

## Check Mates

### ***Two Brunswick School Friends Bring Chess Club to Homeless Shelter***

By Barbara Bind

Tuesday was the first time 6-year-old Britney had ever played chess.

"I was excited! I liked it," said the third-grader, who attends public school in Stamford. "I almost beat three other kids."

Britney, who currently lives in the Fairfield County homeless shelter, Inspirica, was playing the board game courtesy of InspiriKing, a chess club started in spring 2012 by Brunswick students Max Konzerowsky and Lucas Korn, who were 8 and 7 years old at the time, respectively.



The club meets several times a month at the Stamford shelter, where the boys teach and play chess with the homeless children.

"I told my mom I wanted to volunteer when I was 8, so she researched and found Inspirica," Max said.

"When Max and Lucas were brainstorming on how they could help the homeless children, they decided on chess because it was a game they both enjoyed and, more importantly, the kids could learn skills that would benefit them when they got older," said Max's mother, Dawn.

Chess was the perfect choice for the boys -- and the kids at the shelter.

"We both play chess, and we are really good friends," said Lucas.

"This is a really good experience because it makes me happy to make them happy. We figured it would be nice because the kids here have a lot of hardships, and we wanted to make them smile." The boys have recruited other classmates to help teach chess at the program.

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"It's really good to do. I like passing this on to younger volunteers, so when I'm older they can run it -- like I have a younger brother and he could do it," Max said.

The boys are quick to point out that the benefits of knowing how to play chess extend beyond learning the rules of the game.

"Chess has helped me in my schoolwork and in sports," Max said. "For example, when I play hockey, I am always thinking one or two shots ahead. I try to anticipate where the puck may go. You have to have a plan and plan ahead. That's the same with chess."

"Chess is a really good sport for the brain," Lucas added.

Britney's sister Katie, 8, said she loves what chess has brought to her life.

"My dad sort of started to teach me when I was 7," she said. "Then I came here, learned more and played more with my dad -- and I beat him! He was like, 'Oh, come on. How could you beat me, you're so little!' I told him I learned here and practiced hard."

And Katie added, "It's a good feeling. I feel proud and amazed, because one time I was in school, and I didn't know what I was doing with my writing homework -- and that felt terrible. But when I came to chess, it felt good. I will come next time!"

The bottom line, though, for everyone involved, is not about winning.

"The kids here have a lot of weight on themselves. It's so hard for them. This gives them time not to be stressed, but to be fun and happy," Lucas said. "Whether or not they win, when they say 'Wow! That was fun!' I say 'Mission accomplished,' and I feel like it did a great job."

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