15, a carload of an estimated 200 items was de-



Ali Mascaro

livered to Family Hope Connection.

Mascaro's donation did more than supply resources to an adoption agency, she touched everyone involved in the adoption process.

"We do a good job, but we can do an even better job when we have the right tools," said JoAnn White, Director of Family Hope Connection.

"Ali recharged our staff and rallied behind them by providing the tools they

needed."

Mascaro's enthusiasm found its outlet in providing supplies for one-on-one services, and her excitement has been contagious; the staff is enthused to be using the tools that Mascaro provided.

As Mascaro prepares the final stage of her senior project, she looks forward to future work with children, this time by studying pediatric nursing at Robert Morris University.

When asked why she chose to give so much for her senior project, Mascaro replied, "It touched my heart and I wanted a meaningful experience. Everyone deserves a shot at a successful life with parents who love them."

With her gift, more foster children now have that shot.

To learn more about Jewish Family and Children's Services and the Family Hope Connection Adoption Program, visit their website at www.fhcadapt.org.