



The 2021 Spirit of SS Award



(L to R: SSS President Susan Sutterfield, Peyton White & Nicole Nagel Gray)

Each year, the Sandy Springs Society honors a community member who has made an extraordinary difference by volunteering for a cause that serves our community. This year, the Spirit of Sandy Springs Award goes to a deserving citizen who as a third grade teacher, like all teachers during the COVID pandemic, has gone beyond the call of all her duties.

Our winner, Nicole Nagel Gray, a teacher at Lake Forest Elementary School, saw a huge need and rallied her colleagues and friends. Together, they created “*Lion Pride*,” a reflection of the school’s mascot—and so much more!

And the rest of the story?

Nicole entered the fray of “pandemic crisis management” by taking bags of food to families of students at her school. Upon knocking at one door, she found the student—a 5th grader serving as translator—and three small siblings, along with their mom who was pregnant with her fifth child. Nicole discovered that scarcity of food was almost the LEAST of their problems! They could pay neither their electric bill nor even their apartment rent.



After that moment thanks to Nicole, *Lion Pride* was born—“Emergency Assistance & Support for Families of Lake Forest Elementary School.” This grassroots organization first connects families with charitable organizations such as the Community Assistance Center and the Solidarity Food Pantry for support. Next, *Lion Pride* assists with any needs not met by local organizations, or supplements the support already in place, as necessary.

In twice-monthly zoom calls, teachers report on the DIRE needs of their students—needs not met by other charities—and through a Facebook page set up by Nicole and her pride of lion teachers and friends, hundreds of dollars for food, rent, utilities, medicines and everyday necessities poured in! By the end of 2020, over \$40,000 in donations had been received, and dozens of citizens donated actual food, clothes, supplies and services.

Nicole is quick to say that these families-in-need are good, hard-working folks who just don't have extra financial resources. Many of the parents work in the service industry—restaurants, hotels, and construction companies--and have either lost their jobs, or now have reduced hours because of the pandemic.

“Our little scrappy startup charity,” as Nicole calls ***Lion Pride***, continues to fill students' needs—everything from eye exams and glasses; to supplies for victims of a devastating fire; to assistance for grieving families who have lost a mom or dad. The needs are endless, and ***Lion Pride*** is indeed PROUD and grateful for every dollar that has been donated for its students.

The Sandy Springs Society is honored and proud to present this year's Spirit of **Sandy Springs Award** to Nicole Nagel Gray, along with a check in her honor to Lake Forest's ***Lion Pride*** fund!



(L to R: Nicole Nagel Gray, her mom JoAnne Nagel and Lake Forest Elementary School Principal, Taylor Barton)