

# The Dreamer

Exclusive news for the St. Joseph's Indian School DreamMakers



August 2022

## Helping Children Heal, One Wet Nose at a Time

*St. Joseph's HAPI Homes program helps students heal with the help from others with four paws.*

When Lucy\* first arrived at St. Joseph's Indian School, she was scared. Scared, because of some of the experiences she carried with her from her past. Scared, because she was in a new place with new people she did not know. People she did not trust just yet. Thus, Lucy shielded herself with defenses and started becoming aggressive so no one — not her peers or any adults — could get close to her.

Maija, St. Joseph's residential support and owner of Jojo the dog, heard this story and had an idea.

"Let me bring Jojo by the home during prayer time and talk to the girls," said Maija to the houseparents, who agreed.

Maija and Jojo arrived and Maija began telling the girls Jojo's story. Jojo was a rescue dog that had a past full of hurt and abandonment. She barked at adults and didn't want anyone to come

near her. But, after she was given a home with someone who cared for her, Jojo changed. Now, she freely gives love to others.

The girls were in awe of Jojo and enjoyed petting and loving on her until bedtime. As girls left for their rooms, one girl stayed behind: Lucy.

"I understand you and Jojo might have a few things in common," said Maija to the young girl, who stayed quiet. "I want you to know you are in a safe place now. It's okay to let your guard down."

That night was a turning point for Lucy. While she still had difficulties on her journey,

*(over, please)*





connecting with Jojo was the catalyst Lucy needed to begin healing ... It's proof even the most guarded of children can still be reached. Perhaps not at first by two hands. Rather, four paws.

Experiences and stories like this are what launched the Houseparents And Pets In (HAPI) Homes program in 2017, now coordinated by Maija. This program allows staff members to bring their dogs to campus if the pets have passed a good citizenship test. With safety precautions in place, the program allows children the quiet and silly presence of a dog that often comes with slobbery kisses, wagging tails, games of fetch or bedtime snuggles.

On top of this, research shows dogs support psychological growth while increasing social skills and self-esteem in children. They provide emotional support and may decrease anxiety, which in turn has the potential to increase overall academic achievement.

It's common for St. Joseph's alumni to mention Maija's and other staff members' dogs during a chance run-in or get-together. It's proof the impact of the furry friends is substantial.

"Years ago we had a student who really had a hard time connecting to people when he first arrived at St. Joseph's. At the time, I was a houseparent and I would bring my dog, Thumper, to the home on occasion and this kid just really loved him," said Maija. "Years later, I ran into this young man — who is around 40-years-old now — and one of the first things

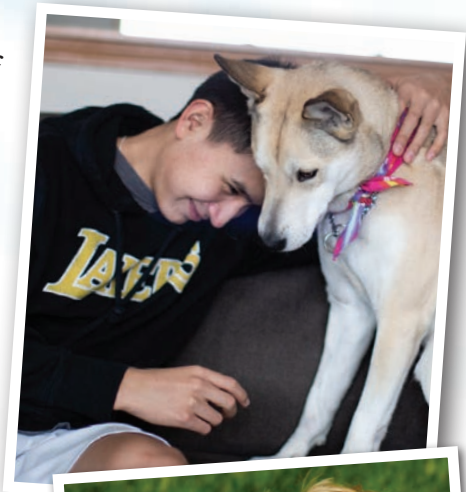
he brought-up was a memory of Thumper. That's the kind of impact an animal can have."

Today, several houseparents and staff on campus incorporate loving dogs into the lives of students. Students are able to learn skills to care for a dog properly, with the bonus of having an instant friend and nonjudgmental presence whenever needed.

For instance, Bella is one of the dogs continually warming the hearts of everyone she encounters at St. Joseph's.

"The girls continue to light-up when I bring Bella out to see them," said Bette, a houseparent to girls in grades 1-3. "Bella has brought so much joy to our lives, and we feel in our hearts Bella has brought so much joy to the lives of our girls, too. We are so thankful to have the opportunity to have HAPI Homes at our school."

**Philámayaye** — *thank you* — for helping provide programs to allow Native American children to heal in a safe and loving environment.



## DID YOU KNOW?

The relationship between dogs and Native Americans is not new. The kinship stems back to the early days when a **šúŋka** — *dog* — helped during hunting and transporting tipis and supplies as villages moved from place to place following buffalo herds.

Learn more about the cultural connections between the Lakota (Sioux) and dogs by visiting [stjo.org/dogs](http://stjo.org/dogs).

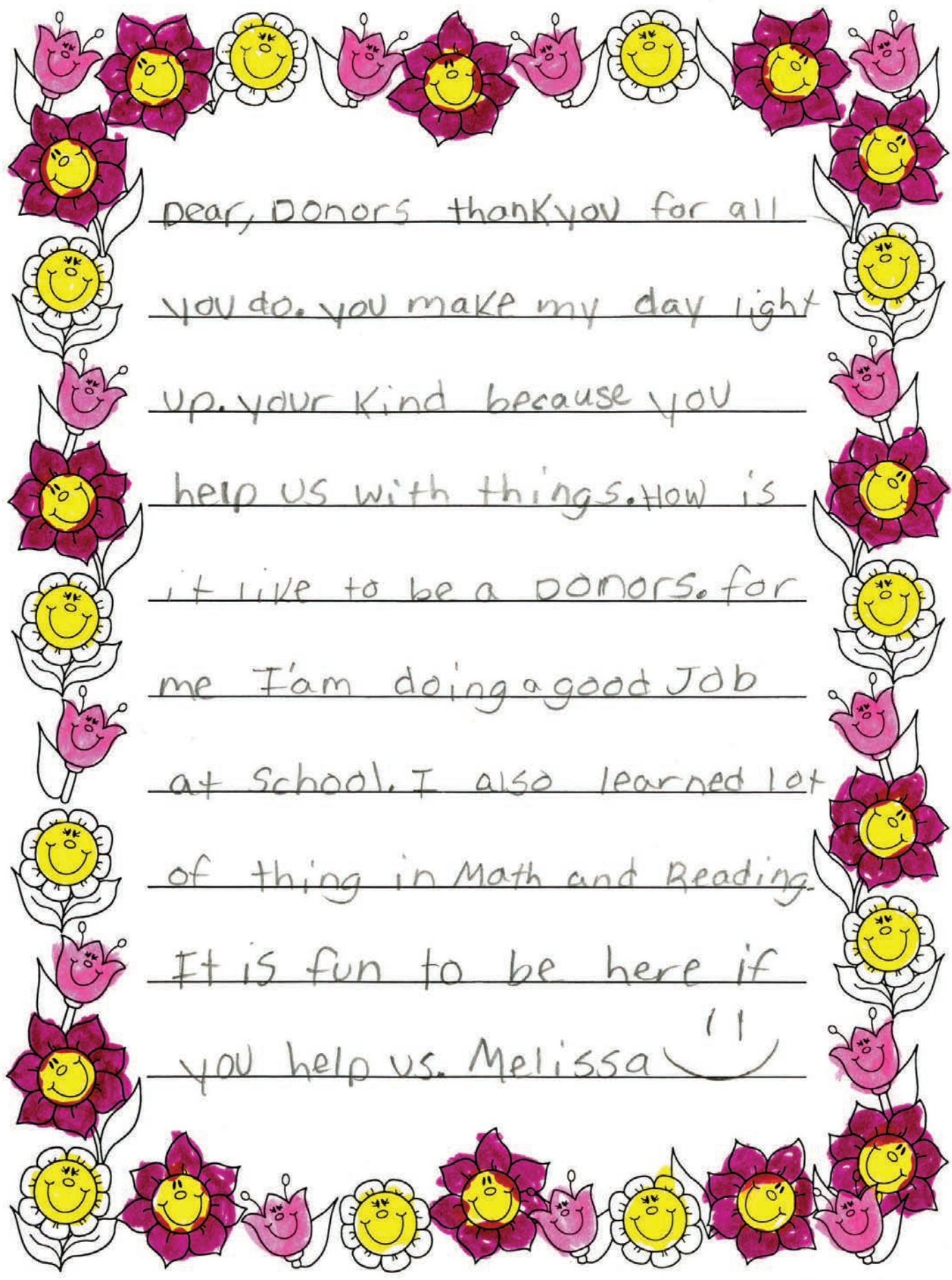
*\*Name and photos have been changed to protect the privacy of those we serve.*











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