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Langley High Student Starts Her Own Nonprofit To Benefit Literacy

Samantha A. Grayer forms Berries for Books to collect donations to help improve literacy rates at a Washington, D.C. elementary school.



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Posted Fri, Aug 12, 2022 at 3:15 pm ET



In addition to being a 15-year-old sophomore at Langley High School, Samantha A. Grayer is the chairman of the board and president of her own nonprofit organization, Berries for Books. (Larry Grayer)

GREAT FALLS, VA — Samantha A. Grayer's decision to launch her own nonprofit company to help improve literacy in Washington, D.C. actually started with chocolate and strawberries rather than books.

"I was making chocolate-covered strawberries for my dad as a present and they turned out a lot better than I had expected them to," the 15-year-old Langley High School sophomore said. "So, last summer, I made chocolate covered strawberries. I worked on them and I sold them to a couple of friends."

By the end of the summer, Grayer realized that she could put that money to better use. Instead of selling chocolate-covered strawberries, she began giving them out as donations. This led her to form own 501(c)(3) corporation, [Berries for Book](#), to raise money and collect children's books to help improve child literacy.

"English has always been my favorite subject and I love reading and writing, so that's where the idea of child literacy came from," Grayer said.

On Friday, Berries for Book wrapped up its [first book drive](#), collecting monetary donations through the [charity's PayPal account](#) and donations of new and used books at drop-off locations around northern Fairfax County.

As of Thursday morning, the book drive had already received about 850 books toward its goal of 1,000.



The idea for Berries for Books originated with homemade chocolate-dipped strawberries that Samantha Grayer made for her father. (Larry Grayer)

Grayer described the response to her company's first book drive as "amazing."

"People who already have books have given huge donations," she said. "Even people who don't have children or children's books that they can donate, they donate on our [Amazon Wish List](#) and they send books through there. Everyone really has been helping out no matter how many books they have or how able they are to donate."

As to where all the books collected will go, Grayer had researched areas nearby with low literacy rates and sent emails to several schools in Southeast Washington, D.C.

The librarian at Savoy Elementary School responded enthusiastically and even said Grayer could distribute the books during back to school night later this fall.

"I could go and actually hand out the books to the students, which is something I'm extremely excited for," she said. "Getting to directly see the impact I'm making is going to be absolutely amazing and really rewarding to me."

Berries for Books is not the first charity work Grayer has done. Her parents taught her the importance helping others. The whole family has fostered dogs and cats, and they recently collected food donations as part of the [Cool Green Bag](#) organization.

Grayer has also done charity work as a Girl Scout, but running her own nonprofit organization at the age of 15 was at a whole different thing.

"It was honestly a little intimidating," she said. "I didn't know all the terms — incorporation and bylaws — it's just a lot to understand at first. My dad definitely helped me learn the ropes and understand what was going on and running my first board meeting — that was definitely intimidating. But it feels great, honestly. I know I'm making an impact and I just really enjoy what I'm doing."

Samantha's parents, Laurence A. Grayer and Jacquelyn A. Grayer, serve as the nonprofit's vice president and secretary, respectively, and participated in the first board meeting.

"As a father, I'm just incredibly proud of her," Larry Grayer said. "It's a great initiative that she's doing this. It's a great cause."

With the Berries for Books' first book drive in the books, Chairman of the Board and President Samantha Grayer is already making plans for what's next.

"Throughout the year, I want to continue giving out chocolate-covered strawberries as gratitude for cash donations," she said. "Next year, I'd like to do the annual book drive."

That will be a lot to do, especially since Samantha is still full-time student.

"I take all honors classes and I'm trying to get two APs this year, so I just want to make sure I have enough time to balance both," she said. "I also play high school soccer and travel soccer, so I just want to make sure I have time."



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