

## MEDIA RELEASE

### BOSTON MONTESSORI ORIGAMI CRANES PROJECT

At Torit Language Center Montessori in downtown Boston, children ages three to six will be learning about the Japan crisis and extending gestures of friendship and support to their peers in Tokyo in a unique way. Montessori is a globally practiced method of early childhood education. Its founder, Dr. Maria Montessori, was twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for her development of the educational method, particularly in the portion of it focused on interdependence and peace education.

Torit Montessori has a connection to Japan. Its Educational Director, Shelley Irish, spends significant time in Tokyo. Her oldest son was born in Japan more than 25 years ago. Ms. Irish had previously developed a connection to a Montessori School in Tokyo and now wanted to reach out. She came up with the idea of having the children at Torit make origami cranes to send to Tokyo's Montessori School, along with a picture of our hemisphere with all of the Torit children's handprints around it. She recalled that the Tokyo Montessori had a similar picture hanging on the wall with Japan's hemisphere and the handprints of its school children around it. One thousand origami cranes (Senbazuru) have become a symbol of long life or recovery from illness or injury and, by extension, a symbol of world peace in Japan.

The idea did not come "out of the blue." The Montessori system of education, while an individualized learning model, is known for presenting concepts to children between 3 and 6 that often are not entertained until elementary school. It happened that the children at Torit have been learning about the Earth and its "lithosphere", "atmosphere" and "hydrosphere" as well as the Solar System. Extended lessons on Earth, including one day's discussion of natural disasters like earthquakes, were already on the classroom teacher's calendar for late March and early April. The origami cranes and picture will now be a part of that lesson and those discussions.

Reaching out to peers in Japan fits perfectly with Torit's overall mission. Its founder, Kristen Mansharamani, takes Montessori's focus on geography, cross-cultural or human-wide understanding and interdependence one step further. Her program incorporates weekly exposure to the languages of Spanish, Mandarin and Arabic. Worldwide cultures are recognized in Torit's presentation of lessons around the holidays of Eid (Islam), Diwali (Hinduism), Chinese New Year, Hanukkah and Christmas. Efforts to reach out to Japan in a time of crisis like this build within each of us, and our children, a sense of belonging to a global world.