



ROCK BROOK SCHOOL
Individualized Programs; Personal Success

For Immediate Release:
Press Contact: Aileen Kornblatt
(609) 213-4297/aileenkornblatt@gmail.com

STUDENT WITH AUTISM RAISES MONEY TO HELP OTHERS ***Paying it Forward for Autism Awareness Month***

Skillman, NJ (April 5, 2016) – 11-year old Lucas Weiner, a student at Rock Brook School, has started a fundraiser to help children with autism receive service dogs. His desire to giveback comes from his own incredible experience with having a service dog.

Residing in Marlboro, NJ, Michelle Weiner says two years ago her family received their most precious gift, Rafael, an autism service dog, for her son Lucas, who is on the autism spectrum. With the arrival of Rafael, Lucas' whole world changed and he is determined to help raise money to help change the lives of other children with autism.

According to Michelle, prior to Rafael's arrival, Lucas was going through a very rough time. His anxiety was out of control, he wasn't sleeping or eating and even leaving the house was a challenge. When the family did manage to get Lucas out of the house, he would become easily distracted and wander off. The family was constantly worried that he would get lost, or worse, taken. It was during this time that Lucas' parents reached out to Heeling Autism, a program through Guiding Eyes for the Blind, that matches children in need with service dogs.

"In September of 2014, our miracle, Rafael arrived," says Michelle. "Rafael immediately became Lucas' best friend. He would sleep with him, come on outings and trips with him and something amazing happened...slowly but surely, Lucas' anxiety melted away, he began to sleep again and eat again and we watched as a self-confident happy child emerged. Rafael is always by Lucas' side. We can now go out as a family with confidence knowing Lucas won't wander away."

After bonding with Rafael, Lucas began asking his parents to help him raise money so other children can receive the same gift he did. Last summer, Lucas set up a stand and sold water. He was so proud of the \$4 he raised and happily handed it off. Lucas' desire to help other children continued; and this past February, Lucas' parents took their son's wishes to the next level and created a go fund me account. Each service dog costs roughly \$50,000, but the dogs are given to the children and their families free of charge. Guiding Eyes does not receive government funding. They depend on donations to continue be able to provide this life-changing service.

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“Service animals can offer many therapeutic benefits for children with special needs,” says Mary Caterson, Executive Director of Rock Brook School. “I have seen first-hand the positive effects animals have had on special needs kids. Lucas has really blossomed since Rafael has come into his life.”

For the past nine years, Rock Brook, serving students ages 3-21 with language and learning difficulties, has partnered with SAVE, a local animal shelter, on its Humane Education Program. Each week, a volunteer comes in to work with two classes. They bring different animals from the shelter for students to see, pet and feel comfortable around. About three years ago, a tiny and lost looking Cheewinnie (Chihuahua/Dachshund) named Roxy came to visit. The staff and students couldn’t bear the thought of her being in a shelter, so Caterson applied to adopt Roxy and she became the school mascot. Roxy spends two-three days a week at the school. Students can work to earn visits with Roxy as part of their individual behavioral motivation program.

“Many special education and nursing home programs use dogs or cats as a comfort or for companionship. For kids with special needs it facilitates a relationship that is a positive experience for them. Roxy is not a certified therapy dog. Parents sign off on a permission slip for their children to visit with her, but the benefits she provides is nonetheless valuable,” states Caterson.

With Rafael by his side, Lucas continues to make great strides.

“To witness the transformation in our son since the arrival of Rafael is beyond words,” says Michelle. “Nothing would make Lucas happier than to share his fortune with another boy or girl.”

To help Lucas reach his goal of \$50,000 to provide a service dog for a child with autism, visit his go fund me site at www.gofundme.com/aarudzmk.

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About Rock Brook School

Since 1974, Rock Brook School has provided education and assistance and support for children with special needs, their families and professionals. Rock Brook’s services include a full academic program, intensive speech and language therapy and other specialized programs for students ages 3-21. For more information, visit www.rock-brook.org. Like us on Facebook. Follow us on Twitter.