

2016-2017 Whittier Elementary Make a Splash Impact Story

We often say the Y is like a family. When someone walks through our doors, another branch on our family tree grows. Hannah's family bough began growing 39 years ago. Her grandmother, Cathy, began working at the Downtown Y in 1978, providing care and guidance to thousands of youth in our community. Hannah's mother, Farrah, learned to walk at the Y, surrounded by caring staff who served as extended family. When Hannah was five, her family situation changed and she began coming to the Y. Farrah was both returning to the workforce and continuing her education and she needed a safe, nurturing program for her daughter during the day. Hannah joined the Y's pre-school class, taught by her grandmother Cathy. That day our Y family grew by one more.

During the summer prior to starting Kindergarten, Hannah went to the pool weekly with her pre-school class. Despite Hannah's positive attitude, learning to swim was difficult for her. She was fearful of the water, but kept trying and trusting her swim instructors. At the Y, our swim testing indicates a child's swimming ability. Red represents non swimmer, yellow represents restricted swimming, and green grants full access to the pool. Hannah continued swimming lessons with the Y's Kindergarten class, always with a smile on her face. Her Y classmates encouraged her to practice her swimming skills so that she could earn her yellow ribbon alongside them.

Three years later, Hannah was still struggling to keep up with her peers in the water. Every week, her summer day camp group would go to the pool and she would take a deep breath and say, "I am going to get my yellow ribbon this week." She would jump into the pool and swim as hard as she could, but her optimism would only carry her half the length of the required swim test. She would hold back tears and put on her red ribbon and walk over to the wading pool. Her friend Helen would take off her green ribbon, asking to join Hannah "so she doesn't have to be alone."

The Y teachers and her family and friends encouraged Hannah to keep practicing. Hannah would work on her arm strokes, kicking and floating in the wading pool. Each week she would say "I am getting my yellow ribbon today," and would swim a little further. Summer came to an end and Hannah started third grade still seeking that coveted yellow ribbon. She would have to wait until next year to try for her yellow ribbon.

Fortunately, Hannah's third grade class at Whittier Elementary School participates in the *Make A Splash* program, generously funded by Boise Southwest Rotary Club. Hannah now participates in swimming lessons and leadership building activities year-round. She looks forward to *Make A Splash* days, marking it on the calendar so she knows when to pack her swimsuit and towel. Hannah is "acing everything she does", says Farrah, excelling in school, swimming and her social life. Because of the support from her family and the *Make a Splash* program, Hannah is now able to try for her green ribbon at next month's swimming lessons.

According to Hannah, "My experience was that yellow was difficult for me when I tried it. Then it got easy. Then it was so easy I made it. My experience was when I did the green it was really hard until my swimming instructor told me how to do it." When faced with difficult tasks in life, we all need the support of our family and friends to help us learn and grow. The same is true for the Y and our family will continue to grow stronger together. Thanks to generous donors like Boise Southwest Rotary Club, Hannah's younger brother (first grade) and sister (starting Kindergarten in the fall) will be able to follow their sister's determined footsteps.