

# Stoneham teen gets \$36,000 to help fund his mission



MARK LORENZ FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

**Max Davis at home in Stoneham with the family pet, Beau.**

**By Wendy Killeen** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT SEPTEMBER 02, 2016

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Max Davis has a cause. And now he has the money to fight for it.

The 14-year-old from Stoneham received \$36,000 from the [Helen Diller Family Foundation](#), which honored 14 Jewish teens nationwide who are helping make the world a better place.

It all began when Davis heard about a young Army veteran who had fought in Afghanistan, was medically discharged, and became homeless.

“I thought it was horrible,” he said. “Someone who served our country should not have to worry about where their next meal is coming from or where they are going to sleep.”

Davis, a freshman at Stoneham High, was encouraged by Temple Israel in Boston to get involved in a social justice project.

He knew exactly what it would be.

Davis did research and learned about the state’s large number of homeless youth who don’t have a regular place to sleep at night.

“I realized they needed to be helped,” he said. “And I wanted to go for a lasting change.”

He started Legislature in Action — Kids Helping Kids. Under his leadership, his team — including Temple Israel teens Zach Iwatsuki, Esther Trask, Sophie Lewis, and Hannah Hummel — made appearances on Beacon Hill and lobbied for a bill to address homeless youth.

Massachusetts House Bill 135 — with \$2 million in funding — passed in 2015. It allows the state to team with agencies that provide housing and support services.

“Kids in the State House is not about changing what the state cookie is,” Davis said. “Youth helping other youth is more powerful.”

“I am excited that [the law] is not just about providing housing but about teaching and other supports; not just a place to stay, but a place to grow.”

Davis impressed Charles Glick, a Boston lobbyist. “I have never seen a young person with such laser-like focus, [helping] move a piece of legislation and working to get funding,” Glick said. “He had a major impact in getting this done.”

Glick, who has long been involved in the Jewish community, nominated Davis for the Diller award. Kelly Turley, director of legislative advocacy at the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, also submitted a recommendation.

“It was wonderful to work with Max and his team,” Turley said. “This is about ways youth can be advocates. You don’t have to be an old soul to be creative and passionate about social justice. He’s curious, knowledgeable, articulate, and a lot of fun.”

“I have good parents,” he said of Bryna Davis, who works in social services, and Mike Davis, who works in technology. His sister, Rebecca, 16, has been similarly involved in service projects.

Davis said the \$36,000 award will go partially to his organization and some to his college fund.

Glick assumes someday, Davis will go into politics. “We all joke that we are going to work for or vote for Max someday,” he said.

Davis has other ideas.

“I want to be a doctor,” he said, like his great-uncle, who still practices, and his late great-grandfather. “I look up to them.”

Davis said Judaism also “fuels me.” The Diller Foundation awards recognize the spirit of “tikkun olam,” Hebrew for “repair the world.”

“My goal,” he said, “is to help as many people as possible and be able to say, ‘I made the world a better place.’ ”

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