

Why we support friendship

BY DANIEL STOLZ AND JUDY GREENBERG

"Ingenious and important."

"I can think of so many awesome kids that I've taken care of who would benefit from something like this!"

"Kindness and empathy are the key to healing our world."

When Judy and I asked our friends and family to join us in supporting the launch of The Nora Project, we expected some enthusiasm. After all, The Nora Project acts on a truth that everyone knows: making friends is a fundamental way in which kids can develop a sense of how the world works, and of who they want to be. Placing the power of friendship at the core of an inspiring educational mission, The Nora Project is intuitively appealing.

What we did not expect was the range of more personal ways in which The Nora Project resonated with almost everyone we knew. Whether speaking as a pediatrician, a philosopher, a former missionary, a parent, aunt, or grandparent, everyone seemed to have a story, a point of view, a special word of encouragement they wanted to share. Quite apart from helping to support a wonderful organization, we found ourselves having unexpected and meaningful exchanges with the people closest to us.

Our own point of view is simple. When our son Gavriel was born prematurely, Nora Levy was one of his neighbors in the hospital. Despite Nora's challenges, she and her family were an extraordinary source of support and good humor.

Three years later, we are very fortunate that Gavi has become a healthy preschooler. But the little seed of friendship that he and Nora planted together in the hospital has only become more precious to us.

It's not just that kids with disabilities and developmental challenges should have friends like anyone else. (That's obvious.) We also deeply want our own kids, and all kids, to enjoy relationships with people like Nora and the amazing "Nora Friends." Our kids have so much to learn from these relationships: the boundless ways in which a child can thrive; the special joy of celebrating another person's achievements; what it means to find something in common with a person who might look, move, or communicate differently. We already see small moments in which having friends and family with diverse abilities enables our kids to appreciate, rather than fear, the realities of difference.

But while kids may learn through friendship, that's not why they have friends. They have friends for the comfort of knowing that someone else recognizes them; that they matter. They have friends because being able to make another person smile is a superpower. They have friends because it's good to have friends. And in this way, at least, Nora Friends are the same as any other friend. Empathy education is necessary for our kids and for our time. But the fullness of what can come of a friendship, though impossible to define, is just as necessary--and powerful.