



Kidz b Kidz cofounders
Jan Weinshanker (left) and
Nancy Corderman

It's four on a Friday afternoon at Hillside Elementary School in Needham, Massachusetts, and an art party is in full swing. Thirty second- and third-graders from the local Brownie troop, assisted by five high school sophomores, are drawing flowers, hearts, rainbows, peace signs and a menagerie of colorful creatures. One girl has sketched a fat orange pig, framed by the word "smile." The pictures are lighthearted, but their mission is serious. The illustrations will be used on clothing, ceramics and a line of hospital products (like cups, napkins, tray liners, bedding and scrubs) that will be sold to fund pediatric medical research.

Doling out the markers and crayons is Nancy Corderman, 49, cofounder of Kidz b Kidz (KbK), a national nonprofit organization that hosts these events in schools and hospitals. "The pictures you draw today will raise money to cure sick children tomorrow," she explains, as her partner, Jan Weinshanker, 64, shows off some of their playful goods. There are T-shirts with one-eyed monsters and kitties, baby clothes adorned with blossoms and butterflies, dinnerware painted with pandas and polka dots. All have hangtags showcasing artists' names and ages and a description of the company's mission. Every child has the opportunity to order T-shirts or bags featuring their artwork. Nancy and Jan then select designs for use on the items they sell to hospitals, schools, coffee shops and other establishments nationwide. "It's wonderful to watch their faces as they draw and begin realizing that they can make a difference in other children's lives," says Nancy.

It was Nancy and Jan's desire to do something meaningful that prompted them to start KbK in 2008 after working together for 15 years. As a home-based freelance textile designer, Nancy was hired to develop a line of tablecloths and rugs inspired by dinnerware patterns from Jan's ceramics company, Droll Designs. Though the items were profitable, "the work had no soul," Nancy says. Medical challenges during that time had them both rethinking their

ART FROM THE HEART

Kids in Boston have a blast drawing—and raising funds for pediatric medical research—because Nancy Corderman found an innovative way to get creative while giving back.

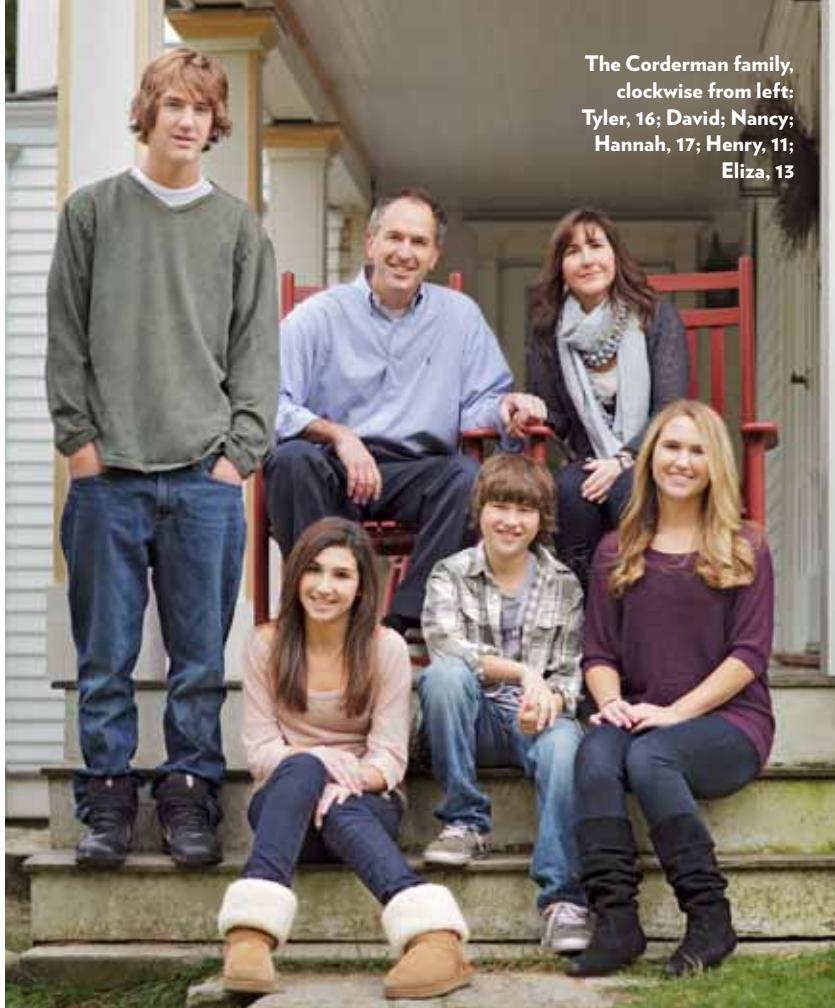
*By Ellen Parlapiano
Photography by Margaret Lampert*

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careers: Jan survived breast cancer, and two of Nancy's kids (Hannah, 17, and Tyler, 16) were diagnosed with significant hearing impairments as toddlers, requiring hearing aids and ongoing outpatient treatment at Children's Hospital Boston (CHB). Illness changed the women's lives but also helped them keep perspective. "It made me realize I wanted to make a difference," says Nancy. Even though she and her husband, David, 48, spent hours at a time at the hospital with their children, they always brought them home at the end of the day. "We felt sad for the families who didn't have that option."

When they began brainstorming, Jan and Nancy agreed that their do-good project should benefit kids facing catastrophic illnesses. Naturally, it should also involve art, since that was their shared passion. Their idea: an educational program to benefit patients at CHB that would host art parties in schools as well as in the hospital, to give kids a creative outlet during their stays.

The Corderman family,
clockwise from left:
Tyler, 16; David; Nancy;
Hannah, 17; Henry, 11;
Eliza, 13



Nancy (left) and Jan



Hannah, in eighth grade at the time and required to do community service, suggested her mom add a volunteer component. Older kids could build leadership skills by being role models for the younger ones, getting involved in every aspect of the parties—from planning to assisting the artists to selecting drawings and determining how they'd be used. She recruited five friends to form the Kidz b Kidz Young Entrepreneurs Club (which now has over 40 members). “It brought our concept full circle,” says Nancy.

Once Nancy and Jan had filed for nonprofit status, recruited a board of directors and contracted manufacturers to mass-produce the line, KbK was ready to party. The first event took place in early November 2008, at Newman Elementary School, which Nancy's two younger kids attended at the time. They distributed flyers that said: “Imagine one day drawing a picture, and the next day having it raise money for kids with cancer! Come create with us and make a dif-

ference.” Forty kids showed up, viewed a short video about a boy successfully treated for lymphoma, and colored for one and a half hours. Six of their designs were selected for the debut retail product line; additional shirts were made for the artists to sell at their school, which raised \$2,000 to fund future parties. Later that month, Nancy and Jan threw another KbK art party, for the media and pediatric patients at CHB. Gary Pihl, their web designer, arranged for members of his band, Boston, to perform. A

couple on the board of directors invited their son, Lee Eisenberg, former executive producer and writer for the TV comedy *The Office*. He brought along cast members B.J. Novak and Mindy Kaling to draw with the kids. The event created such a buzz that the party was covered on *Access Hollywood*.

Since then KbK has held more than 200 art parties and raised \$25,000. Most of the promotion has been by word of mouth. “We talk up KbK to everyone we know,” says Nancy. It's an effective strategy. Alicia Sacramone, an Olympic gymnast from Winchester, Massachusetts, who is now a KbK spokesperson,

→ **“It's wonderful to watch their faces as they draw and begin realizing that they can make a difference in other children's lives,” Nancy says about art parties hosted by Kidz b Kidz.**



Above: Artwork done by patients at Children's Hospital Boston. Right: Hannah Corderman working with fifth-graders at Newman Elementary School.

volunteered to attend a party after learning about it from her dad, the Cordermans' orthodontist.

Nancy says parents love the idea of nurturing kids' empathy through artwork. And the artists and their teen mentors are profoundly affected too. Twelve-year-old Katie, who is confined to a wheelchair, is proud to see her drawing of a dancing chick on the hospital's cups and tray covers. "Hopefully this happy little chick will make other patients smile," she says. Seventeen-year-old Elizabeth, one of the teen mentors, says that working with the young artists has inspired her to become a teacher.

When Hannah heads off to college next fall, she intends to start a KbK program on campus. Tyler organized a special gallery opening at a restaurant in Boston. Eliza, 13, the family's fashionista, designs and dresses mannequins used to publicize upcoming art parties. And Henry, 11, illustrates the thank-you notes that KbK sends to guests and donors. Since the business is home-based, the Corderman kids get a firsthand look at what goes into

building a nonprofit. And their mom gets to balance parenting and philanthropy. Despite the long hours, "we never feel exhausted, because the work is so rewarding," Nancy says.

Of course, there are challenges. Donations are tougher to come by in this economy. Nancy and David have put some of their savings into operating costs, and occasionally Jan and Nancy must take on extra design jobs to supplement their income. They've also had to be innovative about expanding beyond Boston. Schools and organizations throughout the U.S. have shown interest in hosting art parties, but "we can't be everywhere," Nancy says. Thanks to a new initiative, anyone in the country can now download a free step-by-step fundraising manual from KidzbKidz.org, with guidelines on running art parties in their own communities to benefit pediatric research and KbK educational programs.

Powered by kids and mentored by adults, KbK gets children thinking beyond themselves. "We encourage them to use their artful hands and generous hearts to make a difference," says Nancy, who hopes the compassion lasts a lifetime. "We really do believe that you can change the world, one masterpiece at a time." ●

Party with a Purpose → At your next birthday celebration, Bar or Bat Mitzvah or sweet sixteen, set up a table with art supplies and information about the program and encourage partygoers to draw for the cause. Then upload the artwork to the online gallery, where friends can buy souvenir shirts featuring their creations. For more information, go to KidzbKidz.org.