Just-A-Start (JAS) was founded in 1968 as a community revitalization and youth training program focused on improving Cambridge’s then-struggling Wellington-Harrington neighborhood. Since then, JAS has grown into a multi-service community development corporation (CDC) offering a wide variety of housing, programs, and community resources. JAS’s primary service area is Cambridge, a city where economic growth has created substantial wealth, but this has exacerbated problems accessing affordable housing which contributes to the economic insecurity of many residents. JAS hopes to counter this trend by helping low- to moderate-income individuals and families build economic resiliency to attain financial stability and upward mobility.

Mission and Vision

As a CDC, JAS is dedicated to building the housing security and economic stability of low- to moderate-income people in Cambridge and nearby communities. Through innovative, comprehensive, and integrated programs, JAS provides and preserves affordable housing, offers education and workforce training for youth and adults, and builds community engagement. JAS’s vision is a better future for all of its constituents: a secure home, a sustaining career, and engagement in the community.

Kayla Troche  |  BIOMEDICAL CAREERS PROGRAM GRADUATE

Kayla’s passion is science, and she’s also good at math—which made the Just-A-Start Biomedical Careers Program a perfect fit for her. She had started her college education at Framingham State College as a biology major, with the hope of becoming a wildlife biologist. She transferred to Bunker Hill Community College but had to stop attending because her financial aid did not cover enough of her educational expenses. When she learned about the Biomedical Careers Program, she knew this was the right program for her.

Kayla’s hope is to get a job as a lab technician or an animal care technician, and then pursue opportunities to grow professionally at the company that hires her and, hopefully, go back to college to finish her degree.

Kayla graduated from the Biomedical Careers Program on Tuesday, May 17, 2016 and is actively job hunting.
Few individuals have had the impact on Just-A-Start (JAS) that Ruby Pierce Donohue has had. For 40 years—since her first job with JAS as a TeenWork counselor in 1976—Ruby has been a dynamic partner to JAS, and a relentless, passionate advocate for the thousands of young people and families helped by the organization every single year. As she says: “I believe JAS provides opportunities for many adults and their families through affordable housing, education, and community engagement. We are dedicated to strengthening community and improving the lives of those we serve.”

Ruby is a truly inspirational role model…for all of us. Ruby is Cambridge! Born and raised in Cambridge, she attended what is now Cambridge Rindge and Latin School; Salem State for her undergraduate degree; and then Suffolk University and Boston State College for her advanced degrees. Ruby returned to Cambridge Rindge and Latin as a teacher, acting administrator, and housemaster for the next 35 years, including being chosen by the Superintendent of Schools to be a part of the newly-created Office of Student Achievement and Accountability for the Cambridge Public Schools. She took a four-year break when then-Mayor Michael Sullivan asked her to be the Educational Liaison for the City, but then returned to the Cambridge Public Schools system until she retired.

Ruby is a persuasive, relentless community activist—everyone knows her! When you have lunch at the S&S Deli in Inman Square with Ruby, you know you are in the presence of a true community icon. Everyone knows her, she greets everyone personally and asks after their families and children, she gives someone a check to support a fundraising event for a child with autism, a local politician comes over to say hello—it is a nonstop lunch of connections, friendship, compassion, and community. And that’s just lunch with Ruby!

From all of us at Just-A-Start—in our broadest and most inclusive community sense possible—we give Ruby our very deepest and most heartfelt THANK YOU. Thank you for being you, for being so connected to JAS for so long, for keeping the organization partnered with the City of Cambridge, for helping us touch the lives of so many, and for reminding all of us—every day—what true community commitment, compassion, perseverance and, most of all, kindness and faith can do to bring everyone together.

“It’s all about the children, the young people, and the families of Cambridge. Everything I’ve done has been for them. I hope I have made life better for our neighbors, our families, and our friends by helping children and their parents take advantage of every opportunity I could find that would open doors for them. A blessing for them? More like a thousand blessings for me to have touched the lives of so many wonderful people.”

—Ruby Pierce Donohue
A LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

Just-A-Start (JAS) is an almost 50-year network of individuals—thousands of community residents, families, neighbors, supporters, and friends—that have partnered with us to change their lives and change our community. In this year’s Annual Report, I would like to introduce you to some of our wonderful partners, and let them tell you their stories, in their own voices. This is, after all, what JAS really is—it’s people and places. And every year that goes by for JAS is filled with these inspirational stories and these passionate voices – especially 2015! 2015 was an important year of growth and change for JAS. We developed a Strategic Plan for 2016-2020, a first in the organization’s history! This process included input from community members, staff, and our Board, bringing together ideas for a mission, vision, and a plan for growth that are inclusive of internal expertise and the needs of the individuals and families we serve.

Our vision of working to help all those we serve have a secure home, a sustaining career, and engagement in the community truly embodies the goals of the services provided by JAS. As we move forward, we hope that this newly invigorated focus will help us strengthen operations and resources to continue supporting the economic security and mobility of local residents for the next 50 years.

For those of you who support our work, and are involved in our meaningful programs and in the community—my sincerest thanks. For those of you who don’t know much about JAS: come meet us and get involved! As our impact on the community grows and expands, so does our need for dedicated, supportive partners, as we strengthen our network of opportunities and resources for everyone.

Add your story—let us hear your voice! I look forward to meeting new friends and neighbors, and to working with everyone to create opportunity, strengthen community, and improve lives.

Appreciatively,

Deborah Ruhe
Executive Director

“We hope that this newly invigorated focus will help us strengthen operations and resources to continue supporting the economic security and mobility of local residents for the next 50 years.”
Sabina Sheikh lives in a rental apartment at 402 Rindge Avenue in Cambridge, a building owned by JAS which provides 273 families with safe, affordable housing close to public transportation. During the summer of 2015, Nancy Porcaro, the Community Coordinator at 402 Rindge, advertised for an orientation for the JAS Biomedical Careers Program to recruit students for the 2015-2016 academic year. Sabina had a job at Whole Foods in Cambridge, but wanted to find more stable, sustaining employment that would offer her opportunities for economic mobility in the future. Sabina came to the United States from India almost five years ago and although she had a Master’s in Business Economics (MBE) and a Master of Arts (MA) from South Gujarat University in India, she was unable to find employment beyond her job at Whole Foods. She attended the orientation by the staff of the JAS Biomedical Careers Program and became interested in possibilities the program offered in the biomedical and biotech fields. Sabina applied, took the entrance exams (her scores were very high!), and enrolled in the JAS Biomedical Careers Program. Throughout the program, Sabina had perfect attendance, and graduated in May 2016. She is currently interviewing for jobs.

Adam Nur was born in Cambridge to Somalian parents and spent much of his early years traveling between North Cambridge and Somalia. Due to frequent travel, Adam was in school intermittently. Adam finished 8th grade in Cambridge and then moved to Somalia to work with his father. At 17, Adam decided to move back to the U.S. to finish school, without his parents. Luckily, Adam’s uncle lived in East Cambridge, and he was able to live with him. When he returned to Cambridge, Adam looked at several options for his education, and was referred to JAS’s YouthBuild. Adam was excited to learn that he could get a high school diploma in two years from JAS YouthBuild, and also that the program offered the opportunity to earn AmeriCorps Education Awards through community service, which could help pay for college. In 2015, Adam graduated and received his high school diploma. After graduation, JAS YouthBuild staff helped Adam research college programs, and he got excited about a program at Syracuse University that collaborates with NASA. After learning more and visiting Syracuse, Adam decided to enroll at Onondaga Community College (OCC), which has a program that allows students to automatically transfer to Syracuse University to complete a bachelor’s degree after two successful years at OCC. Now Adam lives on campus, is majoring in Computer Science, and is on the track team. He has found “the right path”, thanks to JAS YouthBuild.

“Sometimes you lose your way and you need help to get on the right path. That is what YouthBuild did for me.”
A Secure Home…

Just-A-Start believes that each individual should have a safe, affordable, secure home. Everything starts at home—home is our first priority because we know it is the foundation which everything else is built upon: education, careers, family. Renting a home, buying a home, staying in your home, improving your home—JAS provides for, and supports, homes for community residents in many ways.

Real Estate Development

RENTAL HOUSING
As part of its core mission, JAS develops and owns affordable apartments that allow low- and moderate-income residents to live in Cambridge at rents that are within their means. JAS currently owns nearly 600 units and has partnered with Maloney Properties and Wingate to provide the portfolio with professional management.

HOMEOWNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT
JAS develops homes sold at prices within reach for low- and moderate-income households. All of the units are sold pursuant to an Affordable Housing Agreement with the City of Cambridge, allowing the City to repurchase the units when resold at a restricted sale price. Buyers are selected through a lottery process with preference given to Cambridge residents and families with children. Homeowners are required to take a First Time Homebuyers class prior to purchasing their home and JAS provides condominium training and support in the first year of operation.

CONDO RESALE PROGRAM
There are more than 500 homeownership units in the City of Cambridge currently subject to Affordable Housing restrictions, including many developed by JAS. JAS manages the preservation, rehab, and resale when an owner decides to sell their unit. New buyers are selected from the Homeownership Resale Pool, which is administered by the City’s Housing Division.
John Dunn has lived in his house in Cambridge for a long time. In 1957, his parents bought the house and 19-year-old John, his two siblings, and their parents moved into a lovely single-family home—the American dream. After his brother and sister got married and moved out, and his parents died (his dad in 1975 and his mom in 1987), John inherited the family home.

John has always been a hardworking, independent person. When he was 21, he got a job at Raytheon, where he worked on prototypes of the internal guidance systems for rockets to go to the moon. John worked at the company for 36 years, retiring in 1995.

The result of this investment of everyone working together in partnership? John’s home is restored to its former beauty and value, and he is in a safe, affordable living environment adapted to his needs and abilities.

But retirement didn’t suit John! He then went to work for Avis Rent-A-Car and for several security companies, and also went back to school in 2009 to begin the process of getting a certificate in Computer Science from ITT Technical Institute.

But, over the years, the house needed updates and maintenance that John couldn’t afford and so, important repairs and replacements just didn’t get done. Also, John developed some health issues that impact his mobility. All these challenges put John at risk of losing his home. That’s when John met JAS, and began working with the staff of the JAS’s Home Improvement Program (HIP) to find the resources to save his home. With help from HIP and Somerville-Cambridge Elder Services, John refinanced his home and also got grants from the Cambridge Historical Commission, Massachusetts Rehab Commission, the City of Cambridge, and Menotomy to do structural construction, a new heating/cooling system, energy insulation and a new roof, deleading, and overall improvements and updates on the interior and exterior of the house. The result of this investment of everyone working together in partnership? John’s home is restored to its former beauty and value, and he is in a safe, affordable living environment adapted to his needs and abilities. Now, at the age of 78, John can focus on finishing his certificate from ITT Technical!
Antonio is proud of his new apartment at 22 Water Street in Cambridge, and was delighted to show off his new place. His affordable, secure apartment—and the happy smile on his face—is a result of an effective collaboration between JAS, the Cambridge Multi-Service Center, Somerville-Cambridge Elder Services, and the City of Cambridge Inclusionary Housing Program. These agencies all worked together to help Antonio avoid becoming homeless.

Antonio came to the Northeast from Puerto Rico, with a job in New Haven, Connecticut. In 1985, he moved to Cambridge and finally received an affordable apartment after hitting a rough spot when he lived in a homeless shelter for six months. Antonio is a hardworking, quiet man, and lived in this apartment for 10 years. During that time, he also developed some serious health issues. In May 2015, Antonio’s landlord told him he needed Antonio’s ground floor apartment for his elderly mother and wanted Antonio to move out—and thus, the strained relationship between landlord and tenant began. The Cambridge Multi-Service Center got involved, and then suggested that Antonio work with Gerry Zipser in JAS’s Housing Services Program, to mediate the situation before it escalated and left Antonio homeless. Gerry started working with Antonio and the landlord and kept the lines of communication open and though the housing search process moved more slowly than anticipated, the landlord agreed to let Antonio stay until his new apartment came through. JAS also helped Antonio clear-up a credit report problem that initially prevented him from being accepted for new apartments. Antonio was able to move into his new place on February 1st!

“When everyone works together and helps each other out, the world is a beautiful place. Things happen for the best! I can’t believe how wonderful my new apartment is and how lucky I am to have met Gerry”, exclaims Antonio. Although he still receives dialysis three times/week, and is on a kidney transplant list, Antonio’s health is improving and he is looking forward to having a visit from his family in Florida.

JAS’s innovative model for stabilizing housing through the combination of conflict resolution, legal education, and emergency rental assistance has proven effective in assisting 413 families in 2015.
Housing Resources

HOME IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (HIP)
Through HIP, JAS provides assistance in managing home improvement projects and helps homeowners, condominium associations, and landlords secure financing for housing improvements. JAS’s experienced rehab specialists guide clients through the entire process, from application to completion.

HOUSING STABILIZATION SERVICES
To avoid evictions and/or homelessness, JAS professionals mediate and help resolve disputes between tenants, landlords, homeowners, and others by creating a safe, neutral forum in which meaningful dialogue can occur. Through these efforts, JAS has helped thousands of individuals reach compromise and address conflicts before they spiral out of control. In addition, the Housing Services group helps at-risk residents avoid homelessness by administering emergency financial assistance and coordinating available social support services.

RESIDENT SERVICES
JAS provides tenants of its affordable rental properties with resident services including community activities, education, and supportive services (e.g. ESOL, computer classes, support groups), and referral services to tenants. It also assists with property management in addressing resident issues.

HOMEOWNER SERVICES
JAS offers an array of services to meet the ongoing needs of low- and moderate-income homeowners in Cambridge. These services include: technical assistance with property maintenance and repair; advisory services for condominium association finances, management, and compliance; education and training courses; and leadership development for condominium associations.

Jennifer Ramsey is “born and raised in Central Square, Cambridge”, as she puts it—as were her parents and her grandparents. Now, her son is the 4th generation of her family to be brought up and go to school in this part of Cambridge—the same elementary school Jennifer attended! Jennifer and her son live in the Bishop Allen Apartments, which JAS purchased to prevent the units from being converted from affordable to market rate rents. These units were a recent preservation and rehabilitation project for JAS, and the buildings were renovated in a way that enhances the original architecture from the 1880s. In fact, JAS was recently awarded the prestigious Cambridge Historical Commission Preservation Award, with Curtis Construction, for the preservation and rehab of the Bishop Allen Apartments.

But to Jennifer, the renovations of the apartments had a much deeper and more personal impact. While the construction was underway, Jennifer was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS), and it quickly became clear that she needed an apartment that was configured to be completely handicapped accessible. The JAS staff and contractors made that happen, by working closely with Jennifer and her doctor to make sure her apartment had everything she needed to manage her disease. For Jennifer and her family now: “It’s a really beautiful apartment—it just couldn’t be any better for me and for my family! Now I can raise my family in this safe community—we love Central Square! This means everything—the world—to me”.

Jennifer Ramsey | JUST-A-START RESIDENT
A Sustaining Career...

JAS’s community roots are firmly planted in the education and training field, and ensure that individuals of all ages and circumstances—teens and adults alike—are on career pathways with the skills, knowledge, and training to find, and sustain, fulfilling jobs. Whether in high school, out of high school, going to college, developing new skills, or exploring career possibilities, JAS has programs and resources to enhance career options and earning power.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

BIOMEDICAL CAREERS PROGRAM
The Biomedical Careers Program was launched in 1992 to prepare local low- to moderate-income adults for careers in the biotechnology, life sciences, and medical research industries, and supply local employers with work-ready, diverse employees. This free, nine-month program provides instruction in biology, chemistry, medical terminology, and computer and laboratory skills. The laboratory training is done in partnership with Bunker Hill Community College. In the program, students also receive job readiness training such as preparing a resume, interviewing, and job search, and are introduced to industry professionals through career talks and employer site visits. After graduation, students receive follow up services for up to one year, until they are placed in relevant employment.

JAS YOUTHBUILD
JAS YouthBuild is a comprehensive youth development program for 16 to 24 year-old out-of-school youth that provides education leading to grade level increases and credential attainment (HiSET or diploma); career exploration and employment skills building (construction/facilities maintenance and healthcare focus); and leadership and life skills training. Through their housing community service work experience, youth gain occupational skills leading to HBI PACT and OSHA certificates (industry recognized credentials), in addition to applied academic skills and leadership development. JAS YouthBuild also provides comprehensive guidance, counseling, case management, and support services. Youth who complete the program transition to employment, training, and/or college and receive intensive follow-up support for at least one year, with additional support beyond.

Brenda Comeau
DATA AND PROGRAM COORDINATOR, BIOMEDICAL CAREERS PROGRAM

Brenda Comeau always puts her family first—always has and always will. It’s the way her mother and father raised her, growing up in this area. She also has a very strong work ethic; she has worked since she was 15 years old. She worked through high school, graduated, and did one semester of college. Brenda got married and started her family while she was in her 20s. Her husband is an electrician so Brenda always worked nights so someone would be home with their three children: a son (who is now 32) and two daughters (one is 30 and the other 26). In 1997, while Brenda was working as a bank processor at nights at a local bank, she saw an ad in the local Medford Transcript for the JAS Biomedical Careers Program and decided to apply. With 3 children in 3 different schools, her husband working, and her aging parents needing help, Brenda often found herself studying until midnight. But she persevered and graduated in 1998—as the class valedictorian! The Director of the Biomedical Careers Program was so impressed with Brenda that she offered her a part-time job, with flexible hours, at the program; a perfect fit for Brenda with her busy family. Almost 20 years later (and with 3 grandchildren!), Brenda is still working for JAS’s Biomedical Careers Program, helping the students stay on task, on time, and motivated.

A Sustaining Career...

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DATA AND PROGRAM COORDINATOR, BIOMEDICAL CAREERS PROGRAM

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John Altidor
CASE MANAGER, JAS YOUTHBUILD AND FORMER CAREER CONNECTION AND SUMMER YOUTH ENRICHMENT PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

John Altidor’s parents came to Cambridge from Haiti in 1997, when he was 9 years old. John faced challenges adjusting to school in the U.S., and he wasn’t able to do as well as he wanted academically. In eighth grade, a career counselor told John about JAS’s programs for academic support and career assistance, and he decided to check them out. One part of Career Connection that appealed to John was that while you received academic support, you also had the opportunity to get a paying job, so he decided to enroll in the program. John also took part in the Summer Youth Enrichment Program, so he was participating in JAS programs year-round. Career Connection helped John build friendships and positive relationships and keep him out of trouble, which in turn helped him excel in school. Because of his hard work and the dedication of staff at JAS, John was awarded five college scholarships. John says that “without the hard work of JAS staff members helping me to get those scholarship applications turned in, I wouldn’t have been this successful.” After completing high school, John studied at Newbury College and, while he was in college, John started working at JAS part-time as a Vocational Counselor for Career Connection. After completing his degree, John continued to work at JAS full-time for the TeenWork program, helping high school students prepare for employment and gain work experience. Seven years later, John was recently promoted to become a Case Manager for JAS YouthBuild, continuing to support youth who need help to find the right path in life.

“Without the hard work of Just-A-Start staff members helping me to get a scholarship, I wouldn’t have been this successful.”

CAREER CONNECTION
Career Connection is a year-round program designed to improve school performance, attendance, and retention, and prepare youth ages 14 to 21 for successful futures through attainment of a high school diploma and placement in post-secondary education and/or employment. Career Connection provides youth, identified by the Cambridge School system as being at-risk, with academic support, pre-employment/work maturity skills building, leadership development, and summer activities that combine work with academic remediation and skills development. Career Connection also provides strong support and advocacy through counseling, mentoring, placement, and follow-up services to support retention in post-graduation placement. Graduates often return to the program in the summer as Junior Staff and peer models to current participants.

SUMMER YOUTH ENRICHMENT PROGRAM
The Summer Youth Enrichment Program is a paid work experience and enrichment program that operates for six weeks in July and August. Youth spend half their time in academic enrichment and life skills courses, and half their time working with housing/rehabilitation/beautification crews providing community services to the City of Cambridge.

TEENWORK
TeenWork provides job readiness training, job placement with employer partners, and supportive counseling to Cambridge public high school students and recent graduates, allowing them to gain work experience and develop their resumes.
Just-A-Start FY2015 Highlights

HOUSING
Bishop Allen Apartments: On October 1, 2015, JAS celebrated the preservation and rehabilitation of the Bishop Allen Apartments, a 32-unit family housing development which preserved affordable housing in Cambridge and also a small piece of Cambridge history. Located in the Central Square neighborhood, at the intersection of Bishop Allen Drive and Norfolk Street, the Bishop Allen Apartments consist of 27 three-bedroom and 5 two-bedroom apartments in four buildings originally built as residential hotels in the 1880s.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING
Biomedical Careers Program moves from Charlestown to Cambridge!

On Wednesday, September 16, JAS officially opened the new offices and classrooms of the Biomedical Careers Program at 1035 Cambridge Street, in the same building as JAS’s main offices. The new space features a dedicated lecture hall with a Smartboard, computer lab, kitchen, conference room and offices for the employees who directly support the career training program.

PHILANTHROPY
In 2015, JPMorgan Chase, a world leader in global philanthropy, made a $200,000 commitment from the JPMorgan Chase Foundation to support the Biomedical Careers Program. JPMorgan Chase works with community partners to create pathways to opportunity by supporting workforce development, financial capability, small business development and community development in the regions where they do business. The grant will engage biotech employers with enhanced outreach, expand service offerings to program participants, and help prepare more low- to moderate-income adults for careers.
Shawn Fitzpatrick wasn’t sure exactly what he wanted to do with his life after high school. He started working, but didn’t find anything that seemed right for him right away. When he was in his early 20s, Shawn’s mother gave him an ad for the JAS Biomedical Careers Program and it had a huge impact on the direction of his life. As Shawn says, once he got into the program “my hunger started, and eventually I got my first job, and then I haven’t really looked back.” While he was going through the program, Shawn worked full-time, which was a challenge, but he urges others to push themselves the way he did: “Go for it! Tackle that change! You are going to fall down, you will make mistakes, but it is what you learn from those mistakes and how well you get up and dust yourself off that makes you successful. By tackling that change myself, I couldn’t be any happier.” Shawn graduated from the Biomedical Careers Program in 1997 and has now been working at Shire Pharmaceuticals for 17 years. In 2015, Shawn decided to join JAS’s Board of Directors, because of the positive impact that he sees the organization having on community members. Shawn thinks the Biomedical Careers Program represents something good for the community by giving people who don’t necessarily have the financial means to change their career track or find a career track an opportunity to learn a new skill and very quickly apply it to the workforce.

“You are going to fall down, you will make mistakes, but it is what you learn from those mistakes and how well you get up and dust yourself off that makes you successful.”
Mitch Goldstein, JAS CITC donor and Cambridge resident, with a vintage 1975 JAS/Cambridge Redevelopment Authority t-shirt given to him as a then-VISTA Attorney working at Consilio Hispano de Cambridge on Columbia Street.
Another Benefit To Supporting JAS!

In 2015, JAS became part of the Commonwealth’s Community Investment Tax Credit (CITC) Program, and is now able to offer JAS’s donors an added benefit for their investment in the community. The CITC Program gives donors of $1,000 or more—individuals, foundations, corporations, and other nonprofits alike—a 50% Massachusetts state tax credit for their donations! For example, if a donor contributes $5,000 to JAS, s/he is entitled to a credit of $2,500 on her/his Massachusetts state taxes that year. Tax credits support a broad array of JAS’s community development efforts in affordable housing, education and job training, and community engagement; the CITC Program improves the quality of life and economic opportunities for all the individuals and families involved in JAS’s programs. Please join this wonderful program! For more information, contact Kathleen Carney at: kathleencarney@justastart.org | 617.918.7558.

Just-A-Start Corporation
Summary Financial Statements*

For Fiscal Year 2015
(January 1–December 31, 2015)
Audited December 31, 2015

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

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* The financial information shown here represents that of Just-A-Start Corporation operations only. Excluded are the JAS rental properties.

STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

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* Community Investment Tax Credit (CITC) Program Donor
This poster was created by Tahsin Razzak, who lives with her family in one of Just-A-Start’s apartment buildings in Cambridge. She submitted her poster for the New England Affordable Housing Management Association (NEAHMA) Poster/Calendar Contest for young people in grades 7–9—the theme was “Words that Heal—Stop Bullying, Spread Kindness”. Tahsin’s poster won 1st place! Tahsin brilliantly depicted an image of hurt and words of hope; she is an inspiration for all of us. Thank you, Tahsin!