Remarks as read by Youth Mentoring Program Coordinator, Maureen Desmond at the Friends’ annual recognition event on October 1.

Volunteerism is at the core of the Friends Youth Mentoring Program, which matches Merrimack County youth – age 6 to 17, with a volunteer mentor. About 150 volunteers devote approximately 13,000 hours each year to their “Junior Friends.”

Without these community champions who selflessly give their time and energy to building meaningful connections with youth, our program would not be able to offer valuable opportunities to local children. It is an honor to recognize and celebrate one exemplary volunteer mentor tonight.

Susan Scarcello became Zoe’s mentor in January 2009, making their’s one of Friends Youth Mentoring’s longest active matches. Their 6 ½ years together have been filled with challenges in their respective lives – yet the pair’s bond has only grown stronger as they’ve overcome each obstacle that
life has placed before them. They share a resilient spirit, a quality that is impressive. They give each other the strength to persevere and embody the notion that when you mentor one child, you enrich two lives.

While the true breadth of Susan’s relationship defies description, its essence can be encapsulated in three words: Advice, Access, and Advocacy.

**Advice:** Susan is a trusted confidant for Zoe, who benefits from her mentor’s guidance and support. The pair share many similar interests, which have helped establish and deepen their bond. Both Susan and Zoe enjoy cooking and renovating doll houses. Recently, Susan shared that she’s been teaching Zoe how to “smart grocery shop,” offering advice on using coupons to save money and eat well. This is just one example of the valuable guidance Susan offers as Zoe’s mentor.

**Access:** Apart from the personalized support she provides Zoe, Susan has helped open her world to include social and cultural opportunities. Since being matched, the pair has attended no fewer than 17 Friends Program-sponsored events and activities. This is clearly an active and very involved match. Zoe’s mentor often takes advantage of donated tickets for theater performances and concerts that the Friends Program receives and makes available. This access to cultural and social opportunities expands Zoe’s horizons in a way that’s fun and engaging.

**Advocate:** Susan has not only been an advocate for Zoe, but for Zoe’s family as well. She truly values the mentoring relationship and encouraged Zoe’s brother, Leevi, to get involved; he was matched with a mentor of his own when he was in the 4th grade. Susan truly cares about Zoe’s entire family’s well-being. While I cannot speak for Zoe’s family, it’s evident that they share our appreciation for Susan, as they have taken the time to attend tonight.

Zoe just turned 13 – and it’s remarkable to think that Susan has been a consistent and stable role model for almost half of her mentee’s life. Both Susan and Zoe express confidence that they will be lifelong friends and often refer to each other as BFFs. This warms my heart as one of Youth Mentoring’s goals is to foster connections that are genuine, longstanding and mutually beneficial.

We are truly grateful for Susan’s commitment to Zoe and to the Friends Youth Mentoring Program. We look forward to seeing them grow together as their friendship deepens.