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Boys & Girls Clubs are community treasures: Melody Glendell-Gazso

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A child gets help with homework at one of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Northeast Ohio Photo Courtesy of Boys & Girls Clubs of Northeast Ohio



By Guest columnist, cleveland.com

Guest columnist Melody Glendell-Gazso of Cleveland is the mother of Amber, a recent graduate of The Ohio State University; Alexandra (Ally), a ninth-grader at Holy Name High School; and Aleena (Apple), a seventh-grader at Metro Catholic. Melody is an accountant for the City of Cleveland.

Finding safe and affordable childcare is a struggle for most parents. So when my two youngest daughters joined Boys & Girls Clubs of Northeast Ohio, it was a blessing.

Having one less bill to pay provided a buffer to the cost of raising a family amidst rising prices. Knowing they were cared for helped me to work with less stress about childcare. Having less stress helped me to be a better parent.

I was dismayed to learn that some Clubs may have to close if BGCNEO is unable to fill a \$3 million gap left by the unexpected non-renewal of federal funding -- a move that had nothing to do with how the Clubs operate.

I would urge everyone to do what you can to help keep open as many Boys & Girls Clubs as possible. Tell your companies, your government officials and your neighbors. Find out more at www.bgcneo.org.

For some children, the Club is a lifeline. For many more, it is a reliable safety net that enriches their lives. For us, the Club provided enhanced stability, new camaraderie and more exposure to culture.

My experience with the Club began when my middle daughter, Ally, was in first or second grade. It was a great opportunity for her to receive free afterschool care in a safe environment. She was able to make more friends and experience new things.

As soon as my youngest daughter, Apple, was old enough, she also joined the Boys & Girls Club. She also made new friends and experienced new things.

Picking my children up from the Club shortened my daily commute home, giving me more time to cook dinner and help with homework.

Both girls continued to blossom into unique individuals with varying tastes, and the Club provided an outlet for all of them. The Club's structure to focus on homework and tutoring before play kept my daughters motivated to get their work done.



Guest columnist Melody Glendell-Gazso and her children at her oldest daughter's graduation from The Ohio State University. Photo Courtesy of Melody Glendell-Gazso

In a world where excelling academically is sometimes seen as unpopular, the Club and its staff encouraged my daughters to do their best. The staff promoted confidence in both of my daughters and encouraged them to exercise their talents.

My children had so many wonderful experiences and opportunities for talent development and growth of character.

During the COVID-19 shutdowns, I was an essential worker. With the help of family, I was still able to report to work, but remote school provided extra challenges.

When schools closed, the Broadway Club was able to provide a safe, supervised environment where my children could attend school remotely. The Club provided meals, tutoring and computers, and was equipped with fast, reliable internet.

I believe the Club's holistic support of my children helped keep them whole, even as the world around us seemed to fall apart.

Being a parent is hard. Being a kid might be harder. In the media, and sometimes in our own circles, we hear of declining birth rates, broken relationships, missing kids and discord throughout society.

A loved, respected and nurtured child is much more likely to grow up to improve the world around them.

The Club is a safe space where neighborhood kids can walk to after school. They know they will be welcomed, eat a nutritious meal and be protected.

Securing our good future starts with protecting our children -- and keeping places like the Boys & Girls Clubs open.

Readers are invited to submit Opinion page essays on topics of regional or general interest. Send your 500-word essay for consideration to Ann Norman at anorman@cleveland.com. Essays must include a brief bio and headshot of the writer. Essays rebutting today's topics are also welcome.