

DONOR OF THE DAY
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Comic-Book Dreams

Foundation Brings Comic Books, Writing and Drawing to Students in New Jersey

By [MELANIE GRAYCE WEST CONNECT](#)

To Suzanne Andora Barron, there's something magical in fostering a child's creativity. It's something she cherished in her son Christopher. When he died of leukemia in 2007 at the age of 9, she established the Christopher Barron Live Life Foundation in his memory. Ms. Andora Barron, 48 years old, says that in the months following her son's death, she had a strong desire to continue parenting and providing for Christopher. "I felt an incredible need to help other kids," she says. "I needed to do something to share him."



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Suzanne Andora Barron

Her son adored comic books and superheroes. Where some kids had lemonade stands, Christopher sold comic books on the front lawn. And he loved dreaming up and drawing superheroes. She knew there was a good idea in inspiring a love of comic books in other children, but she also wanted such a program to provide hope and opportunities.

What emerged was a foundation that brings comic books, writing and drawing to fifth grade classes at School 21 in Paterson, N.J. In four years, the Glen Rock, N.J.-based foundation has served some 300 kids.

The eight-week program teaches comic-book development from start to finish. Students first learn about comics, see professional examples and learn the lingo of the trade. They then develop an original character and story plot, sketch a drawing, ink the sketch and then publish a four-panel comic strip into an anthology. The comic strips are later on view for parents at a special show. Kids that complete the program are given movie tickets.

Alex Simmons, a comic-book writer for Archie Comics and founder of Kids Comic Con, leads the workshop. The weekly comic-book workshop is tied to the established fifth grade lesson plans. The program costs around \$10,000 each year.

Many children begin the program focused on not being able to draw or not being able to write well, says Ms. Andora Barron. The workshops, however, "help kids to be kids and we bring fun to their learning," she says.

The program does include the story of Christopher's life and that naturally does bring about a lot of kind words and actions from the children, says Ms. Andora Barron. But the characters that children dream up are so filled with compassion, too, she says. There's been a teen superhero who saves the water supply; a gigantic elephant that kills rats in a building; a super-girl who stops shoplifting; and a superhero with the power to hear when homeless people are hungry.

"We are constantly trying to offer the kids different ways to believe in themselves," says Ms. Andora Barron. "I just want the kids to feel invincible, no matter what they are going through."

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