

Trib Total Media Outstanding Young Citizen Scholarship
Letter of Recommendation for Sam Bisno

I have known Sam Bisno since the fall of 2017, when he began volunteering at the Carnegie Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (LBPH), where I serve as the volunteer coordinator for a partnership with his school. This program involves the recording of audiobooks that are made available through the Library of Congress to all US libraries for blind and print disabled patrons. As a retired educator (including teaching 28 years at The Ellis School) and an LBPH volunteer program coordinator, I strongly recommend Sam Bisno for the Trib Total Media Outstanding Young Citizen Scholarship. His community-mindedness is outstanding and his work reaches library patrons not only in the Pittsburgh community but also in other communities around the nation. He has approached his volunteer work at the LBPH with dedication; creativity and empathy; and reflection.

As an LBPH volunteer, Sam has shown remarkable dedication. For two and a half years, he has volunteered at the LBPH on Friday afternoons, selecting, narrating and monitoring (following narrations electronically) dozens of children's books and a few for adult patrons. Thanks to his excellent attendance and preparation, he has narrated and monitored around 50 books; he has helped recruit underclassmen from his school for the sustainability of our audiobook program; he has served in an ambassadorial role by addressing the impact of our program on children who are patrons of libraries for the blind and print disabled on WESA; and, after last year's tragic mass shooting at the Tree of Life synagogue, he engaged in a project involving the narration of books for children about Judaism and narrated a book about Jewish holidays.

Sam is creative and empathetic in his volunteer work. He truly wishes to give library patrons from the disabled community a quality experience listening to the audiobooks that he narrates. When Sam began to volunteer at the LBPH, he learned voice-over reading skills and he has since embraced the opportunity to sound silly, endearing, sad, angry or serious, depending on the context of the children's books he narrates. For the recording of the poetry anthology *Iconoscope*, by Peter Oresick (a book for adult patrons), Sam added meter, alliteration, and rhyme to the mix. Sam is the key singer in this year's narration of the 75 songs from *Mr Rogers: A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood: the Poetry of Mr. Rogers*, which was published to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the WQED TV program. So far, Sam has sung 20 of the songs a capella, with musical genres ranging from ballads to jazz! These examples illustrate Sam's creativity and his willingness to take risks, learn new skills, and show empathy.

Sam has also shown reflection as a volunteer in the LBPH community. A book selection process that illustrates Sam's reflective approach to audiobook projects occurred when fellow library volunteers questioned the propriety of including a biography for children about the controversial football player Antonio Brown among biographies of present and former Pittsburgh athletes. After Sam analyzed the content, tone and message of the book, he determined that it was important to tell the story of Brown's challenging childhood experience and to celebrate openness rather than to censor a person because of his flaws. Sam was also intrigued by the hypothesis (not included in the book) that Brown might be suffering from CTE, which could explain the athlete's erratic and violent behavior. Last fall, I invited Sam to monitor Andrew McCutchen when the former Pirates player came to the LBPH during "Cutch Charity

Week” to narrate an audiobook for children. I enjoyed watching Sam and Cutch work together as a monitor/narrator team in the recording of the book *Baseball Is. . .* by Louise Borden. They both shared the same goal: finding the best pacing, tone, and volume to capture the excitement of the children’s book in order to best serve blind and disabled patrons who would later listen to it.

Sam’s volunteer work at the Carnegie Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped demonstrates his readiness to serve the needs of a community. The numerous audiobooks that he has helped to select, narrate, and monitor in the past two and a half years have enriched the lives of many patrons of libraries for the disabled, and they will continue to do so in the future. I believe that Sam’s dedication, empathy, and reflectiveness are the qualities that make him such a remarkable young citizen and volunteer community member. For these reasons, I believe that Sam is an ideal candidate for the 2020 Trib Total Media Outstanding Young Citizen Scholarship.

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