Alabama

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Madison Haney, 18, of Killen, Ala., a senior at Florence High School, collected backpacks for a local foundation to fill with food on Fridays and send home with students who get free lunch at school, but have little to eat at home over the weekend. While Madison was eating breakfast at a weekend band practice, a classmate approached her and asked if she had any extra food. When questioned, the girl said she hadn’t eaten since lunch the previous day. “She said she received free lunch at school but her family didn’t have money to buy food at home,” said Madison. “This broke my heart.” Upon further investigation, Madison discovered that many students at her school go to bed hungry. She was determined to help.

Madison contacted a local foundation that serves at-risk children and learned that it needed backpacks for a weekend food program benefiting more than 300 at-risk children in the area. She asked her friends to donate their gently used backpacks, then posted details about her project on social media and placed donation boxes around her school. She also made fliers and began handing them out to parents at other schools in her district. It wasn’t long before local businesses began supporting her efforts by donating both backpacks and school supplies. After Madison collected all of the donated backpacks, she brought them home, and with help from her mother, cleaned and repaired them before delivering them to the foundation.

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Ciara Laird, 10, of Troy, Ala., a fifth-grader at New Life Christian Academy, began a food drive to feed the hungry in her community after witnessing someone eating out of a dumpster outside a restaurant. After that disturbing experience, Ciara placed a small box inside her school classroom to collect canned food for the Salvation Army. That effort has now become a continuous food drive, and Ciara, as president of her school’s honor society, is actively encouraging all students to work together to feed the hungry. “These food drives provide an opportunity to inform, encourage and involve all participants in understanding and addressing hunger issues in our community,” she said.

Ciara also has filled shoeboxes with Christmas gifts for children in need, made care packages for families affected by local storms, and volunteered at a local nursing home and sang Christmas songs to the residents of the home. She also assisted at a local community garden that is connected to an afterschool center.

Alaska
2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Jenevia Wika, 16, of Anchorage, Alaska, a junior at South Anchorage High School, has helped collect and donate more than 13,000 pairs of jeans for homeless teens in Alaska. Three years ago, Jenevia and her older sister heard about DoSomething.org’s “Teens for Jeans” initiative and, after learning that teen homelessness is a big problem everywhere, knew they wanted to get involved. “One in three homeless are under the age of 15 years old,” said Jenevia. “I felt it was important to pay it forward and give back to our Alaskan community while inspiring others to do the same.” Two years after the onset of their project, her older sister went off to college and Jenevia took the reins.

This year, to accomplish her goal of helping homeless teens, Jenevia announced her campaign in an article in her church’s bulletin, created posters and fliers promoting the drive, and met with peers, her student council, church groups and business owners to raise awareness of teen homelessness. She then placed collection boxes around the community. After the drive was over, she collected the jeans, brought them home to sort, and delivered them to Covenant House, which provides services for homeless young people. Jenevia is especially proud that she collected 6,569 pairs of jeans this year, substantially more than in both previous years and the second-highest total in Do Something's national campaign. “The most memorable part was having thousands of jeans piled up throughout the house,” she said. “I could not help but smile and feel great about the positive difference I was going to make in so many lives.”

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Isabella Weiss, 14, of Palmer, Alaska, an eighth-grader at Colony Middle School, interviewed 19 residents of a local senior center to record the memorable experiences of their lives, and also arranged a “movie night” at the center. Isabella and her family began volunteering in the cafeteria of the senior center three years ago, and got to know a remarkable 92-year-old woman there. Isabella visited her regularly to keep her company, and ended up helping her make Christmas gifts for local children. “She showed me the joy of helping the elderly,” said Isabella. So when Isabella was looking for a service project to prepare for her bat mitzvah, she knew she wanted to do something to help the seniors at the center. “I wanted to connect with these seniors, let them know somebody cared, and provide them with an opportunity to share their wisdom,” Isabella said.

After meeting with the center’s management to figure out what she could do, Isabella began meeting with residents and recording them as they shared their memories and wisdom. “They made me laugh, they made me cry, and they really made me think about life,” she said. Isabella then transcribed and edited the stories into typed documents, and began planning a movie night to bring a little fun to the center. In addition to screening “Singing in the Rain,” Isabella served homemade treats, gave a speech, and read two of the stories she recorded. Now, each month, one of her 19 stories will be featured in the senior center’s newsletter for all to read.
2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Dustyn Phillips, 17, of Queen Creek, Ariz., a senior at Basha High School in Chandler, began conducting a wide variety of volunteer projects 11 years ago to benefit kids and families both in the U.S. and overseas. A TV commercial for St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital that Dustyn saw as a child made a lasting impression. “I was overtaken by a yearning to help,” he said. He began fundraising for the Memphis hospital, and then used his birthday parties to collect toys and money both for St. Jude’s and for an orphanage in Kenya.

Dustyn’s volunteer activities, which he calls “Dustyn’s Kids Helping Kids” (or “DKHK”), expanded significantly three years ago when he formed a chapter at his high school. All together, more than 200 young people in three states now participate in projects organized by Dustyn and fellow students. They have collected backpacks and school supplies for immigrant boys, promoted literacy through book drives, volunteered at Special Olympics events, donated soccer uniforms to kids in Brazil, and raised money to provide low-income families with gifts and essential items at Christmastime. Their most recent project aims to provide more than 1,000 reusable personal hygiene products to girls in Africa. “I hope that later in life I am able to share this love for helping others, as well as the humility and wisdom I have gained,” said Dustyn.

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Hope Weng, 13, of Tempe, Ariz., an eighth-grader at Tempe Preparatory Academy, delivered 100 care packages containing cookies, thank-you cards and a self-penned essay to residents of a veterans home to honor their service. Hope said she never recognized the importance of American veterans until she was assigned to write an essay on the subject and then met a vet at a local VFW post. Afterwards, she said, “I felt that I needed to do something to honor our heroes.”

Hope started by creating a budget to buy enough Girl Scout cookies and thank-you cards for 100 care packages. Then she set about gathering the necessary funds by selling cookies herself, hosting a garage sale, winning a writing contest, saving her Chinese New Year gift money, and soliciting donations. She asked individuals of all ages to fill her thank-you cards with messages of gratitude to emphasize to the recipients that “all of our servicemen and women’s hard work and sacrifices are valued and remembered,” she said. When she delivered her packages to the Arizona State Veterans Home, Hope brought along a group of friends who had helped her with her project, all dressed as “Minions.” “The visit was a huge success for everyone,” said Hope.

Arkansas

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Katelyn Bondhus, 18, of Hot Springs, Ark., a senior at Hot Springs High School, volunteers with other young people in her church to serve the less fortunate in her community and state, including working on home improvement and maintenance projects, serving lunch to the homeless, and supporting animal welfare efforts. It began in seventh grade when Katelyn learned through her church about the Ozark Mission Project (OMP), a series of weeklong summer youth camps held at locations around Arkansas to help individuals and families in need of minor construction and yard work. When she signed up, “I was just doing it because I was told
community service looked good on high school applications,” she said. “After attending one week of the program, I realized why people love to volunteer.”

For the next several years, Katelyn devoted a “very taxing” week each summer to OMP. “It is full of hard work,” she said, “building wheelchair ramps, painting the insides and outsides of houses, and doing yard work.” But she found it to be such “an amazing, life-changing experience,” she recruited all of her closest friends to participate as well. “I learned that volunteering brings joy to both volunteer and recipient of the work,” she said. As a result, Katelyn has made it a priority to get involved in other community service activities. During the summer, she and other members of her church’s youth group package and serve food to homeless people at a community crisis center. They also help with painting, cleanup and Humane Society projects during designated church service days.

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Shelby Dunphy-Day, 12, of Texarkana, Ark., a sixth-grader at College Hill Middle School Academy of Design, planned two “six-leg” races in downtown Texarkana for dog owners and their pets to raise money for a local animal care and adoption center. When Shelby was a first-grader, the animal shelter brought some puppies and kittens to her school. “I remember asking why they were in the shelter, and what would happen to them,” said Shelby. “The answer I received was heartbreaking.” She decided that day that she wanted to help save animals’ lives. Her first step was to hold a raffle that raised $250 to buy dog food for the shelter, and she has been volunteering for the shelter ever since.

To prepare for her “Six Leg Fun Run & 5K,” Shelby researched races in other communities, mapped out routes, obtained approval and grants from the two Texarkana municipal governments, made presentations to students and community leaders, built a website, and assembled an event committee of six adults. In addition to the two races, Shelby planned a pet contest and a promotion for animal adoption as part of her event, which she hopes will become an annual affair. “Really, there’s only one reason I’m putting this race on,” said Shelby. “It isn’t to get a better grade in school, or because someone is making me do it. It is only because I want to help get the animals in the shelter adopted.”

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Emmi Eisner, 16, of Encino, Calif., a junior at Sierra Canyon School in Chatsworth, founded a nonprofit organization called “Play It Forward” that has supplied sports equipment to 19 schools that lacked adequate gear for their physical education programs, benefiting thousands of students in the Los Angeles area. On a field trip with her seventh-grade class, Emmi visited a nearby elementary school and was shocked to see that the students there had no balls or other equipment to play with during recess. “I couldn’t believe not all students grow up with access to basic PE equipment, something I took for granted,” said Emmi, an accomplished soccer player.

Soon after, she began collecting donations of new and gently used balls, jump ropes, hula hoops and other athletic equipment for schools in low-income areas, partly by holding a walk-relay at her school that accepted
sporting goods in lieu of a registration fee. Emmi supplied one elementary school that first year. She then started organizing fundraising events to buy equipment for more schools. So far, Emmi has collected $80,000 in donations, recruited 50 student volunteers to help, and given kids at 19 underserved schools the equipment they need to enjoy the full benefits of a physical education program. “The impact of a quality PE program at a young age is far-reaching,” noted Emmi. “Sports build character, teach teamwork, and demonstrate the importance of being responsible to others.”

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Alyssa Simmons, 13, of Mission Viejo, Calif., an eighth-grader at Los Alisos Intermediate, has been a spokesperson, mentor and advocate for kids like herself who have sickle cell anemia since she was 5 years old. After her mother started the Sickle Cell Foundation of Orange County, Alyssa became a “spokesperson for tots” and began encouraging children with sickle cell anemia to share their feelings about the daily challenges of their chronic disease. “I acted as the voice for that age group,” she said. “It felt good because some kids didn’t have an advocate like I did, and I wanted them to get the same chances I got.”

Several years later, Alyssa led friends and classmates on visits to children in hospitals, bringing them gifts and tutoring them so they wouldn’t fall behind on their schoolwork. Then she created a program that encourages young sickle cell patients to chronicle their feelings and activities in a daily journal. Alyssa also has represented people with sickle cell anemia in the news media, helped raise thousands of dollars for sickle cell causes, mentored individual patients, and wrote a book about sick kids. Her plan, said Alyssa, is to “continue inspiring others to look beyond their challenges and reach toward their goals.”

Colorado

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Nicole Steiner, 17, of Parker, Colo., a senior at Legend High School, has collected more than $40,000 worth of games, puzzles and books for organizations and individuals in 15 Colorado cities to make life a little brighter for hospitalized children, veterans, kids with special needs, cancer patients, the elderly, homeless people and students from low-income families. When Nicole was a young child, her mother took a “horrific” fall down some stairs at home and became disabled for a number of years. “Many people helped my family with meals, shopping and childcare,” recalled Nicole. “I am inspired by those who served us.” As a result, she decided to give back by doing something for others who are experiencing difficult times in their lives.

Since board games had been a beneficial distraction and social outlet for her mother during her convalescence, Nicole founded “A Game for You” in 2014. She began organizing large school and community donation drives to collect new and gently used board games, puzzles and books. Then, with the help of classmates and other volunteers, she delivered these items twice a year to hospitals, veterans organizations, special-needs classrooms, cancer centers, assisted-living facilities, homeless shelters, and school libraries.

“Games, books and puzzles help stimulate mental and social interaction,” said Nicole, “which can lead to mental, emotional and physical healing.” So far, more than 6,000 people have received items from Nicole’s collection efforts. Nicole also recently launched a second project called “A Journal for You,” providing journals
for all nine high school counseling offices in her school district to distribute to students as a stress reduction and mental health tool.

**2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE**

Madelene Kleinhans, 13, of Broomfield, Colo., an eighth-grader at Colorado Digital Academy, organizes free bimonthly outings for kids who have critically ill siblings, to provide them with emotional support and show them that they are not alone. When she was 7, Madelene's younger brother was diagnosed with leukemia and had to endure 38 consecutive months of chemotherapy. "I felt so left out and angry about my brother's cancer," said Madelene, "but after attending a camp for siblings of kids with cancer, I realized I wasn't alone." She also realized that she could do something to help other children in her situation.

Madelene approached There With Care, a nonprofit serving families in medical crises, to partner with her in developing a program she calls “Heartfelt Hugs.” The program offers free events every other month to young people ages 8-16 who have brothers or sisters with life-threatening illnesses, events such as a skate party with horse-drawn carriage rides, a visit to a pumpkin patch, a pool party and a huge birthday party. Madelene recruits participants by speaking at cancer camps, hosting booths at cancer events, and working through children's hospitals. Then, with help from family members and friends, she plans all of the events, solicits donations and sponsorships, recruits volunteers, and secures facilities. Participation has grown from just two kids at the beginning, to nearly 50 at a recent event. “In the end, we find that we are all dealing with the same emotions and fears,” said Madelene.

**Connecticut**

**2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE**

Alexandra Minutillo, 16, of Madison, Conn., a sophomore at Daniel Hand High School, formed a nonprofit organization and school club that have raised more than $10,000 to buy gifts for teenage patients at Smilow Cancer Hospital. Watching her grandparents struggle with cancer, Alexandra saw first-hand how draining the experience can be. When she started high school, she decided she wanted to do something for young people undergoing cancer treatment. Through conversations with cancer specialists at Yale-New Haven Children's Hospital, she learned that most donations for young cancer patients are intended for pre-school and grade-school youngsters. So she decided to focus on “the often-invisible teen population” and “provide age-specific items for these patients as they struggle with treatment and hospitalization,” said Alexandra.

After forming a nonprofit called “Kids Helping Kids with a Smile, Inc.,” Alexandra started a club at her high school that now has more than 40 members. Then she got to work planning fundraisers, publicizing them through social media and a website she created. Thus far, the club has had bake sales, sold novelty items, and solicited donations at shopping areas, local football games and parades. Alexandra also speaks often to civic groups about donating to her cause. Among the items she has purchased with her proceeds are a media cabinet for the cancer center’s teen recreation area, a MacBook computer and gift cards. “We have been able to accomplish something that changes people’s lives,” said Alexandra.
2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Emily Christensen, 13, of Manchester, Conn., an eighth-grader at Illing Middle School, has raised more than $85,000 to benefit young cancer patients and their families by selling recycled crayons formed into interesting shapes and sizes. When Emily was 6 years old, she lost her 4-year-old friend TJ to cancer. Coincidentally, a few weeks later, her church challenged its members to do something to help someone in need. The very next day, the crossing guard at Emily’s school handed her a bag of old crayons her children had outgrown. That sparked a memory of a craft project in preschool in which old crayons had been melted and poured into molds. “I had an idea of making crayons into different shapes and putting them into a cute little package to raise money,” Emily said. “TJ was my best friend and I had to help him live on somehow.”

With the help of her family, Emily began peeling crayons, melting them, and then placing them in different-shaped molds. Her initial goal was to raise $200 for a local hospital to help the families of young cancer patients pay for things insurance does not cover, such as hospital parking and meals, as well as to buy small gifts for the ill youngsters. Now, seven years later, “Crayons for Cancer” is a nonprofit organization that provides funds to assist families in several states. Although Emily still spends time everyday making her wax creations, she has a cadre of volunteers from schools, clubs, churches and service organizations crafting and packaging her crayons, which she then sells through her website and at local events. She also has partnered with several businesses and frequently speaks in front of large groups to get the word out. Emily estimates that her group has helped at least 4,000 families over the years.

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Micah Freer, 17, of Wilmington, Del., a senior at Mount Sophia Academy in Newark, spearheaded a yearlong effort to build a pavilion to be used by church, school and community groups, and by families and individuals who hike, bike and jog at an adjacent state park. In search of a project that would have a lasting impact on his community, Micah brainstormed with officials at his church and came up with the idea of building a pavilion where people could meet, sit and talk. At first, Micah questioned whether the project might be too large an undertaking for a teen. But he decided to go ahead after considering how many people could benefit from it.

To begin, Micah drew up designs of the pavilion and began applying for permits from the city. He recruited volunteer engineers to review and give feedback on his plans, asked professional drafters to make blueprints, and consulted construction experts to ensure that the structure would be built correctly. Then Micah started fundraising, writing letters to individuals and businesses seeking money, materials and discounts. When it was time to begin construction, Micah got hands-on help from 50 volunteers, including church members, Boy Scouts, friends and family. The total cost of building the 18-by-24-foot pavilion was a little over $15,000. “The pavilion was made with steel and quality materials, so it will last for decades,” said Micah. “Every time I see it being used, it brings a smile to my face.”

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Will Kenney, 14, of Delmar, Del., an eighth-grader at Millsboro Middle School, organized two carnivals that raised more than $15,000 to help fund medical research and benefit patients who have Sturge-Weber
syndrome, a rare neurological disorder. A little girl he knows who has the disease inspired Will’s project. “I decided to have a carnival with activities for all ages so that she could enjoy the fun,” he said. After the first “Will’s Carnival for a Cause” in August 2014 was a success, Will was more determined than ever to raise money and the public’s awareness of Sturge-Weber with a more elaborate carnival.

For his second carnival last September, Will gathered a core group of seven volunteers to help him plan. As chairman of the event, he organized monthly meetings, wrote emails and letters soliciting donations for game prizes and a silent auction, asked businesses to donate food and other items, and recruited fellow football players to help with logistics. In addition to the auction and 23 games, the event included three rides, a petting zoo, food and refreshments, a “dunking booth” featuring football coaches and a county councilman, and an appearance by Miss Delaware. To help people understand more about Sturge-Weber syndrome, Will distributed literature at the carnival and posted information on social media. Most of all, the experience taught him the value of teamwork, said Will. “One person cannot move a mountain, but a village can,” he said.

The District of Columbia

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Gavrielle Kamen, 16, of Washington, D.C., a junior at Georgetown Day School, organizes weekly video-conferencing sessions at her school that bring together teens from the United States, Middle East and southern Asia to talk about their experiences and perspectives, in an effort to promote peace and understanding in a troubled part of the world. Growing up with a mother who is a psychologist, Gavrielle says she learned the importance of honest, sincere communication in resolving human conflict. “Understanding and communication are the most primary basis for human change,” she said. “The best way to go about creating change is for people to learn how to respect, trust and communicate.”

Last summer, Gavrielle participated in a conflict-resolution forum with teens from several Middle Eastern countries. She returned home determined to apply what she had learned and continue to build bridges among young people in countries with deep animosities. “I decided that the way I could help the most in my community was to have as many people as possible speak face to face with other humans their age in different regions involved in the Middle East conflict,” she said. Using large-screen Skype technology, she began hosting weekly forums involving teens from Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, as well as students at her school. Her sessions began with over 60 American participants and more than 200 from overseas. “Together, we are learning how to empathize, and what it means to obtain peace and justice,” she said.

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Amelia Myre, 13, of Washington, D.C., an eighth-grader at Alice Deal Middle School, launched an initiative with her sister to support wounded veterans by raising money and focusing attention on their sacrifices. Amelia, who began volunteering at Walter Reed Bethesda National Military Medical Center at age 9, purchased gifts one year for the patients there and handed them out during a Christmas party. At the event, she saw a
quadruple amputee receive a specialized “track chair” from a nonprofit organization, and realized she could do more to help America’s wounded warriors.

Amelia and her sister decided to launch an initiative to help more veterans get track chairs. They invited some of the amputees they had met at Walter Reed to come to their school to share their stories, and persuaded a local television station to cover the visit. Then Amelia hosted a car wash outside of her school that raised $1,000. At first, "I didn’t know much about amputees and specially designed chairs for them,” she said, “but now I am determined to help in every way I can.”

Florida

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Sydney Hamilton, 17, of Key West, Fla., a senior at Key West High School, started “Sydney’s Hope Project” two years ago to provide games, supervise craft projects and organize special events to brighten the lives of children undergoing treatment for cancer at the Nicklaus Children’s Hospital in Miami. Sydney was expected to live only a month or two when she was diagnosed with rare liver cancer before age 2, but after much treatment, was declared cancer-free. “As a 15-year cancer survivor, I have lived and endured the challenges that a child with cancer must overcome to survive,” Sydney said. She was reminded of those challenges two years ago when a young family friend was diagnosed with the same cancer that she had overcome. At that point, Sydney knew she wanted to do something to help young cancer patients.

There is no pediatric oncology unit in the Florida Keys, where Sydney lives, so she decided she would make the eight-hour round trip to Miami to provide fun activities for young cancer patients there. As founder and chairperson of Sydney’s Hope Project, she fundraises through social media, plans a variety of fun activities for the kids, coordinates with hospital staff to schedule a visit about every six weeks, and recruits and trains volunteers to help. In addition, Sydney won a $20,000 grant to implement the “Bravery Beads” program at the hospital, which awards children a special bead for every procedure or event they endure during their treatment. Sydney said her mission is not only to ease the burden borne by pediatric oncology patients, but also to show young people “how each and every one of us has the ability to improve a day in the life of a child with cancer.”

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Kayla Abramowitz, 13, of North Palm Beach, Fla., an eighth-grader at Watson B. Duncan Middle School, has collected nearly 10,000 DVDs, books and other items for 81 hospitals and Ronald McDonald Houses in all 50 states through her nonprofit organization, “Kayla Cares 4 Kids.” Kayla, who has juvenile arthritis and Crohn’s disease, knows firsthand how boring hospital stays can be, especially for kids who are hospitalized for long periods. After a two-week stay at a hospital that had a limited DVD selection, Kayla returned home and noticed some old DVDs her family didn’t watch anymore. She asked if she could donate them. “The hospital was so happy to receive just two DVDs from me,” she said. “That’s when I realized I could do much more.”

Kayla set a goal of collecting 100 DVDs for the hospital and went to work. She made a flier and began knocking on doors in her neighborhood. Then she got her Girl Scout troop involved and asked her principal for permission to have a schoolwide collection drive, with a pizza party for the class collecting the most. After the
local paper published a story on her project and her parents created a Facebook page for her, the family living room was soon piled high with hundreds of DVDs, books, video games, game consoles and electronic items. She began speaking in front of schools and business groups to promote her organization and was chosen by the Chamber of Commerce as the Young Entrepreneur of the Year. Her new goal is to donate items to every children's hospital and Ronald McDonald house in the U.S. “I've learned that no matter how small something starts out, with enough passion and effort, you can make it bigger than anyone ever dreamed," Kayla said.

Georgia

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Devneet Singh, 17, of Duluth, Ga., a junior at Gwinnett School of Mathematics, Science, and Technology in Lawrenceville, served as a mentor, teacher and friend to young refugees from Bhutan while working as a lead volunteer coordinator in Atlanta for SEWA, an international humanitarian organization. She became involved after meeting one of SEWA's Atlanta chapter chairmen and learning of the need for young adult volunteers. “Half of all refugees are children subject to war, religious persecution and famine,” said Devneet. “I couldn't help but be motivated by such adversity.”

During the summer months, Devneet taught classes on math, science and English to Bhutanese students ranging from 5 to 17 years old. She also planned fun games, brought books and snacks, advised on personal hygiene, and provided information on public transportation. After one of her students expressed astonishment at being given a pencil to keep, Devneet organized a car wash that raised $300 for school supplies. She also served as vice president of a 5K run that raised $7,000 for SEWA’s animal rights campaign. Devneet compiled photographs and video footage from her refugee experience into a promotional video to recruit additional volunteers. “I am passionate about this relief effort,” said Devneet, “because it is a way that I can directly aid the children of refugees, immigrants and other hard-pressed members of the international community.”

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Damâcia Howard, 13, of Union City, Ga., a seventh-grader at Georgia Cyber Academy, has collected thousands of books in her community for students in Africa, working with a national charity called Books for Africa. Damâcia was looking for a community service project to take on in conjunction with her membership in the National Junior Beta Club and her title of National American Miss 2015-2016 Miss Georgia Pre-Teen Spokesmodel. She researched possible projects with her mother, and upon learning that books are desperately needed in Africa, she knew she’d found her mission. “Education is important,” she said, “and when help can be given to children in other countries, I feel those of us that can help should.”

Damâcia started by packing up books out of her own collection, and then asked friends and family members for help. She spoke to middle school students about her effort, obtained some publicity on a radio program and set up a collection drive at her church. All of the books she collected were turned over to Books for Africa to be shipped overseas. In addition to providing a valuable educational resource to African kids, Damâcia’s project has helped emphasize “what a privilege it is to have access to books via libraries, schools, electronic devices and bookstores,” she said. “Knowing that helps me not take books for granted.”
2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Anna Kimata, 16, of Honolulu, Hawaii, a sophomore at Punahou School, organized a project to collect books and other educational materials for schools in the small island nation of Palau, where many students lack basic educational resources. From a very young age, Anna’s parents taught her the importance of learning and have made sacrifices to send her to an excellent school. “In the United States, every child is gifted with the chance to attend school, no matter where they live,” Anna said. But when she interned at the state capitol, she learned that in many small Pacific Island countries and territories, schools lack the basic educational resources that Americans take for granted. Anna said she needed to do something to help students at those schools “cultivate their love of learning and give them the knowledge to pursue their dreams.”

After researching small countries in the Pacific, Anna decided to focus her efforts on Palau, located in Micronesia. She began by meeting with the country’s president to discuss its educational needs. Then she wrote letters to request donations, met with leaders of organizations that could help, and recruited 40 volunteers. When donations began coming in, Anna and her team sorted through the materials to make sure everything was in good condition. She then partnered with two companies that agreed to transport the items. Because of a pressing need, the first shipment was sent to Saipan - a Northern Marianas island that had been affected by Typhoon Soudelor - with the understanding that future shipments would be sent to Palau. To date, Anna’s efforts have gathered more than $4,000 worth of educational supplies for the students of Pacific Island countries. “I hope to continue this project in the future so that I can pay forward the gift of education,” she said.

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Orren Smith, 11, of Mililani, Hawaii, a sixth-grader at Hanalani Schools, arranged for a presentation on disaster preparedness at his school to educate students and their families on how to increase their chances of surviving a natural catastrophe. “I live in Hawaii, and we are at risk of many natural disasters such as tsunamis, earthquakes and hurricanes,” said Orren. Last year, he said, was an especially bad one for hurricanes, and it got him thinking that a lot of people have no idea how to prepare for a weather emergency. “I think it is important for residents of Hawaii because our state is isolated and it could take a while for help to reach us,” he said.

Orren began by researching state guidelines on ways to prepare for various natural disasters. He then contacted agencies involved in emergency planning to get more information, obtained permission from school officials to hold a student assembly, and invited a Coast Guard officer to be a guest speaker. Orren then prepared materials for the speaker to use in the presentation and handouts for the students to take home. More than 150 students attended the presentation and learned the importance of early planning and ways to help their families stay safe in the event of a natural disaster.
Idaho

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Harlie Sorrell, 18, of Parma, Idaho, a senior at Parma High School, has filled hundreds of shoe boxes with
gloves, hats, socks, toiletries and other items each Christmas for the past nine years and delivered them to
people in need. When she was 9, Harlie helped fill a shoe box at her church with items a needy child would
need in winter. “I was amazed at how good it felt to help and wanted to do more,” she said. The following
Christmas, Harlie used her birthday gift money to fill her own boxes, and shipped 28 of them to a mission in
Montana. After receiving a photo of a smiling little boy holding one of her boxes, Harlie repeated her project for
the next two years.

Harlie then decided to distribute Christmas boxes to the needy in her own community. She started speaking at
area churches every Sunday from October to December to raise shopping money, asked Boise State
University’s athletic program for empty shoe boxes, and spent Saturdays filling and wrapping the boxes. The
first year she distributed 350 boxes; by Christmas 2014, she was delivering 600 boxes to individuals, local
shelters, community centers and a holiday dinner for homeless men. “I have seen so much need it is
sometimes overwhelming,” she said. “So many homeless and needy people out there!”

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Tracen Mangum, 13, of Blackfoot, Idaho, an eighth-grader at Snake River Junior High School, co-founded a
youth volunteer group with his brother that has collected more than 800 winter-wear items for people in need. It
all began when Tracen and his brother started volunteering at the local animal shelter where they’d adopted
their dog, and later held a community pet food drive that ended up delivering more the 3,000 pounds of pet
food and supplies to two local animal-welfare organizations and to families who could not afford to feed their
pets. After Tracen and his brother were recognized locally for their efforts, they heard from other young people
in the community who wanted to know how to volunteer, too. So they organized the “I, YOU, WE YOUTH
GROUP” to take on other service projects.

That spring, the group held a winter wear drive, decorating boxes and placing them throughout the community.
By November, the young volunteers had collected more than 400 coats, hats, boots and other winter
necessities, which they washed, mended and distributed to five local organization that assist families in need.
Since May 2015, the group has collected another 470 winter wear items and delivered them to local
organizations. Tracen has also been involved in efforts to recycle grocery bags by turning them into plastic
mats for the homeless, and has supported the volunteer projects of other youth in the community by collecting
books and helping with fundraising. “Volunteering has made me more aware of the needs of the animals and
people in our community,” Tracen said.
Illinois

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Jungin Angie Lee, 17, of Naperville, Ill., a junior at Metea Valley High School in Aurora, co-founded a nonprofit organization that has generated nearly $200,000 over the past nine years through annual fundraising events to help find a cure for her rare neuromuscular disease. When she was 15 months old, Angie was diagnosed with spinal muscular atrophy (SMA), a genetic disorder that causes debilitating and often fatal muscle weakness. In second grade, she made friends with a girl who, upon learning that Angie would never be able to walk, wanted to do something to help. So together they started a nonprofit called “Angie’s Hope” to raise money for SMA research.

The two friends first set out to raise $200 with a penny drive. Then, every year they organized another fundraising event, including garage sales, pasta parties, and most recently a “big ball” soccer tournament. Thirty teams of 8-12 players each compete in this wheelchair-friendly tournament, which also features a disc jockey, photo booth, concessions, cheerleaders, a capella groups, raffles and a silent auction. In addition to coordinating and playing in the tournament, Angie has sought support from local businesses, created promotional videos, and managed a website. In 2015 alone, Angie’s Hope raised nearly $40,000 for the national organization Cure SMA. These efforts demonstrate “how huge a difference individuals can make when they combine efforts,” she said, and have become “a way for our small community to unite to make a change.”

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Nicolas Ramkumar, 14, of Champaign, Ill., an eighth-grader at University of Illinois High School, has raised nearly $10,000 over the past two years to purchase laptop computers for his old school, Franklin Middle School, with the goal of giving every student access to his or her own machine. “I always try to help whenever I can, and I was taught to always give back,” said Nicolas. In fourth grade, he organized a drive that collected 300 pairs of shoes for people in need. He knocked on doors to seek donations for earthquake victims in Haiti. In addition, he has planted “pollinator-friendly” gardens at home, and at a school and a church.

When Nicolas arrived at Franklin Middle School, he saw the impact his older brother made by raising $1,500 to help the school buy 30 Google Chromebooks. “I saw firsthand how much the computers helped other students and myself, so I decided to expand the fundraising,” he said. Over the past two years, Nicolas asked friends and family members for donations, contacted other potential donors, knocked on doors in his neighborhood, sought sponsorships from local businesses, and ran a 5k race to fund the purchase of more school laptops. So far, Nicolas has helped his school acquire a total of 360 computers for its 659 students, a majority of whom come from low-income families. “The school is more than halfway to achieving the goal of one-to-one computing,” he said.
**Indiana**

**2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE**

Kamna Gupta, 18, of Carmel, Ind., a member of the Girl Scouts of Central Indiana and a senior at Carmel High School, has collected and distributed more than 2,500 pounds of gently used shoes to people in third-world countries through “Soles for Souls,” the nonprofit organization she founded in 2013 after a trip to India. It was there that Kamna encountered a beggar who was wearing sandals he had fashioned from two empty water bottles and hay. “To aid him, I gave him sandals purchased from a store, upon which he rejoiced,” said Kamna. The experience got her thinking. She and most people she knew thought nothing of tossing out a pair of perfectly good shoes simply because they were out of style. Yet, she had no doubt that there were millions of people all over the world, who, like the man in India, couldn’t afford to own even one pair of shoes. She came home determined to change that.

After some research, she discovered Shoe Box Recycling, a company that sends boxes of donated shoes abroad. It agreed to handle the shoes Kamna collected. She approached the executive board at her temple and received permission to conduct a shoe drive there. It was slow going at first, Kamna said, as she struggled to fill even a couple of boxes with acceptable shoes. So she stepped up her efforts to publicize her project by developing a website and designing fliers and cards to remind people to bring shoes. She also persuaded corporations and civic organizations to hold shoe drives. She recruited more than 40 volunteers and trained them to lead shoe drives at school and to canvass neighborhoods for donations. After expanding Soles for Souls to nearly a dozen organizations, Kamna estimates her efforts have helped put shoes on the feet of more than 15,000 needy people in 15 countries.

**2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE**

Esha Mishra, 14, of Schererville, Ind., an eighth-grader at Forest Ridge Academy, organized a collection drive at her school that yielded thousands of school supplies for poverty-stricken children in Nepal. Esha visited the central Asian country last spring with her family, and was stunned to see the poverty there. “The kids barely had anything!” she said. Two weeks after Esha returned home, a major earthquake devastated Nepal. “I thought, if these kids had so little before the earthquake, they must be in even worse conditions now,” she said. “I knew I had to do something.”

Esha brainstormed ideas with her family, and created a plan to collect school supplies in her school community for kids in Nepal. After obtaining the support of her principal, she set up a collection table at her school and began visiting classrooms to make PowerPoint presentations about her campaign. Before long, Esha had collected thousands of items, including pencils, pens, books, crayons, paints, notebooks and markers. The supplies were packaged and shipped to a thousand-student elementary school in Nepal. Esha said she is determined to send shipments to the school every year. “By providing this school with supplies, the children will have the tools they need to get a better education,” she said.
Iowa

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Allison Ockenfels, 17, of Wellman, Iowa, a senior at Ockenfels Homeschool, has raised more than $150,000 since late 2010 to build kitchens at three schools in the African nation of Malawi and to provide daily meals for students living in poverty there. Allison was attending a conference when she learned about Mary’s Meals, a charitable organization that feeds children at schools in the developing world. “Hunger and starvation are often a reality for many children in third-world countries,” Allison said. “Parents are motivated to send their children to school because they know they will receive a nutritious meal every day. For many children, it is the only meal they receive.” Allison learned that the organization is feeding over one million children worldwide every day, and that it takes less than $20 to provide a child with a daily meal for one year.

Allison began by visiting local church parishes and asking their congregations for donations. Then she knocked on the doors of local businesses and spoke about her cause at a school and at meetings of civic clubs. Allison also started a blog and a fundraising page on the Mary’s Meals website. She now receives donations from all over the country, and has raised enough money to help feed more than 5,000 children in Malawi. Allison has visited two of the schools that benefited from her efforts. “It was amazing to meet the children,” she said. “They swarmed toward us and greeted us with smiles and laughing.”

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Clare Szalkowski, 10, of Dubuque, Iowa, a member of the Girl Scouts of Eastern Iowa and Western Illinois and a fifth-grader at Hoover Elementary School, started “Clare Cares” over two years ago to “build friendships and make our community a better place” by organizing projects that benefit bullied children, homeless and hungry people, and others in need of assistance. Clare was inspired to start her project after her older sister had an epileptic seizure at school. “This ‘friend’ made fun of her,” said Clare. “Then she recruited others to make fun of her. That’s when I knew I needed to do something about bullying because, unfortunately, bullying has touched nearly everyone’s life, and that makes me sad.”

Her initial goal was to provide a “buddy bench” on her school’s playground to promote friendship and discourage the isolation that bullied children often feel. Today, every elementary school in her region has a Clare Cares Buddy Bench on its playground – more than 30 benches in all. Clare also formed “kid committees” and scheduled “buddy events” to work on projects supporting the missions of local nonprofits. She and her fellow volunteers have made blankets for children experiencing trauma, created greeting cards for nursing home residents, and filled a Santa’s sleigh for Toys for Tots. They also have provided 22 complete birthday packages to celebrate the birthdays of children in a homeless shelter, filled the shelves of a local food bank with more than a ton of food, and provided bag lunches every Monday for homeless men.
Kansas

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Lauren Browning, 18, of Overland Park, Kan., a senior at Blue Valley Southwest High, began painting faces at community events when she was 9 years old to benefit kids with cancer, and now oversees a group of 10 trained volunteers who paint as many as 3,500 faces a year. When a close family friend was diagnosed with neuroblastoma, Lauren wanted to join the fight against cancer by raising money and “bringing more smiles and hope into the world,” she said. She bought some paints and started offering to paint faces at small, local gatherings, and then moved up to larger events and began recruiting and training other volunteers.

Her organization, called “Faces of Hope,” now has two painting crews made up of 10 volunteers. With Lauren doing the training, scheduling and coordinating, she and her staff paint for free at numerous community events throughout the year, with an emphasis on those associated with childhood cancer. They also paint faces at private functions like birthday parties in exchange for donations to cancer-related charities, sometimes raising as much as $500 in a single day. Lauren is training two girls to take over her Kansas City area activities after she goes to college next year, and is planning to start a branch at her new location. “I do not want this smile factory to end,” she said. “A few minutes of complete happiness can do wonders.”

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Cooper Lohman, 13, of Manhattan, Kan., a seventh-grader at Susan B. Anthony Middle School, spearheaded a drive to fund and build a multi-purpose outdoor stage at her elementary school to thank its staff and students for “a truly amazing experience.” As Cooper’s elementary school days were nearing an end, she began brainstorming ways that she could express her gratitude and leave her mark on the school. “I wanted to do something great for the students and teachers to use after I had left,” she said. After much thought, she settled on the idea of building an outdoor stage that could be used for plays, assemblies, recess activities and outdoor classroom sessions.

Once she gained the support of the school’s principal, teachers, PTO and students, Cooper enlisted an architect to draw up plans, and put together a committee of students to help. She then set up an account on a crowd-funding website and made fliers seeking donations. When it was time to begin construction, Cooper recruited volunteers to help build the stage. After almost a year of work, the stage was finally completed. Cooper said it makes her happy to know that future generations of students will reap the benefits of her efforts. “My younger sister still attends the school, and it fills my heart when she comes home and tells stories of how students enjoy playing and learning on the stage,” she said.
Kentucky

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Christian Cole, 18, of Lexington, Ky., a senior at Lexington Catholic High School, has raised more than $50,000 from a landscape business he started as a seventh-grader and from private donations to build houses for destitute people in Haiti and sponsor 20 homeless children there. When Christian was 13, his life changed with the arrival of a Haitian boy named Odolphe, who had come to Lexington for medical treatment. It wasn’t long before the boys were inseparable. But four months later, it was time for Christian’s friend to go back to Haiti. “As I walked Odolphe to the plane, my heart began to shatter,” said Christian. “He was going to leave the warmth of an American home, soft bed and plenty of food to go home to an 8 by 8 tarp-covered concrete slab that he shared with six family members.” Christian made a promise to his friend that day that he would go to Haiti and build a home for Odolphe and his family. That was the day he decided to start his landscape business, which he calls “Mission Works Lawn and Landscaping.”

Eighteen months later, Christian, accompanied by his dad and four other adults, was able to make good on his promise. Assisted by charitable organizations in Haiti, Christian’s group not only built a house for Odolphe’s family, but brought much-needed supplies, refurbished a large chicken barn for their community and stocked it with 200 chickens, and educated people on water safety and nutrition. Christian also was able to sponsor 20 children, getting them off the streets and providing them with school tuition, books, and uniforms. He returned in 2013 to begin another house and check on the progress of the students he continues to sponsor. Last year, he led 35 missionaries – many of them high school students – on a trip to Haiti to build two more homes, cover an outdoor kitchen and paint an orphanage. “This began not so much as a service project but maybe what one would call one random act of love,” Christian said.

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Grace Davis, 11, of Louisville, Ky., a fifth-grader at Greathouse Shryock Traditional Elementary School, has helped raise more than $140,000 over the past four years to care for babies born prematurely by distributing piggy banks to students in her community and encouraging them to fill them up. One day Grace had an idea. What if every child in her school filled a piggy bank for a good cause, she thought. “As a kid, it is hard to think about raising money, but I knew this idea would take off,” said Grace.

With the help of her first-grade teacher, she took her idea, called “Piggies for Preemies,” to officials at Kosair Children’s Hospital, whose neonatal unit would be the beneficiary of the program. A local bank agreed to donate 604 piggy banks, one for every student in Grace’s school, and as an incentive for filling those banks, offered a chance to win a $500 scholarship. The students were encouraged to think of creative ways to raise money, said Grace. Some had yard sales, some sold baked goods, others operated lemonade stands. Grace created fliers to advertise the program throughout the community and the bank provided piggy banks at all of its Louisville branches to anyone who wanted one. The media and the hospital’s website further spread the word, and it wasn’t long before students at other schools in her district and beyond began filling piggy banks. The program continues to grow; Grace’s banking partner has announced it will distribute piggies at branches
It is so exciting to see piggies all around our city raising money and awareness for all preemies,” said Grace. “People just love these pigs!”

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Stanley Celestine, 16, of Cottonport, La., a junior at Louisiana School for the Agricultural Sciences, is trying to decrease the incidence of childhood obesity and improve the general health of all citizens in his community through an initiative he calls “Healthy Avoyelles.” Three years ago, Stanley formed a nonprofit mentoring program to help elementary students improve their science, technology and math skills. During that project, Stanley noticed that many young children in the rural, economically depressed Avoyelles Parish were obese and had serious health problems often associated with being overweight. “Obese children have a higher percentage of becoming obese adults,” said Stanley. “So I set out to educate families about the health risks associated with child obesity, the many causes, and how to create a healthier lifestyle.”

After researching the subject of obesity, Stanley began planning events and applying for grants to finance his endeavors. The majority of people in his community, he said, are the working poor who often do not have easy access to health services. So Stanley organized a back-to-school festival where families could receive basic health services and information about healthy living. He also started a health and wellness walk to promote exercise, secured a grant to teach healthy cooking to 500 adults, and is planning a youth-run community compost garden to provide better nutrition. Stanley estimates that his health initiative has affected more than 2,000 children to date.

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Ashini Modi, 12, of Shreveport, La., a member of the Caddo Parish 4-H and a sixth-grader at Caddo Parish Middle Magnet School, established a 1,500-book library at a local homeless shelter so that the children there could “explore, imagine and find the beauty of reading.” With the help of family and friends, Ashini collected children’s books in her community from individuals, schools, public libraries, a thrift shop and a bookstore. They all went into a room at the Providence House shelter that is now called the “Reading Rainforest,” decorated by Ashini and her family with handmade trees and tropical animals and reptiles.

To further encourage kids at the shelter to use the new library, Ashini started a story time at the facility. Several times a year, usually on a holiday, she reads a book to the children and supervises a related craft project. “Founding the library program and story time has given me a profound joy of giving,” said Ashini. “I sincerely hope that every child at Providence House will utilize the library to develop a love of books, which can open many new doors and possibilities for them.”
Maine

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Connor Archer, 17, of Stillwater, Maine, a senior at Old Town High School, works to educate the public about autism and the challenges faced by people with autism like himself, and has raised more than $12,000 for organizations that help people with special needs. Connor was diagnosed with autism when he was 3 years old. Luckily, he said, his parents were tireless advocates for him and searched until they found a preschool that could help him develop his full potential. As he grew older, he wanted to give back to the school that had helped him so much, so he created “sensory learning gardens” for the children there. In 2014, Connor decided he wanted to do more for kids with special needs and founded “The Courageous Steps Project.”

The project’s initial event was a walk-run fundraiser to benefit local schools that help children with special needs. The first one raised nearly $4,000, and a second one brought in more than $6,000. Other fundraising activities, such as a benefit dinner at a local restaurant, have pushed Connor’s total to more than $12,000. Much of that money has been donated to benefit organizations that have played a key role in Connor’s own development, and other groups that work with kids with autism. Connor also has awarded scholarships to three graduating seniors who have overcome their own challenges, purchased iPads and a sound system for his former preschool, and conducted two drives to collect supplies for area schools. “Strong communities begin with individuals who have the support to take their own courageous steps,” he said.

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Benjamin Levesque, 14, of Lyman, Maine, an eighth-grader at Massabesic Junior High School, has been involved for the past three years in a variety of service projects in his community through the Boy Scouts and his school. His first foray into community service occurred when Benjamin contacted his town hall and asked if he could volunteer at the local cemetery. With help from the head of the cemetery committee, Benjamin replaced tattered flags on veterans’ graves with new ones, and removed debris from the cemetery grounds.

Working with his Boy Scout troop, he also helped clean up a local shopping area, facilitate community dinners, construct a sandbox at a local elementary school and promote healthy lifestyles for young people. To teach his classmates about climate change, Benjamin created wall-sized murals and maps to illustrate the problem. “I feel that these actions have positively impacted my community, and I’m honored to have participated,” said Benjamin.

Maryland
2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Luke Pitsenbarger, 18, of Salisbury, Md., a senior at Parkside High, repaired houses for people in need last summer through the Appalachia Service Project, a Christian volunteer organization that serves impoverished communities in the central Appalachian Mountains. An active volunteer since he was in middle school, Luke has contributed to his community in many ways, including coaching at football camps, serving the homeless, and aiding people with disabilities. “These experiences have been some of the most meaningful moments so far in my life,” he said. So when the opportunity arose to go with a church-sponsored group for a week to work in a poor town in Virginia, he jumped at the chance.

At sunrise that first morning in Jonesville, Luke and his fellow volunteers arrived at a decaying trailer home. Luke was stunned at the poverty. “I could not believe my eyes! A myriad of tires were dispersed amongst the garden. The back porch was crumbling. The dogs were running after our van on the craterous driveway,” he said. The team unloaded their tools, met the family and went to work demolishing the leaky roof over the trailer and building a new one. “I noticed that, as the roof progressed, so did the family’s spirits,” said Luke. He found the experience so uplifting that he continues to work with the same group in his hometown, where they have built a shelter for homeless men, served meals at a soup kitchen, and installed a wheelchair ramp at the home of a local handicapped person.

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Alyssa Gerhart, 13, of Waldorf, Md., a seventh-grader at Benjamin Stoddert Middle School, helps feed up to 100 hungry people in her town each week by collecting food, raising money, and working at the soup kitchen her mother co-founded three years ago. When Our Place Waldorf was first being discussed, Alyssa immediately wanted to get involved. She helped sign in attendees at the initial organizing meetings, handed out information on the proposal, and assisted during interviews with potential board members. “I felt this was an important cause from the beginning because nobody should have to go without food,” she said. “I had no idea how many homeless and hungry people were living so close to where I live.”

After the soup kitchen opened in a local church, Alyssa began helping her mother shop for food, cook, set tables, serve, clean up and even fundraise. She also recruited fellow members of her school’s service clubs to volunteer at the facility, participated in fundraising events, and conducted drives to collect non-perishable food items to be sent away with soup kitchen guests. Alyssa is currently helping to raise money to find a permanent home for the soup kitchen so that it can open its doors every day. “As we know, people aren’t hungry only one day a week,” she said.

Massachusetts

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Katie Curran, 18, of Pocasset, Mass., a senior at Sturgis Charter Public School, founded an organization three years ago that conducts free social science workshops to teach civics and leadership skills to middle school students and help them become more involved in their communities. “With zero dollars and a dream,” Katie was inspired to create “Project Next Generation” (PNG) after reading that most people eligible to vote in recent
elections did not. “I feel that the issue is important because my generation will be taking on the mantle of leadership one day,” said Katie. She envisioned an organization that would provide the tools to enable them to do just that by teaching skills that are not traditionally acquired in the classroom.

To begin, she created a website (ProjectNextGeneration.org). She then applied for grants, developed curricula for her workshops and contacted the media to publicize her organization. One of Katie’s workshops was a United Nations program, where each participant was assigned a country that he or she had to represent during a debate. Another was a camp at the John F. Kennedy Hyannis Museum, where students were immersed in the political process, designing a policy platform, running a campaign, debating, and writing speeches to give at a mock political convention. In addition, Katie has individually mentored hundreds of middle school students, and has represented her organization at youth leadership events both in the U.S. and overseas.

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Lauren Eppinger, 14, of Grafton, Mass., an eighth-grader at Worcester Academy, sold stuffed bears at her school for Valentine’s Day and used the proceeds to buy needed items for an organization that comforts children grieving the loss of a loved one. Lauren, who has initiated several drives and service projects in the past, decided to sell her “Bear-grams” at school after learning that the Children’s Friend Grief Support Center needed to replace some of its worn stuffed “comfort” animals and buy supplies. “I thought about how much I would want something soft and fluffy to comfort me if I had lost a loved one,” said Lauren. Since Valentine’s Day was coming, she decided a great way to raise money would be to sell something cuddly with a personalized message attached.

After Lauren got her principal’s permission and recruited two friends to help, she contacted a company that sells small stuffed animals in bulk and asked for a donation. The company gave them 96 bears. Lauren and her friends made posters and sent emails to publicize their project, then began taking orders and wrote messages from the purchasers and attached them to their bears. When all their Bear-grams were ready, Lauren recruited more students to deliver them around campus. Lauren took the $420 in proceeds to local stores to buy the items needed by the grief support center. She said she plans to continue her fundraising efforts in the future.

Michigan

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Dale (Trip) Apley, 16, of Ann Arbor, Mich., a junior at Skyline High School, spearheaded an all-school fundraising drive in October 2015 to provide 18,000 bottles of water to children in Flint after the state first announced the city’s water was contaminated with dangerous levels of lead. For more than five years, Trip has been involved in monitoring the water quality of streams and rivers in his area, efforts that have earned him an appointment to the youth council of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. “Water quality monitoring and revitalization of watersheds is my passion,” said Trip. That’s why he knew he had to do something when he learned that an entire community had water that was unsafe to drink. “To me this was a serious situation,”
said Trip. “Flint is an economically disadvantaged area, and is the last community that can afford to switch to bottled water.”

Trip contacted the United Way and the Flint School District to determine the best way to proceed. He then asked his principal for permission to raise money at school. With the support of his school principal, family and friends, he was able to donate over $2,800 to buy bottled water for schoolchildren in Flint. Trip said he recognizes that his donation of water will not cure what ails the city’s water supply, and he intends to work toward a long-term solution. “In the near future, through public and private means, I intend to be part of the solution to revitalize water systems in economically disadvantaged areas like Flint,” he said.

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Aubrey Cohoon, 12, of Spring Lake, Mich., a sixth-grader at Spring Lake Intermediate School, has helped grant wishes to three sick children and their families over the past two years by raising more than $30,000 for Make-A-Wish Michigan. Aubrey got involved with giving to others after she received so many gifts on her 7th birthday that she felt “overwhelmed.” For subsequent birthdays, Aubrey asked for donations to a designated local cause instead of presents she didn’t need. A few years later, she began researching the Make-A-Wish Foundation, met with its Michigan chapter, and decided she wanted to raise money exclusively for that organization.

Since then, Aubrey’s year-round efforts have gained her recognition as a prolific Make-A-Wish fund-raiser. She formed a team for the annual Walk for Wishes, ran in a 5K, bussed tables at a local restaurant in exchange for donations to Make-A-Wish, and sold bracelets at a car show and a neighborhood stand. She also arranged to hold activity nights and special dress-up days at her school to raise money, and recruited local businesses to help as well. “It makes me feel so good to do what I am doing,” said Aubrey. “So many people have been impacted, but most importantly, I do it for the wish kids.”

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Maria Keller, 15, of Plymouth, Minn., a sophomore at Orono High School, founded a nonprofit called “Read Indeed” when she was 8 years old, and has since collected more than 1.7 million books for children in need in 50 states and 17 other countries. An avid reader who couldn’t imagine going to sleep at night without a bedtime story, Maria one day asked her mother why some of her classmates didn’t read much and was told that perhaps it was because their parents couldn’t afford to buy them books. “I became aware that there are children throughout the country and beyond who have never owned a book,” she said. Maria set out to change that.

With her parents’ help, she formed her nonprofit and began organizing book drives in her community, which she publicized through the news media and a website. Her goal was to collect one million books by the time she turned 18, a number she exceeded five years early. Initially, people would leave piles of books on her front steps and Maria would store them in her garage, but it wasn’t long before the books outgrew her house. Today, Maria has warehouse space to store her books and leads more than 250 volunteers – mostly young people –
who twice a month help her sort, box, and distribute them to hospitals, orphanages and schools in the U.S. and abroad. She also has recruited corporate sponsors, applied for grants, and raised more than $80,000 in individual contributions to purchase new books and cover shipping costs. She estimates that her organization has touched the lives of 800,000 children. “I am determined to continue getting books to kids who need them the most,” Maria said.

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Jasmine Kennebeck, 13, of Reads Landing, Minn., a member of the Red Wing Family YMCA and a seventh-grader at Wabasha-Kellogg Secondary School in Wabasha, volunteered eight hours a day last summer at a YMCA 45 miles from her home, requiring that she leave her house at 6 a.m. to fulfill her duties. After Jasmine’s mother signed her up to participate in the Red Wing Family YMCA’s recreation activities, Jasmine decided to volunteer instead. “I knew volunteering would give me the opportunity to help others and this would make me feel good,” she said.

She started and ended each day helping at the front desk, greeting people and checking in members. During the morning, she went to the childcare area and helped the staff play with and care for toddlers while their parents were at the Y. At lunchtime, Jasmine helped with laundry, delivered clean towels and cleaned equipment. For her efforts, Jasmine was nominated for the Y’s “Volunteer of the Month.” “That was my best summer ever,” she said. “I made new friends, learned job responsibilities, and helped people in the community.” Jasmine, who plans to volunteer at the YMCA again this summer, also volunteers to walk dogs at a local animal shelter, helps the homeless, and volunteers at school sports events, community events and festivals.

Mississippi

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Lindsey Meyer, 17, of Pass Christian, Miss., a senior at Pass Christian High School, planned a “sensory friendly” movie presentation at a local theater for people with autism or other special needs, after learning that most people with these disabilities are denied this simple pleasure because they may not be able to sit still or stay quiet for an entire movie. “Working at a summer camp for children with special needs broadened my perspective on the limitations society sets for these people,” said Lindsey. When she read on social media about a child with autism and his family being removed from a movie theater after he had an excited outburst, she wanted to do something. “A dark theater flooded with booming sound, over-stimulating advertisements, and the overwhelming struggle to remain still and silent can result in pain and anxiety for people with special needs,” she said.

She first contacted several local theaters to propose a special showing of a family-friendly film. To be sensory friendly, she explained, there could be no commercials or previews beforehand, the lights must be left on, the sound turned down, and the audience allowed to move about, talk, clap, and even sing. Only one theater would even consider her idea. After several meetings with the theater’s management, her persistence paid off. Lindsey then trained a team of volunteers to help monitor the event, posted a movie flier on social media, and
reached out to the special needs community for support. It wasn’t long before she heard from organizations, schools, and homes for special needs individuals eager to reserve seats. The theater’s management has now agreed to host a sensory friendly movie each month and expanded the program to include films geared toward teenagers and adults, too. Lindsey has created an organization called “Free to be Me Sensory Friendly Events” that is working to expand the events to other venues across Mississippi’s Gulf Coast.

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Jameshia Attaway, 12, of Indianola, Miss., a sixth-grader at Carver Elementary School, celebrates her birthday each year by throwing a party for children in need and giving them gifts she collects from businesses, local organizations and community members. When Jameshia was 8 years old, she noticed that a girl in her school wore shoes with holes in them. “Children made fun of her,” said Jameshia. “I told my mother that I wanted to buy her a pair of new shoes.” She then realized that many other kids were in need of help, too, while every year she was “overwhelmed” with birthday gifts. So she decided that she could “put on a smile on my face and theirs” by giving her gifts away.

Since then, Jameshia starts preparing every November for a birthday party to which she invites children in need. She writes letters to local businesses and civic groups to garner donations of toys and food, and contacts agencies that provide services for people in need. She also asks family and friends to make gift boxes, teachers to read to children who attend the party, and her mother’s friend to dress up as a princess. The hardest part, Jameshia said, used to be finding a place large enough to hold the party, but the mayor of her town now allows her to host the event in a city-owned building. She estimates that about 40 local families benefit from her project every year. In addition to her annual party, Jameshia participates in a wide variety of community service projects with her school’s PTA, the Indianola Youth Council and a mayor’s diversity council.

Missouri

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Brooke Hale, 18, of Forsyth, Mo., a senior at Forsyth High School, is the co-founder and executive director of a free after-school arts program that has been offering weekly classes in musical theatre to elementary and middle level students in her school district for the past four years. As a child, Brooke had to travel 20 miles to Branson, Mo., for singing, dancing and acting lessons. “There were no artistic extracurricular activities at my school for students in elementary and middle school, which forced me to outsource for instruction in the arts,” she said. When her older brother proposed that they address that need, Brooke was quick to take up the challenge.

Together, the two siblings met with school administrators to plan a program called “Art to the Third,” presented the plan to the school board, recruited staff members and high school students to help, and secured funding from the Branson Arts Council. Classes are now taught weekly at the Forsyth Performing Arts Center and include such specialized disciplines as tap dancing, vocal technique, script writing, improvisation and stage combat. In addition, students perform throughout the year at various events in the Forsyth/Branson community, and a musical is produced at the culmination of the spring semester. About 70 students have taken part in the
There is nothing more gratifying than sharing your passion with others and seeing the lights you spark in other people’s lives,” said Brooke.

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Kera Mingus, 12, of Kirbyville, Mo., a seventh-grader at Forsyth Middle School, raised more than $11,000 during the first three years of her fundraising campaign to find a cure for juvenile dermatomyositis (JDM), a rare autoimmune disease that attacks her muscles and skin. “I know what it is like to be sick and not be able to have a doctor tell you what is wrong,” said Kera. “I am trying to prevent other children from going through what I went through.”

Kera wanted to find a fundraising project that her whole family could take part in. After deciding on a mini-golf tournament, she enlisted the cooperation of a local mini-golf course, recruited sponsors for each hole, and asked local businesses to donate prizes. She also promoted the event through emails, the news media and the website of the Cure JM Foundation. Kera repeated the event the following year, and in 2014, she hosted a raffle and ran a concession stand at flag football games. Kera’s activities have not only raised awareness of a rare disease, but have made important contributions to the research efforts of the Cure JM Foundation. “I’ve learned that I can do something positive with having a disease, and that I don’t have to feel sorry for myself,” she said.

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Nathanael Jourdonnais, 18, of Missoula, Mont., a senior at Big Sky High School, organized a nine-month project to build a bike shelter in downtown Missoula so that bicycle commuters and recreational cyclists would have a convenient place to lock and protect their bikes. “I wanted to create a structure that would help promote alternative modes of travel in my community for years to come,” explained Nathanael. He figured more people in Missoula would use their bikes for commuting and for fun if there was a safe place to park them, and that, in turn, would benefit the environment.

He broached the idea with the director of Ecology Project International, who liked the idea and offered property next to the nonprofit’s historic building. Next, Nathanael went to city officials to research building codes and obtain permits. He worked with an architect to develop a design for the shelter that would be compatible with the historic building, and solicited donations from 25 businesses and individuals in the community. Nathanael then recruited 35 volunteers to help build the shelter with lumber, hardware and other materials – much of it recycled and repurposed – that he collected throughout the process. After nine months of work, the structure was finished and ready for bicyclists to enjoy. “I continue to maintain my shelter and will in the future to make sure that it stays in excellent condition for years to come,” said Nathanael.

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE
Berkley Stroh, 14, of Roy, Mont., a member of the Fergus County 4-H in Lewistown and an eighth-grader at Roy Public Schools, collects used shoes in her community and ships them to Uganda, where many people don’t own a pair of shoes and contract infections from walking barefoot in dirt. Berkley decided to act after reading a book about Uganda by a missionary in that African country. “She talked about jiggers (mite larva) getting into the feet of those who have no shoes,” said Berkley. “The jiggers burrow into the feet and can cause infections if they are not removed.”

Berkley used social media to publicize her collection drive and began asking everyone she knew to donate shoes they no longer needed. After she had collected 50 pairs, she cleaned and disinfected them. She then sent them to Kampala, Uganda’s capital, where they were picked up by a family contact and taken to a local pastor, who distributed them to people in villages he travels to. Berkley said she will continue to collect and ship her shoes so that she can help as many people as possible. “Even the little things we have here in the U.S., like shoes, can be very valuable things in less fortunate countries,” she said. “Things we no longer use can make a big difference in someone else’s life.”

Nebraska

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

My’Kah Knowlin, 14, of Lincoln, Neb., a freshman at Lincoln High School, formed a network of student role models and mentors at nine schools throughout Nebraska to help stop bullying and support victims. After years of being bullied herself, My’Kah believed that the only way to stop it was to commit suicide. “I couldn’t see any other way out,” she said. But she was lucky enough to have a strong support system, and instead resolved to provide other victims of bullying with the support she had benefited from. “I want to make sure that no one feels suicide is their only choice, but to know there are others out there who want to stand beside them and help them get through the hard times,” said My’Kah.

Because she felt that sharing personal stories of bullying would be key to helping other victims, My’Kah named her initiative “My STORIES,” which is also an acronym for “Students Teaching Others Respect, Independence, Empowerment and Strength.” She began recruiting students in her school and other schools to reach out to kids being bullied, offer to stand beside them, teach them how to document and report incidents, and bolster their self-respect. In one instance, My’Kah intervened directly to help save a young girl from taking her own life. “I may not be able to protect all students,” she said, “but I will stand up to those I see trying to hurt others, and I will continue to educate those who want to help.”

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Golden Kelly, 13, of Omaha, Neb., a seventh-grader at Russell Middle School, has personally raised nearly $14,000 for the American Cancer Society over the past nine years as co-captain of a team participating annually in the society’s Relay for Life fundraiser. Goldie became aware of cancer at a very young age. She watched a friend battle a brain tumor, and saw three grandparents diagnosed with malignant melanoma. So by the time she was just 4 years old, Goldie wanted to help fight the disease by forming a fundraising team with her sister.
Goldie has raised more than $1,000 every year with her Relay for Life activities. She has sold clothing and toys at garage sales, sold lemonade and cookies, and marketed headbands and flip-flops throughout the year. She also has asked for donations rather than gifts on her birthday, and has twice donated her hair to make wigs for cancer patients. In addition, Goldie participates in a walk for juvenile diabetics, and plays bingo at least once a month with residents of a retirement home. “I love to give and make people smile,” she said.

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

James Lea, 17, of Las Vegas, Nev., a junior at Faith Lutheran Middle School and High School, helps brighten the holiday season for children who have recently lost a parent by surprising their families with an anonymous gift each day for 12 days, tied to the theme of the song “12 Days of Christmas.” In 2008, when James was 9 years old, his father died from a sudden heart attack. “It was hard on my brother, my mom, and me,” said James. “Even though we would laugh at times, the pain never went away.” Then one day in December, a mysterious gift of pears appeared on the family doorstep. And for each of the next 11 days, James and his family found another gift left for them. It turned out the family’s church was behind the surprise, though they didn’t know it at the time. “By the twelfth day, we were so excited and happy,” said James. “We couldn’t believe that we could feel so normal again.”

Wanting to pass along the joy their family had experienced, James and his brother started ringing the doorbells of other grieving families, leaving gifts, and running away. Soon after, they helped their mother found a nonprofit called “In12Days” to expand the effort. The family built a website and began reaching out to individuals, other charities and companies for support. Every year, they recruit 12 companies to donate $5,000 each to cover the cost of the surprises. To identify families suffering from loss, they contact schools, religious groups and civic organizations. Surprises include things like a basket of fresh pears, an inflatable pool turtle filled with Dove chocolates, a French hen meal, and a wreath of “calling birds” containing airline or sporting event tickets. So far, In12Days has touched the lives of more than 7,000 people in Las Vegas, Chicago, and San Francisco, said James, and now has over 1,000 volunteers supporting its mission.

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Marquis Jamison, 13, of Las Vegas, Nev., a seventh-grader at Faith Lutheran Middle School and High School, has volunteered in a variety of ways to aid homeless people, at-risk kids, young cancer patients and children with disabilities. He began his volunteering in kindergarten, handing out food to the homeless. In second grade, he cut off his long hair in front of his whole school to draw attention to kids with cancer, and raised more than $3,000 for a cancer foundation.

A few years later, Marquis’ mother started a nonprofit organization called “Vegas Youth Ambassadors,” and Marquis became one of its most active participants. Besides handing out food, clothing and hygiene supplies to the homeless, Marquis has helped teach at-risk youth about teamwork, sportsmanship and how to be productive members of the community. In addition, Marquis has twice traveled to Sri Lanka and Thailand to
work with orphaned children and deliver wheelchairs to children with disabilities. “I learned that it feels good to help other people and to stand up to make a change,” said Marquis.

New Hampshire

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Emma Williams, 17, of Merrimack, N.H., a senior at Bishop Guertin High School in Nashua, began organizing an annual basketball tournament at a nearby high school in 2011 to raise money to provide Christmas gifts for families in need in her community. As a member of her school’s service group in eighth grade, Emma was challenged by the club’s advisor to think of ways to raise money for charity. At the time, she was an avid basketball player, so it didn’t take too long for Emma to propose a fundraising “Heart to Hoops” basketball tournament.

After obtaining permission to use the school gym for a weekend in November, Emma reached out to coaches and recruited eight teams, and then, with the help of her father, lined up referees. The teams all paid an entrance fee to play in the tournament, and additional money was raised by selling tickets to spectators, and conducting a raffle and shooting competitions. Emma also encouraged spectators to bring canned food to the tournament, which was donated to charity. Emma’s annual tournaments have raised more than $10,000, enough to brighten the holidays of 80 families in her area. “My favorite part is the kids,” she said. “It’s amazing to see young basketball players become excited about doing something they love, while making a difference in the world.”

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Caitlin Shapleigh, 12, of Londonderry, N.H., a sixth-grader at Londonderry Middle School, resolved to conduct one volunteer project each month over the course of a year, and also launched a campaign to persuade other young people to get involved in volunteering. “My mom has a saying, ‘touch one, touch many,’” said Caitlin. “She explained that if you help one person, you have no idea how many other people might be helped in the future by one act of kindness. It is now my motto, which inspires me when volunteering.”

In August of 2014, Caitlin sat down with a calendar and marked the volunteer activities she wanted to do each month. These included collecting canned goods for a food pantry, men’s winter coats for a church, and more than 100 books for a local library. She also performed at a senior center with her baton team, made gift bags for veterans, and stuffed backpacks with donated school supplies for students in need. Every time she volunteered, Caitlin documented the activity with photos to share with other young people as part of her “Kids Can Too!” campaign. In addition, she put together a PowerPoint presentation to show elementary school children that they can make a difference without a lot of effort. “I feel really good inside every time I finish a volunteer project,” Caitlin said. “I want other kids to feel that same way.”
New Jersey

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Benjamin Zangoglia, 17, of Old Tappan, N.J., a senior at North Valley Regional High School, organized a fundraising team that collected more than $115,000 in donations last spring to find a cure for a rare form of leukemia that Benjamin has had since he was 10 years old. When he was first diagnosed, Benjamin said he “hated everything about myself,” but after a “long, internal struggle,” he realized he couldn't let his disease control his life. With a new attitude, Benjamin decided he wanted to help others living with blood cancer, especially children. “I needed to help rid the world of this insidious disease,” he said.

Benjamin got his chance when his oncologist nominated him to compete in the Leukemia Lymphoma Society’s annual fundraising competition, held each spring. He assembled a team of his closest friends and began strategizing ways to collect donations. Over the next 10 weeks, Benjamin’s “Team Be-CURE-iou” placed posters throughout Bergen County, sent emails and letters to potential donors, made telephone calls and in-person presentations, and solicited contributions from friends, family members and their business associates. When the deadline arrived, the team had raised $115,332, the third-highest total in the New York City area. “Leukemia taught me that everyone has the power to overcome the bleakest experience, and the right attitude always yields success,” said Benjamin.

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Zachary Rice, 13, of Long Valley, N.J., an eighth-grader at Long Valley Middle School, initiated an annual 5K run/walk that has raised more than $50,000 over the past three years to provide gaming systems and other fun distractions for young patients at Goryeb Children’s Hospital in Morristown. Zach spent a lot of time in the hospital during fourth and fifth grade due to a painful hip infection and a subsequent debilitating bone condition. His father, however, made it a little easier for him by bringing his gaming system from home. “I quickly learned how important being distracted from pain can be to a child in the hospital,” said Zach. When he returned home, he announced that he wanted to buy gaming systems for all the kids in the hospital.

Zach and his mother agreed that a good way to do that would be to raise money with a 5K race. They mapped out a route, set a date, reserved a park and put together sponsorship packets for local businesses. Zach also secured donations of food and refreshments, and held a contest for kids at local schools to determine the design of the event’s official T-shirt. Zach had to undergo surgery just a month before the race, but despite having not walked in seven months, he managed to walk the entire course on race day, crossing the finish line to cheers and tears. More than 250 people participated in the event, and enough money was raised to purchase gaming systems for every room at the children’s hospital. Zach’s “Action for Distraction 5K” has been staged twice since then, raising more funds for other forms of distraction at the hospital, such as art and music programs, as well as for upkeep of its gaming systems.
**New Mexico**

**2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE**

Cameron Estrada, 17, of Roswell, N.M., a senior at Roswell High School, formed a therapy group at her high school to help girls deal with the pressures of being a teenager. Cameron herself was feeling very stressed from the demands of schoolwork and extracurricular activities when she decided to seek the advice of her school’s mental health counselor. “This visit led to my discovery that there were probably many other teens at my high school that were having the same issues,” she said. A therapy group, she thought, might help address these issues.

Cameron began convening lunch meetings with girls whom she thought would benefit. As word got out, participation in her meetings increased, with as many as 30 girls showing up. In addition to dynamic discussions, the meetings often feature guest speakers on issues such as healthy eating habits, dating violence, alcohol and substance abuse and suicide prevention. Cameron also leads her group in an annual drive to collect necessities for the homeless. Due to the success of her initiative, a similar group has sprung up for boys at the school, and a local middle school has followed suit. In addition, Cameron is now advocating for teens across the country by serving on the National Youth Advisory Council for School Based Health Centers in Washington, D.C.

**2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE**

Cody Osborn, 13, of Belen, N.M., an eighth-grader at Holy Ghost Catholic School, has volunteered as a group leader and games facilitator over the past three years at his parish’s summer vacation Bible school camp. “I first got involved with the camp when I saw a flier at my parish announcing the camp, and how volunteers were needed to put on the program,” said Cody. “I have come back to this program every year since it was fun and provided a way to serve my parish.”

For the first two years, Cody was a group leader, responsible for guiding an assigned age group to various activities throughout the weeklong camp. More recently, he has assisted two adults in administering games for the young campers, such as water-balloon baseball. He prepares materials for each day’s events, and cleans up after each session. Cody also has recruited some of his friends to come and help. “I get a sense of accomplishment and joy from this project, seeing the smiles on kids’ faces as they have fun,” he said. “It has shown me the great feeling doing service gives me, and brings me back to it every year.”

**New York**
2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Dimple Belani, 17, of Bellerose, N.Y., a member of the Girl Scouts of Greater New York and a senior at Bronx High School of Science, produced a series of episodes for a public television station featuring interviews with accomplished women to inspire young girls to pursue higher education and their dream careers. In 2012, Dimple visited the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts in London and learned about the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals, which include promoting gender equality and empowering women. She was inspired to embark on a project that incorporated the UN goals, one that would promote higher education and career choices for women. “From an early age, I was encouraged by my mother and my Girl Scout leaders to dream big and follow my heart, but many other girls were not as fortunate,” she said. “So I vowed my resolve to provide support to girls who could not pursue their dreams, or who were compelled to change their goals.”

Dimple assembled a production team, including a script writer, director, editor, and a light and sound technician, and then interviewed on camera a different professional woman each month. They included a lawyer, school principal, CEO, doctor, navy pilot, computer engineer and guidance counselor. Each was asked to tell “how they were able to overcome financial hurdles, social pressures and gender discrimination, and pursue higher education to realize their dreams,” said Dimple. After she oversaw the post-production process, the interviews were broadcast on a local public TV station. Dimple, who plans to eventually pursue a medical degree, has received requests to produce more interviews, and said she will continue with this project well into the future.

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Cole Faller, 12, of Roslyn Heights, N.Y., a seventh-grader at Roslyn Middle School, helped start an annual community-wide flag football event that has raised nearly $50,000 over the past three years to support young people with autism. When Cole was in fourth grade, he participated as a mentor in an after-school program for kids with special needs, and became good friends with an autistic boy named Luke. “Luke has autism,” Cole said at the time. “It’s okay, autism is just a different way of thinking.” Cole wanted other kids to appreciate the importance of embracing differences, and also wanted to raise money for Luke’s future needs. So, with the help of his family, he planned a small flag football game.

The idea quickly took off, and word of the event spread through the community. On the day of the games, more than 120 youngsters showed up at a local park to play, along with a large number of spectators, a DJ, a tattoo artist and caterers. The event, called “Go Long for Luke,” was so successful it’s been held twice since then, raising more money and awareness each year for those with autism.

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Karigan McCurry, 18, of Gastonia, N.C., a senior at Hunter Huss High School, started volunteering for a youth suicide prevention organization after a close friend took her own life, and then branched out into numerous other service activities that benefit her community. “I will never forget the night I got the call that my best friend
had committed suicide," said Karigan. "I was in shock and disbelief at first. I even called her phone to see if she would answer. I was just hoping it wasn't true." When the shock wore off, Karigan was left to deal with guilt. She and her friend had gone to separate high schools and drifted apart. Maybe, Karigan thought, she could have done something to help, if only she had known.

Turning to the internet for answers and consolation, Karigan discovered The Jason Foundation and decided she wanted to support its mission of educating people about youth suicide and making desperate teens understand that suicide is not their only option. She started a small support group at school, and then visited middle and high schools to educate staff and students with a PowerPoint presentation and printed literature. Karigan also has helped raise funds for the Jason Foundation at events such as an annual golf tournament. Her work with the foundation has motivated Karigan to seek out other volunteer opportunities in her area. For example, she has assisted an animal rescue agency with pet adoptions, collected leashes for an animal spay/neuter clinic, sold shirts to help find missing schoolgirls in Africa, and raised money for autism awareness. “These things make my heart happy!” said Karigan.

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Abbigail Adler, 14, of Greenville, N.C., a member of the Girl Scouts North Carolina Coastal Pines and an eighth-grader at The Oakwood School, launched an online business selling jewelry and personalized items to raise money for organizations that work to end violence in the Middle East. In school, Abbigail learned about the Middle East and clashes between cultures and religions in that volatile part of the world. “This violence does nothing but kill innocent people and worsen relationships between different cultures,” she said. “I want to do something to change that.”

As someone who loves art, Abbigail saw an opportunity to use her artistic skills and creativity to promote peace in the Middle East. She used her own savings and some donations to start her business, then began creating beautiful and useful products, built a website to sell them (www.artsforisrael.org), and designed a logo and business cards. Abbigail spends at least five hours a week making her artistic creations, filling orders and updating and marketing her online store. At the end of each month, she donates her profits – more than $650 so far – to organizations that, according to her research, “come together to stop the devastation and violence on a large scale, and promote peace in our world today.”

North Dakota

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Lauryn Hinckley, 16, of Bismarck, N.D., a sophomore at Century High School, has collected more than 7,600 pounds of peanut butter and jelly over the past five years to help feed 500 children in her area who don’t have enough to eat on weekends. Lauryn will never forget a scene she witnessed in the grocery store when she was 9 years old. “There was a family in front of me with a grocery cart half full of food, most of which had to be put back on the shelves because their mom didn’t have enough money to pay for it,” she said. “I could not believe that kids my own age were going hungry.” Lauryn decided to hold a food drive to help.
Since then, Lauryn’s peanut butter and jelly drive has become an annual event in her community. This past year, 20 local schools, eight businesses and five bank branches participated. To prepare for her drive, Lauryn spoke to school principals and businesses, shared a blog she wrote on hunger, and sought interviews with the media. She then designed posters, fliers and T-shirts, and alerted store managers so they could stock enough peanut butter and jelly. Next, Lauryn and about 20 volunteers distributed collection boxes and advertising materials. She then held a party where businesses made donations and organizations helped sort the food, which the United Way then used to help fill backpacks sent home with kids in need for the weekend. “It only takes $5 to feed a hungry child on the weekend, and I have been able to help feed over 500 kids for 10 weeks in the last five years,” Lauryn said. “My goal is to feed these kids the entire school year!”

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Evan Knoll, 11, of Fargo, N.D., a member of the YMCA of Cass and Clay Counties and a fifth-grader at Park Christian School, has been volunteering since he was 3 years old at a local homeless center. Evan comes from a family of volunteers. “My inspiration is my mom because when she was younger she served our community and wanted me to have the same understanding of how good it is to help others so I can appreciate all my blessings,” he said.

Once a month during the school year, Evan works at a homeless shelter in a variety of capacities. He helps prepare and serve meals, stocks shelves and organizes the pantry, plays games and reads stories to young children there, and sorts and hangs clothes donated for the shelter’s Dress for Success program. He also has packed bags containing warm socks, gloves and toiletries to hand out to residents, and has shopped for and delivered Christmas presents to them. In addition, Evan has helped his family raise funds to provide housing for the homeless in Fargo, volunteered at a summer church camp on an Indian reservation, and participated in the planting and maintenance of two community gardens to promote healthy eating.

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Parker Inks, 17, of Fremont, Ohio, a junior at St. Joseph Central Catholic High School, helped start a foundation eight years ago that has raised $150,000 through an annual dinner and auction to help families burdened by the high cost of caring for children with disabilities. Parker, who was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy when he was a baby and uses a power wheelchair to get around, was hospitalized in 2008 with severe pneumonia. It was a terrible time for his family – not only was Parker sick, but his mother was undergoing chemotherapy and his father was not working. One day, Parker had a visit from his school’s football coach. “He and my dad told me that I have a purpose,” said Parker. “I thought these were just words of encouragement but the older I get the more I understand that I truly do have a purpose.” After that visit, the coach organized several fundraisers to ease the family’s financial situation. Overwhelmed by the community’s generosity, Parker and his family wanted to “pay it forward” and founded a nonprofit organization, “Parker’s Purpose,” to help pay bills and purchase medical equipment for families of children with disabilities.
As one of five members of the foundation’s executive committee, Parker attends monthly meetings to review grant requests. To raise money, Parker came up with the idea of having an annual dinner and auction. Every year, Parker helps spread the word and is the spokesperson for the event. He weighs in on the choice of venue, the entertainment, and which celebrities will be asked to attend. The money the event has raised has helped more than 200 families over the years, Parker said, and he plans to keep going. “One day, I hope I can look in the mirror and say that I have made an impact on others’ lives!”

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Meagan Warren, 12, of Bexley, Ohio, a seventh-grader at Bexley Middle School, brings the magic of books to low-income children in the Columbus area through “Books for Bedtime,” a nonprofit organization that has collected more than 19,000 and donated more than 12,000 children’s books since late 2014. For Meagan, who started reading when she was only 2 years old, it is hard to imagine not having a book to read, especially at bedtime. But she knows that not every child’s parents can afford to buy books. “Because my mom has always worked at disadvantaged schools, I have seen the effects of poverty, and understand that books are often low on the families’ list of necessities,” Meagan said. One night, while reading in bed, she was thinking how sad it was that there were kids who didn’t get to read before falling asleep. It dawned on her that she could help change that.

With the help of her family, Meagan filed the paperwork to start her nonprofit, and created a logo, business cards, a website and social media accounts. Then she built a large collection box to place at her school and at various businesses in her community. Soon, donations of books started coming in. Once she gets the books, she stamps them with her logo, organizes them by grade level and stacks them in her garage to await their new home. The biggest hurdle initially, she said, was finding organizations that wanted her books. But after a local newspaper printed a story on her project, she started getting calls from schools, homeless shelters, immigrant organizations and other groups. When she delivers books, she often gives a short motivational speech about the wonders of reading. “Almost every time I donate I have at least one child approach me and ask, ‘How much does this book cost?’ It brings me such joy to be able to say it’s free,” said Meagan.

Oklahoma

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Sarah Kellogg, 18, of Yukon, Okla., a senior at Mustang High School, oversees a committee of 48 students that conducts a series of fundraisers throughout the year to support cancer research, in conjunction with the American Cancer Society’s Relay for Life program. When Sarah’s father was dying from cancer, people in their community supported the family by bringing meals to their house. “They showed me that family extends much further than those who live in your home,” she said. “As a result, I spend my time giving back.” Much of that time is devoted to chairing her school’s annual Relay for Life campaign, which raised more than $100,000 last year to fund cancer research and treatment.

In addition to coordinating a 12-hour Relay for Life run/walk, Sarah and her committee raised funds last year by hosting a “powder puff” football tournament, a Halloween party, and a teacher vs. student volleyball
tournament. They also produced a video featuring professional and student athletes explaining why they support the fight against cancer. In addition, Sarah has organized her own annual golf tournament for the past several years to supplement her fundraising efforts. Sarah has also collected coloring books and crayons for patients at a children’s hospital, boxed food at a local food bank, served meals to the homeless at a rescue mission, and participated in mission trips to serve the disadvantaged in several U.S. cities.

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Olivia Kuester, 14, of Coweta, Okla., an eighth-grader at Coweta Junior High School, recruits volunteers to help her sew quilts and blankets for children in crisis, make fabric hearts for premature infants and their mothers, and collect winter gloves for kids in need. Three years ago, Olivia met a girl in foster care who had been the victim of child abuse. “The abuse was terrifying, but being placed with strangers was equally traumatic,” said Olivia. “As she confided in me, my heart ached for her and all children suffering from crisis. I knew I had to do something.”

What she did was launch a campaign to provide quilts and fleece blankets to children in group homes, hospitals and homeless shelters. In addition to making these items herself with donated money and supplies, Olivia recruits volunteers at group meetings and on a Facebook page, and gives them sewing instructions. She also solicits volunteers to help her make “comfort hearts” for mothers and babies in neonatal intensive care units. In addition, Olivia conducted a winter drive to collect 1,500 pairs of gloves for students from low-income families and for children at homeless shelters. Olivia estimates that her “Olivia’s Hope” activities have involved about 300 volunteers so far, and have resulted in more than $15,000 worth of donated items.

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Alisha Zhao, 17, of Portland, Ore., a junior at Lincoln High School, created a club at her school to provide services to local homeless people, and then founded a nonprofit organization called “Kids First Project” to expand her efforts and focus on the needs of homeless youth. While volunteering at a homeless shelter several years ago, Alisha realized that the families there were not getting the help they needed to escape the generational cycle of poverty. “I met youth who were capable of becoming doctors, dancers, and even presidents, yet did not have the resources to achieve their dreams,” she said. It quickly became a passion of hers to help supply those resources.

As a freshman, Alisha started the Hope for Homeless Club, which, over the following two years grew to include more than 300 members and conducted projects serving 500 families and an additional 200 individuals. Then, Alisha decided to form a nonprofit that could deliver educational and recreational programs to homeless youth through multiple organizations and shelters. She recruited an advisory board, a board of directors and volunteer leaders, and began organizing activities to help homeless kids reach their potential, including arts and crafts projects, games, tutoring, peer mentoring, life skills classes and donations of school supplies. In recognition of her leadership, Alisha was appointed by Portland’s mayor to be the first young person to ever serve on the city’s Human Rights Commission.
2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Michael Murray, 14, of Lake Oswego, Ore., an eighth-grader at Lake Oswego Junior High School, started a club at his school that has collected enough food and money over the past few years to provide an estimated 10,000 meals to hungry Oregon families. “It became clear to me that I should focus on hunger when I learned how many people in my community do not have access to food,” said Michael. In 2014, he worked with his principal and one of his teachers to get his club off the ground, then advertised for members.

A core group of about 15 students now participate in Michael’s “Hunger Fighters Oregon” club on a regular basis, meeting weekly to talk about how best to collect donations. At first, the members knocked on doors in their neighborhoods, but then began to conduct collection drives at their school. They also sell T-shirts that say “I won’t stand for hunger.” To further educate his fellow students about hunger, Michael delivered a 15-minute speech and a PowerPoint presentation at an assembly for each grade at his school, speaking directly to more than 900 middle-schoolers. All of the donations gathered by his club go to the Oregon Food Bank, which distributes them to food kitchens across the state. “I will never be able to know exactly how many people I helped directly,” said Michael, “but if all of this helped one person who was hungry, then I accomplished what I set out to do.”

Pennsylvania

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Colin Harding, 18, of Pittsburgh, Pa., a senior at Baldwin High School, donated $7,500 worth of toys, video games, books and other items last year to Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh. When Colin was 13, his appendix burst, an emergency that required weeks of hospitalization. During that time, Colin made friends with a member of the hospital’s Child Life team, who invited him to hang out in the activity room or, when he was too sick to leave his room, brought activities to Colin’s bedside to alleviate his boredom. “They took amazing care of both myself and my mother,” said Colin. Even so, he found being in the hospital pretty boring as there was “not much entertainment for teens, especially those into video games.” When Colin was ready to finally go home, he asked the Child Life employees what items they wished they had to improve the stay of every child, and vowed that someday he would find a way to help.

That day came last May when Colin met with Child Life employees again to compile an updated list. He registered his “wish list” at Toys-R-Us and then solicited support from local businesses, distributed fliers around the community, held a donation event with food and entertainment at a local Harley dealership, and asked family members and friends for donations. The items he donated to the hospital included foosball, bumper pool and air hockey tables, a projector and screen for movie nights, sound and lighting systems, games and gaming items and sports equipment, as well as dolls and other toys. The day in September he delivered his trailer full of donations was a proud one for Colin. “They were not prepared for the amount of donations,” he said. Colin continues to help children as a summer volunteer working in the hospital’s playrooms and at school in a special gym class for children with physical challenges. He also volunteers with a local Cub Scout troop and helps to teach religion classes to second-graders.
2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Grace Preston, 11, of Brockway, Pa., a sixth-grader at Brockway Area Elementary School, has raised more than $6,000 over the past three years to improve the lives of animals in her community by selling homemade dog treats, cat toys, and flea and tick repellent. Grace become interested in orphan animals after her family adopted a dog from a local shelter. “I wished that all animals could be lucky enough to find homes,” she said. “Since my parents wouldn’t let me adopt all the animals at the shelter, I wanted to help them while they were waiting for homes.” Grace read about a girl who asked that her birthday party guests donate to a hospital’s children’s unit in lieu of buying her gifts. Grace liked the idea and decided to do the same thing on her eighth birthday, requesting donations to the animal shelter. Helping the animals felt so good that Grace wanted to do more. That was when she started “Grace’s Goodies.”

With the help of her mother, Grace found a recipe for dog biscuits, commandeered the family kitchen, and started baking. She sold the biscuits and other products at local farmer’s markets, festivals and through a Facebook page. She also placed donation cans around her town, and appealed for help on fundraising websites. With the money she’s raised, Grace has enabled the local Humane Society to purchase a storage shed, as well as other supplies such as rabies gloves. Grace also has provided animal oxygen mask kits to the fire department for pets caught in fires, helped pay for a shelter dog’s surgery, and collected pet food for families who can’t afford to feed their animals.

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Zachary Librizzi, 17, of Warwick, R.I., a senior at Saint Raphael Academy, has helped his family raise more than $1 million for diabetes research through an annual charity golf tournament, and has generated an additional $75,000 on his own by leading a team each year in a fundraising walk. Zach, who was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes when he was 10 months old, was so sick of needle injections by the time he was 2-1/2 that he tearfully pleaded with his father to “take my diabetes away.” His parents responded by organizing a golf tournament to raise money for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF).

Within a few years, Zach began speaking at the event, addressing up to 200 tournament attendees about the need to cure diabetes. As he got older, Zach took on an increasingly important role in the golf tournament’s fundraising activities. He also led a walk team that has raised funds for JDRF for the past 14 years, and has garnered additional support for the foundation at hockey events. Zach has mentored newly diagnosed children, too, as a camp counselor. “There might not be a cure just yet, but many advances have taken place over the years and have helped thousands of people with diabetes live their lives a little easier,” he said. The funds he and his family have raised, he added, “I know will help find a cure in my lifetime.”
Sarah Coutu, 12, of Pawtucket, R.I., a sixth-grader at St. Cecilia School, makes and sells a variety of craft items to buy supplies for animals at four privately funded no-kill shelters. “I have always had a special passion for animals,” said Sarah. “It’s so sad going into shelters and seeing so many animals who are homeless and are alone in the world.” Since she also has been an avid crafter all her life, Sarah decided she could combine her two passions in a project she calls “Paws for Life.”

She began by asking her principal if she could sell some of her creations at school. Soon, she was carting as many as five overflowing bags to school everyday, containing homemade bracelets, necklaces, earrings, headbands, throw pillows and cat and dog toys. Sarah also has held raffles at school, requested donations instead of gifts on birthdays, sold her crafts at community events, and opened an online shop on Etsy.com. Working on her business for about 15 hours a week, she so far has been able to purchase approximately $1,500 worth of supplies for animal shelters. In addition, she organized an after-school club to engage fellow students in ways to prevent animal abuse and homelessness. “I believe I can change the world if I try hard enough,” said Sarah.

South Carolina

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Devin Srivastava, 17, of Spartanburg, S.C., a junior at Spartanburg Day School, founded a nonprofit organization promoting an innovative technology that can enable cancer patients to retain their hair during chemotherapy. When Devin’s aunt was undergoing treatment for breast cancer, “she was more terrified about losing her hair than chemotherapy,” said Devin. After intense research, his aunt learned about “cold cap therapy,” a little-known technique in which breast cancer patients wear a specialized frozen cap before, during and after chemotherapy to keep their hair from falling out. Devin discovered that most cancer patients – and even many doctors – are unaware of the technology, but that saving their hair can have a dramatic impact on the success of their treatment and sense of well-being.

Seeing an opportunity to make an impact, Devin spent months working to set up a nonprofit he calls “chemoHAIRapy,” and then built a website to start spreading the word about cold cap therapy. But he wanted to do more than that; he wanted to actually purchase cold caps for his local hospital. So he organized a charity golf tournament last summer. He secured a course for the tourney, worked with graphic designers to design a logo, sought publicity from local media, recruited golfers, and solicited prizes and sponsorships from local businesses. The $9,000 he raised is being used to print brochures about cold cap therapy and to buy an initial set of cold caps for the hospital. “My ultimate goal is to have chemoHAIRapy become well-known in my community and throughout South Carolina so that more families can go through the chemotherapy process with their dignity intact,” said Devin.

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Jackson Silverman, 10, of Charleston, S.C., a fifth-grader at Advanced Studies Magnet-Haut Gap Middle School, persuaded a local food bank to let him start a youth volunteer program there in 2013 that has by now packed more than 14,000 weekend lunch bags for kids in need. “One in four kids go hungry in my community,
but kids can’t change their lives all by themselves,” said Jackson. “That is why I wanted to help them.” He remembered how fun it was to pack bags of food for the hungry at his church when he was a little boy, and knew his local food bank prepared meal bags for kids who got free lunches at school, but had little to eat on weekends. But when he offered to help, he was told the food bank didn’t accept volunteers of his age.

Jackson started his own nonprofit organization called “I Heart Hungry Kids” and, after a little persuasion, got the food bank to agree to a kid volunteer program. He invited his friends to get involved, talked to a newspaper reporter, built a website and Facebook page, and designed a T-shirt to raise money. At Jackson’s first food bank “packing party,” 25 youngsters packed 150 bags of food. Now, 175 kids are packing 1,500 bags a month. “It makes me feel incredible that all these kids want to work together to make other kids’ lives better,” said Jackson, who also has spoken to more than 2,000 people at schools, churches and clubs about the problem of childhood hunger.

South Dakota

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Shelby Specht, 15, of Sioux Falls, S.D., a freshman at Harrisburg High School, has raised $2,000 over the past several years to benefit sick kids in her community by creating and selling candy “bouquets” and cookies. Years ago, Shelby’s brother suffered a crisis following surgery, but was saved by equipment that had been donated by Children’s Miracle Network (CMN). “I thought, if they gave to my family, I should give back,” she said. She began pondering how she could raise money for CMN, and after weeks of research, decided on a project she calls “Kandy for Kids.”

Shelby assembles candy bars and other candy favorites into “bouquets” decorated with tissue paper and colorful streamers. She sells these bouquets and cookies at numerous venues and donates the proceeds to CMN to aid children at Sanford Children’s Hospital and their families. Shelby also volunteers at CMN radiothons every year, speaks to groups of teens and elementary students about volunteering, and recently launched a Facebook page offering volunteering ideas to young people across South Dakota. “Knowing that the work I am doing is making lives better is why I am so passionate about what I do,” said Shelby.

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Danika Gordon, 14, of Whitewood, S.D., an eighth-grader at Sturgis Williams Middle School, promotes kindness and volunteerism among her peers through an online book she authored and through programs she conducts at a wide variety of venues. For years, Danika has participated monthly in service projects such as collecting food, books and coats for those in need; picking up litter in a park; and writing thank-you letters to soldiers stationed overseas. But it was the experience of being bullied that prompted her to create her own service project to persuade young people that “they have ‘super powers’ to spread kindness in the world by being caring, respectful, and volunteering to help others in need,” she said.

In 2013 and 2014, Danika coordinated a “Character Carnival” at a summer kids program, recruiting 10 4-H members to help her teach 70 elementary students about good character. During the school year, she led monthly lessons on character, kindness and service at an after-school program. Then, she packaged her
message in a book titled “What Makes You a Super Hero?” and made it available online, where it has been viewed by more than 20,000 people. She also has collaborated with schools, libraries, after-school programs and youth groups in seven communities to share her book and promote compassion and service. In addition, Danika has trained 18 other students to conduct similar programs in their schools and classrooms.

Tennessee

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Madison Childers, 18, of Murfreesboro, Tenn., a senior at Blackman High School, organized two golf tournaments that have raised nearly $10,000 to send veterans of World War II and the Korean and Vietnam wars to Washington, D.C., to see the memorials erected in their honor. “I was inspired by my grandfather’s service in World War II,” said Madison. “I wanted him to know how much I appreciate his service and dedication to our country. I feel that veterans do the most for our country and they receive the least amount of recognition.”

Working with a group of classmates, Madison persuaded the director of a local golf course to host the tournament, then distributed sponsor packets to more than 100 businesses in Murfreesboro. Next, she and her colleagues collected donations, signed up players and recruited volunteers to help run the event. After what she described as “200 hours of continuous stress and emotional breakdowns,” Madison’s first tournament raised $4,500 – enough to send 10 veterans to Washington with an organization called the Screaming Eagle Honor Flight. A second tournament held last October raised an additional $5,000 for veterans’ trips.

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Graci Semptimphelter, 11, of Franklin, Tenn., a sixth-grader at Battle Ground Academy, helped her mother initiate an activity program for individuals with special needs, and serves as a peer role model for a girl with Down syndrome. Graci learned about working with people with special needs from her little brother, who has autism, and from her mother, who has been friends with a man with Down syndrome since she was 15. Their nonprofit organization, 1Team1Goal, organizes football, cheer and dance teams, trains peer role models, and raises money to train educators on how best to work with kids with special needs.

Graci helps administer the organization’s activities, sends out emails and other communications, and makes T-shirts for the program. She also works one-on-one with a young girl who has Down syndrome, helping her learn to be part of a cheer team. “Through sports, special needs people find out new strengths and abilities, skills and success,” said Graci. “They find joy, confidence and fulfillment. I love helping them find this out about themselves and I love helping our community see how amazing these people are.”
Texas

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Ariana Luterman, 16, of Dallas, Texas, a sophomore at Greenhill School, has combined her passion for competitive triathlon racing with her desire to help homeless children through Team Ariana, which has raised more than $90,000 in donations and more than $40,000 in goods to benefit a local childcare center that provides free early development services for homeless children. Ariana said her life changed the first time she saw a homeless child when she was 8 years old. “It awakened my heart to the reality that all kids did not have a home, a bed, or even a special pillow to call their own,” she said. She began volunteering at the Vogel Alcove childcare center, reading to children, supervising arts and crafts projects, and requesting that instead of gifts, her birthday guests bring donations to benefit homeless children. At the same time, Ariana said, her triathlon performances were beginning to attract national attention. So she decided to capitalize on the opportunity.

So in 2011, she formed Team Ariana. Her idea was to use her name recognition to attract corporate sponsorships and bring awareness to the growing problem of homeless children. She spent months developing strategies and meeting with companies to solicit support. Once she had a clothing sponsor, she designed a line of Team Ariana racewear and created an online store so that other athletes could support her cause with their purchases. She also sold corporate logo placements on her personal race gear and her clothing line to generate funds for Vogel Alcove. In addition, she began speaking to audiences around the country about the issue of child homelessness. “If I can change the course of one child’s life, I have proven I am a real champion,” Ariana said.

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Courtney Janecka, 12, of Woodway, Texas, a sixth-grader at Midway River Valley Intermediate, makes and sells beaded bracelets to enable her mother to give away the book she wrote on surviving cancer to other cancer patients, churches, hospitals and schools. When Courtney was a toddler, her mother was diagnosed with cancer. Although Courtney doesn’t remember that trying time, she has seen how her mother’s story and book have inspired others. “Her book can help people and I decided that I wanted to help too,” said Courtney. “I knew that if I could raise money, we could give her books away to people with cancer.” After a friend heard of Courtney’s plan and sent her a bracelet, she decided she could make and sell similar ones to raise money. “Courtney’s Creations” was born in late 2013.

To make her beaded creations, Courtney buys beads and charms at local and online stores; sometimes people who have heard about her project even send her cases of beads they no longer need. While she makes many of the bracelets herself, she also organizes bracelet-making parties with her friends to increase the number she can sell. Over the past two years, Courtney has sold more than 1,100 bracelets online and at some local stores, raising over $10,000 and enabling her mother to give away more than 800 of her books. Courtney accompanies her mother on trips all over Texas to deliver books, and often speaks in front of large crowds at events. “There are lots of people with cancer and I am grateful I can help some of them,” said Courtney.
Utah

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Barry Donakey, 18, of Orem, Utah, a senior at Timpanogos High School, provides free lawn care and yard maintenance each week to two elderly couples and two widows in his community who are physically and financially unable to take care of their own yards. In 2014, Barry founded a landscaping company that served more than 50 clients in his and surrounding counties. Two of the lawns he mowed each week, however, belonged to senior citizens who could not afford his service. He found that he enjoyed cutting their lawns “because of the wonderful feeling I would get as I served them,” he said. He decided to expand his free service.

Barry estimates that he now spends about six hours a week mowing and trimming the yards of his four pro bono clients. When necessary, he also weeds, prunes, fertilizes, picks fruit from trees, cleans gutters, and takes care of whatever else needs to be done. Recently, for example, he cut down and hauled away five large spruce trees. Barry uses profits from his commercial business to pay for the gasoline, fertilizer and other materials needed to maintain these yards. He estimates that his labor saves each of these households about $1,200 a year. “I never grow tired of the time I spend in service to these elderly persons,” he said.

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Sophia Goodwin, 14, of Draper, Utah, a member of the Girl Scouts of Utah in Salt Lake City and an eighth-grader at Channing Hall, worked with a partner to make hygiene and school supply bags for 38 preschoolers from low-income families in a project they called “Supplies of Love.” A Girl Scout since kindergarten, Sophia has participated in many community service projects in the past. “These have helped shape me into the person I am today,” she said. “Service to your community not only helps out others but makes you feel good inside.”

After Sophia and her partner decided on their project, they began researching schools that had both a Title One preschool program and a majority of students who qualified for free or reduced-price lunches. They then drew up a plan, recruited a mentor to help them, raised money, and shopped for items to promote good hygiene and supplies that would help the youngsters be more successful in school. “I love seeing how small amounts of work can make a big improvement in our community,” said Sophia. “It makes my heart feel all warm and fuzzy.”

Vermont
2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Kiran Waqar, 16, of South Burlington, Vt., a sophomore at South Burlington High School, organized a project to make gift bags for hospitalized children in her community. For the past two years, Kiran has been an active volunteer, instructing the elderly in the use of technology, packaging food for children in Africa, and most recently helping to collect blankets and warm clothing for Syrian refugees. But she wanted to do something to help sick children in her area. “Children have the right to have fun and be happy, even if it may be from a hospital bed,” Kiran said. So she decided that she would fill gift bags with crayons, activity books, notebooks, stuffed animals, stickers and cards to help sick children pass the time while in the hospital.

She began by going from store to store to ask for donations to put in her gift bags. She received $390 worth of items and then recruited a team of volunteers to take on babysitting jobs and donate their earnings to her cause, raising another $300 to help fill her bags with gender-neutral toys. Then she wrote messages to include in each bag. Her project produced enough bags to give 50 kids “something to smile about,” said Kiran.

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Miranda Walbridge, 13, of Barre, Vt., a seventh-grader at Barre City Elementary and Middle School, volunteers in a variety of ways to make her community a better place to live, including working with athletes with special needs, preparing meals for senior citizens, spreading holiday cheer at a nursing home, collecting food for a food bank and wrapping gifts for children in need. “My family has always instilled in me the value of helping others less fortunate, so when the opportunities to help have come up over the years, I have jumped at the chance to make a difference,” Miranda said.

After seeing a flier about the Special Olympics United Sports program, Miranda became a buddy partner to an athlete with disabilities. Even though she had never tried the sport, she served on a snowshoe team and had so much fun and made so many friends that she later volunteered for the bocce team as well, and continues to be a buddy in both sports. “I enjoy seeing the looks of accomplishment on the athletes’ faces when they get the medal or ribbons,” she said. After going with her grandfather to deliver meals to seniors, Miranda decided she wanted to volunteer at the senior center, too, and has learned to prepare, package and keep track of meals delivered to the elderly. In addition, Miranda has joined her Girl Scout troop in entertaining residents of a local nursing home, gathering supplies for a food bank and wrapping donated gifts for less fortunate kids in her area.

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Reshini Premaratne, 17, of Glen Allen, Va., a member of the Partnership for Nonprofit Excellence/HandsOn Greater Richmond and a senior at Maggie L. Walker Governor School, founded a youth service organization in 2010 that has raised $10,000 for the homeless, donated more than 450 pounds of goods, and spread to more than 20 schools throughout Virginia. Six years ago, Reshini volunteered to make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for her city’s homeless, and discovered that many of the perceptions she’d had about homeless people were wrong. “Many students, especially those that live in the suburbs, are not exposed to the homeless
on a daily basis,” she said. With her new appreciation for the plight of homeless people, Reshini resolved to “help my community see beyond their own misconceptions, too,” she said.

Reshini’s organization, “X-Out Homeless,” started with a one-day event at her middle school that focused attention on the issue of homelessness both locally and nationally. Since then, she has organized a wide variety of fund- and awareness-raising activities, including charity figure skating shows, a special “homelessness week” at schools, and events at local businesses. In addition, Reshini started a program last spring that brings together high school students and homeless individuals to learn computer programming and “to foster a community of trust, tolerance and understanding,” she said.

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Chase Anthony, 13, of Virginia Beach, Va., a seventh-grader at Princess Anne Middle School, launched a fundraising drive three years ago that has yielded more than $30,000 to battle breast cancer, after his third-grade teacher was diagnosed with the disease. When Chase found out about his teacher’s illness, he decided to ask for monetary donations instead of gifts on his 10th birthday. Sadly, his teacher died the month before. “She was a great teacher who taught me to never ever give up,” said Chase. So he didn’t.

After collecting his initial funds at his birthday party, he began organizing events to raise more money for a regional affiliate of the Susan G. Komen Foundation. With the help of up to 20 friends at six different schools, Chase has operated lemonade stands, held car washes, conducted raffles, sold T-shirts, and started an annual dodgeball tournament. Last year, he got his whole school to celebrate a “pink day” in support of his campaign, complete with a “pink” pep rally and a “pink” football game. Chase said he gets joy out of helping others and trying to make his late teacher proud.

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Tristan Ryan, 18, of Vancouver, Wash., a senior at Seton Catholic College Preparatory, worked with his brother to raise more than $100,000 to begin a music therapy program for premature infants at a local hospital, and to purchase equipment to reduce noise in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). The brothers, who take on a different project every year to benefit their community, decided on their hospital fundraiser after listening to a family friend describe how hearing live harp music had brought her peace during the very stressful three months that her premature twins were confined to the NICU. “I had spent 11 days in intensive care at birth, and know how hard that was on my parents,” said Tristan. “Their stories inspired me to act on behalf of newborns and their families to provide the best possible environment and care at our local hospital.”

The boys visited the hospital to find out more about the NICU and its needs. They learned that, according to many studies, noise has a negative effect on the growth of premature babies, but music enhances healing and development. So they decided to raise money to bring regular music to the unit and purchase monitors that would cut down on extraneous noise. The brothers developed a presentation to illustrate the need and then met with a local philanthropist, who agreed to match up to $25,000 of whatever they raised. Over the next two months, the brothers met with local businesses, friends and family members to ask for financial support. They
also sold poinsettias at Christmastime, held a Super Bowl fundraiser and threw a Valentine’s Day dinner at their house. In the end, they received 117 donations, providing $103,432 for the hospital.

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Emma Murphy, 14, of Enumclaw, Wash., an eighth-grader at Enumclaw Middle School, raises both money and awareness for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF) to seek a cure for Type 1 diabetes, and also volunteers at school and church in a variety of ways. “I’m very passionate about freeing the world from diabetes, a disease we’ve battled for thousands of years,” said Emma, who is diabetic herself. Every year she leads a team called “Emma Jane’s Gang” that participates in a walk-run fundraiser in Seattle called “Beat the Bridge.” She also raises funds at school for JDRF, makes public appearances to focus attention on diabetes, and helps her father with an annual fundraiser they hold at their home.

In addition, Emma has helped lead recycling activities, food drives, and other service projects at her school; worked at a local food bank; helped with a beach cleanup; supported Special and Senior Olympics; and entertained residents at an adult family home. “All of these activities make an impact because they make others feel good, make the world a better place, and start a chain reaction of kindness and support for each other,” said Emma.

West Virginia

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Sofia Salon, 16, of Daniels, W.Va., a sophomore at Woodrow Wilson High School in Beckley, organized a 16-hour rocking chair “rock-a-thon” on June 20, 2015, that drew considerable attention in southern West Virginia to the battle against Alzheimer’s disease and raised more than $17,000 for Alzheimer’s research and care. “After watching my grandma having struggles being a caregiver for my grandfather, I was motivated and determined to do something to make a difference for families coping with Alzheimer’s,” said Sofia. She heard that the Alzheimer’s Association promoted various kinds of fundraising activities across the country each year on the summer solstice, and decided she would take part in “The Longest Day” event by creating a rock-a-thon.

Sofia persuaded the Raleigh County Commission on Aging to help with her event and lend its facilities. Then she invited teams from across southern West Virginia to raise money and participate in the rock-a-thon. From 5 a.m. to 9 p.m. on June 20, the teams and other participants rocked in rocking chairs, danced, sang karaoke, played games, and bid in a silent auction. “The most memorable part was when my grandpa sang karaoke, after dancing with my grandma twice,” said Sofia. When it was all over, she had collected $17,258 to fund Alzheimer’s research at West Virginia University and to support caregivers and medical workers in her state, making her one of the nation’s top 10 “Longest Day” fundraisers for 2015.

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE
Arin Dorsey, 13, of Fayetteville, W.Va., a member of the Girl Scouts of Black Diamond and an eighth-grader at Fayetteville High School, organized a “Milk and Cookies with Santa” event to entertain local children and solicit donations of toys and money for the homeless. Arin became interested in homelessness after meeting a fellow Girl Scout who was homeless at one time. She began to research the subject, and contacted the administrator of a local homeless shelter to learn more about the needs of its clients. Then Arin asked her Girl Scout council to help her hold a holiday event that not only would delight local youngsters, but also collect donations to brighten the season for homeless people.

Arin distributed invitations through schools to 800 children, secured space from a local church, arranged for donated cookies and decorations, and recruited a Santa Claus and other adults to help manage her event. Afterwards, Arin gathered all of the donations, assembled “care packages” of food and toys, and delivered them to the 130 residents of the Pinehaven Homeless Shelter. “At this point, I learned how donations and giving help reduce their feelings of loneliness and abandonment,” said Arin.

Wisconsin

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Ananya Murali, 18, of Shorewood, Wis., a senior at Shorewood High School, designed and conducted an educational leadership camp to teach more than 100 middle school girls life skills and strategies to stand up against bullying and other forms of aggression in school. Ananya became interested in that subject when her family experienced harassment and discrimination after moving from India to the U.S. “They started smashing our car windshields and tires and saying ‘Go back to your country, we don’t want you here,’” said Ananya. She did some research and learned that bullying is a huge problem in schools, especially for minority children. “I was determined to take action,” she said.

With $2,000 in grant money and the help of several dozen youth and adult volunteers, Ananya developed an anti-bulling/leadership curriculum and then organized a camp at a local middle school called “Step-Up Against Bullying and Violence.” The more than 100 girls in attendance heard national and local speakers, took part in group discussions and team-building activities, learned peace songs written by Ananya and participated in a yoga session. Since then, Ananya has conducted her camp for more than 1,000 youth at other schools, Girl Scout gatherings, Native American reservations, an international youth peace conference and five schools in India. Because of her efforts, Ananya was invited to be a delegate and speaker at the United Nation’s 59th Commission on the Status of Women.

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Luke Smith, 13, of Manitowoc, Wis., a seventh-grader at Wilson Junior High School, raises awareness of people with special needs, promotes inclusion through speeches in his community, and helped raise money to build a rubberized baseball field and an all-accessible playground for children with and without disabilities. He also is an avid volunteer for the local Humane Society. Luke, who has autism, was bullied when he was in elementary school because he was different. But instead of making him withdrawn and fearful, the experience motivated Luke to stand up for victims of bullying and prove his ability to make a difference in his town.
Luke began his volunteer work at the Humane Society, where he helped with fundraisers, brought in supplies and fostered special-needs animals because “no one understands like me what it is to be different.” After hearing about the Miracle League and its desire to build a special baseball field and playground that children with special needs could use, he gave public presentations to raise money and awareness for the project, recruited players and coaches for games, and was chosen to sing the National Anthem at the field. To combat bullying, Luke, a peer ambassador for Generations Against Bullying, gives speeches to promote universal acceptance. He also uses the intervention techniques he learned as an ambassador to stand up when he sees someone being mistreated.

Wyoming

2016 HIGH SCHOOL STATE HONOREE

Grace Belize Anderson, 16, of Devils Tower, Wyo., a member of the Crook County 4-H and a sophomore at Wyoming Virtual Academy, recruited school classmates, fellow 4-Hers and state FCCLA members to fill 600 shoeboxes with gifts for children in third-world countries, war zones and areas hit by natural disasters. For over a decade, Grace has helped her family prepare gift-filled shoeboxes for children in need as part of Operation Christmas Child (OCC), a program run by an international relief organization called Samaritan’s Purse. “I am passionate about helping children,” she said. “I took for granted that others knew about OCC shoeboxes, but when I talked to people I was surprised to learn many had never heard about them before.”

Grace decided she needed to make others aware of how they could help. To educate fellow students about the project, she organized a school assembly featuring a skit she wrote, then distributed a list of suggested gift items and invited all attendees to a “packing party.” Grace also sought help from county 4-H clubs through a presentation and a newsletter, and started getting assistance and donations from community members after a newspaper published a story on her project. In addition, Grace held a packing party for delegates at a state FCCLA conference last fall, which filled 368 shoeboxes. The boxes, containing toys, school supplies, hygiene items and crafts, not only show desperate children that someone cares about them, but also help people understand what life is like in places where many kids have never received a gift, said Grace.

2016 MIDDLE LEVEL STATE HONOREE

Selah Jordan, 14, of Gillette, Wyo., an eighth-grader at Sage Valley Junior High, helps her family conduct church services once a month at a local nursing home, and spends time with the residents afterward to keep them company. Selah used to visit her grandmother at the nursing home, and was always struck by how much other residents, too, brightened up and made her feel welcome. “Their faces would literally light up,” she said. “It really hurt my heart to see how lonely they are and eager to have visitors.” So when Selah’s family volunteered to hold worship services at the facility, she definitely wanted to help.

“At first, I was very shy and scared,” she said. But she quickly warmed up to her role of spreading the gospel, choosing hymns to sing and lending her voice to musical numbers. When the service is over, Selah visits with the attendees. “I enjoy hearing their stories,” she said. “They are so sweet. Whenever I go, I feel like I’m part of their family. I love to brighten someone’s day with a helping hand and a smile.”