**Karen Blumstein**

March 22, 2021

**Re: Nomination of** **MaryGrace Stewart, Ed.D. for the** **NAGC Community Service Award**

I am the Co-President of MAGE with long-time gifted advocate Michelle Barmazel, and we are pleased to nominate MaryGrace Stewart, Ed.D. for the NAGC Community Service Award.

My first contact with MaryGrace was a relatively short time ago in 2018, but because of her, those few years have brought significant changes to my family and to the lives of others. My husband and I realized early on that our first-born child was gifted. Although I had spent nine years working with Twice-Exceptional dyslexic children at a specialized school and had learned how to examine them for deficits that required support, I had never received formal training in giftedness, let alone how to support its demands.

MaryGrace was serving as the Parent Liaison for MAGE at the time, so she was my first guide into the world of Gifted Education. She respected my experience as an educator and supported me as both a professional and as a parent in our initial discussion. She gave me an overview of asynchronous learning, shared resources like the NAGC and SENG, and recommended professional development opportunities through the University of Connecticut’s Confratute and graduate courses. I remember feeling like my head was swimming with possibilities. I finally had direction in my efforts to understand and to help support my son’s development.

Thanks to MaryGrace’s recommendations I attended Confratute and enrolled in the University of Connecticut’s online Gifted Education and Talent Development Certification program, which I completed last spring. Her efforts to support a fellow educator and parent brought a new professional into the field and empowered a family in their understanding of their gifted child.

In the fall of 2019 MaryGrace and I connected again when I reached out to her for advocacy help with my son’s public school, which my husband and I had hoped would support our son’s needs. Unfortunately, that was not the case. He came home disappointed and angry at being taught “kindergarten stuff” instead of the reading and the 4th-grade-level math that he found fun and challenging. He wasn’t learning and that was causing significant emotional harm.

At this point MaryGrace had become the MAGE President in addition to her Parent Liaison role. She spent countless hours with us planning, providing resources, emailing with the school, and supporting us emotionally as we encountered great resistance from the school’s administration. Ultimately, she gave us the courage to make the necessary choice to remove our son from public school mid-year and to transfer him to a school devoted to serving gifted and talented students. Since making the change he is thriving again, back to his ever-curious self. MaryGrace saved not just one child but a whole family.

In the spring of 2020 MaryGrace asked me to join the Board of MAGE. She participated in my transition from distraught parent, to professional, to gifted advocate in the space of two years. I took on the roles of MAGE Vice-President and Parent Liaison, trying to reduce the workload for her as she began a new endeavor – an online school for gifted children at the beginning of the pandemic. She had been observing the need for education that would be appropriate to the underserved gifted students in Massachusetts for years, but she struggled with how to bring them together, given the size of our state. With the need for remote learning, Ideal4Gifted was born. Now, a year later, she has fully focused on building this educational platform to meet the needs of gifted children not just in our state but across the country.

MaryGrace has worked with students, teachers, administrators, advocates, state policy makers and legislators, national agencies like NAGC, and has presented at numerous events. She has been a long-time advocate for equity and for serving underrepresented populations in gifted education. Her professional work is prolific, and her personal devotion to the community is unparalleled. She has infected me with her zeal, and I have found other parents who have volunteered to contribute their legal or other specialized skills to MAGE. The ripples of MaryGrace’s work are ever widening, spreading the message that gifted children are a special community that deserve a school experience that is as much tailored to them as to any other identifiable education cohort. Please consider her for this year’s NAGC Community Service award. Her impact has been great and our community is better because of her consistent, self-less and sympathetic service.

Sincerely,

Karen Blumstein

Co-President & Parent Liaison of MAGE

Elementary, Special Needs, Gifted & Talented Ed

cc: Michelle Barmazel