Shorewood Freshman Creates Award-Winning Literacy Program

By Katelin Watson

"To be able to go into classrooms, teach kids, and to see their excitement when they show me their finished product is the best feeling in the world.

– Katie Eder"

It all started with a discussion around the kitchen table in March 2014.

Shorewood High School freshman Katie Eder was listening to her older sister, Molly, describe her experience as a math tutor to younger students. Katie realized that she, too, wanted to be working with kids in some way.

Katie had always been passionate about creative writing, and began to explore some ways in which she might apply that passion and talent to working with children. But she couldn’t find an existing program with all the elements she was looking for.

“I had decided that I wanted to teach students between eight and 12 years old who don’t normally have opportunities outside of school to work on their writing,” Katie says. “So, I went a step further and thought, ‘What if I developed some sort of class on my own?’”

In the next few months, Katie began crafting an outline for her new program – which she named “Kids Tales” – drawing guidance from her past creative writing classes. She determined that Kids Tales would be a weeklong workshop for kids with an interest in writing, during which they would brainstorm, write and edit their own short story to be published as part of an anthology.
Katie spent countless hours outside of school developing a detailed class curriculum and eventually secured the opportunity to teach her program in summer 2014 at two Milwaukee-area locations: the COA Youth and Family Centers and the Highland Community School (Milwaukee Public Schools).

During this time, the Eder family began hosting a Tunisian exchange student through the AFS Intercultural Program, an international nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing the global competency of students, families, educators and communities. Through this connection, Katie learned of the AFS Project: Change competition.

AFS Project: Change applicants submit a one-minute video or a short essay describing an original volunteer project idea that addresses one of five key global issues (including education, a perfect fit for Kids Tales). Winners receive a full scholarship from AFS to spend two weeks abroad, bringing their vision to life.

Katie submitted her video to AFS and waited. Several months later, she received the good news: Kids Tales had been chosen from among approximately 500 entries as an AFS Project: Change “Vision In Action” award winner. AFS cited the project’s extraordinary alignment with AFS’s mission to work toward a more just and peaceful world through international and intercultural learning experiences.

This June, Katie will travel, all expenses paid, to Columbia, South America, to facilitate her creative writing workshop with students there.

“T never saw it getting this big,” Katie says. “I feel incredibly fortunate to have had such amazing support from the community and it makes me so proud to be from Shorewood. I am really excited for the next chapter of Kids Tales.”

In the U.S., Katie has attained 501(c)(3) status for her program and hopes to expand it nationally. With summer 2015 pilot programs planned in Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., Katie has her hands full training instructors via Skype and email on how to implement the Kids Tales curriculum.

“This whole experience has been such a learning opportunity for me,” she says. “To be able to go into classrooms, teach kids, and to see their excitement when they show me their finished product is the best feeling in the world. It’s nice to know Kids Tales is making an impact.”

To support Katie’s Kids Tales program or to learn more, visit kidstales.org.