

Dear Friends and Family,

This June I will become a Bar Mitzvah. As part of my preparation, I am asked to organize a "Mitzvah Project" - a project that demonstrates one of the core Jewish values of repairing the world and addresses an issue that is important to me.

My Mitzvah project is about the "play crisis" in our country. When I started this project I learned that American kids are playing less than ever. One reason for this is that across our country, only one in five kids have a safe place to play within walking distance of their homes. Even though where I live there are tons of places to run, climb and play, in many parts of America, usually in poorer neighborhoods, there are fewer playgrounds and open play spaces and many of those that do exist are falling apart, unsafe, and then usually closed to kids who love nearby. This is where I come in...

On Saturday, October 29, my parents and I volunteered with the national nonprofit organization, KaBOOM! (www.kaboom.org), and almost 250 other volunteers in Revere, MA to rebuild a playground that has been closed to the children of this neighborhood for six years! In this time, the park had become the location of a lot of local crime and so the neighbors were very excited to make it a place where families can hang out and have fun. This playground was also the only outdoor playspace for children who attend the local Head Start - a full-day preschool/kindergarten program for kids from disadvantaged families. So for six years, these kids have also had no outdoor recess! It was an amazing day - even though it was near freezing and windy - and it was really exciting to be a part of something that meant so much to the Shirley Avenue families.

But for me, doing this one day project didn't seem like enough. So I am also doing a "Playground Toy Drive" to collect new toys that kindergarten age kids can use on the playground. I will run this drive for about two months and then visit the Head Start program to deliver the toys to the kids. But like anything important that happens in this world, no one person can do something like this alone. And so I am asking for your help.

Below I have listed some of the items on the "Wish List" for the Head Start program. While you are shopping for your winter holiday gifts, please consider buying one item on this list and donating it to my drive. If it is easier, you are welcome to send a check, cash or a Target gift card and I will purchase additional items on the list. You can also purchase outdoor toys that are not on this list but would be right for kindergarteners. You can drop your unwrapped donations at my house at 25 Standish Road by February 1 or I am happy to pick them up from you.

Wish list items for children 4-6 years old include:

Variety of balls including basketballs

Short, fat whiffle bats and balls (for younger kids who are learning)

T-ball sets

Jump ropes

Hula Hoops

Square Plastic "Scooters" or other riding toys for young kids

Bottles of bubbles

Sidewalk Chalk

Rainbow-colored parachute

Trucks

...and anything else that you or your kids have enjoyed playing with outdoors over the years

Thanks for your help in making my Mitzvah project a success and please call me or my parents with any questions at 781-449-7374.

Will Katcher

Risa Sherman

risa.sherman@gmail.com