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Selfless Roosevelt students earn high honor

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By EILEEN MARUM

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

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NEW BEDFORD — Two Roosevelt Middle School students, Christopher Pabon, 13, and Sarah Luiz, 12, are doing good deeds because they're good kids.

The fact that they were recently honored for their efforts is just frosting on the cake.

Christopher and Sarah were recently among 100 Massachusetts middle school students who received the "JFK Make A Difference Award" presented during ceremonies at the John F. Kennedy Library.

The awards are bestowed on middle-schoolers who make

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outstanding and selfless contributions to their communities.

"The students did it on their own," said Darcy Fernandes, principal at the Roosevelt Middle School. "They had the self-discipline and motivation to go to Gifts to Give, a non-profit enterprise," in the city's South End and begin helping out.

Fernandes said one day she visited Gifts to see what went on in there. While walking through the aisles, she noticed two Roosevelt students volunteering after school hours.

"I was impressed," the principal said, "but when I learned Christopher and Sarah volunteered there almost every day until 5 p.m., I knew I had to write a letter and nominate them for the Make A Difference Award."

Fernandes said writing letters recommending students for awards is one of the most satisfying aspects of her job. "Christopher and Sarah made the entire Roosevelt community very proud," she said.

"We send stuff to Haiti from Gifts to Give," said Christopher. "I help sort shoes and clothes, and I helped coordinate the MLK (Martin Luther King Jr.) services in February."

"Christopher is modest and rarely talks about himself, but he started a yard sale in his neighborhood for Gifts to Give because he thought the organization could use more donations," Fernandes said.

For her part, Sarah said she helps "arrange books and clean toys and sort them according to age and whether the item is for a boy or a girl."

Social workers and non-profits call Gifts to Give to order age- and gender-appropriate packages for families that have fallen on hard times.

Fernandes praised Jim Stevens, the organization's founder. What he does, she said, "gets children engaged in community service and it keeps them out of trouble."

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