

Young Aurora leaders recognized with 2020 Give Back Awards

It remains to be seen whether students will be able to get back into their classrooms before the end of the 2019-2020 school year, but 20 Grade 12 students preparing for post-secondary education this fall have been recognized for the enduring legacies they have left behind.

To mark National Volunteer Week last month, Neighbourhood Network announced the 2020 recipients of the Give Back Awards, an annual cash prize donated by Magna International to recognize students, regardless of their specific post-secondary plans, who have dedicated themselves to making their schools and wider communities better places to live.

Last week, The Auroran spotlighted five recipients attending Aurora schools, and this week we profile their peers:

KIANA MIRSHAHI (Aurora High School)

From a young age, Kiana had a burning passion to help people; specifically, vulnerable and marginalized groups that have trouble getting their voices heard. Within school, she has been actively involved in various clubs such as Mental Health Council/Wellness club, Social Change Makers, Student's Global Issues Club and she has also been an active member in her school's Equity Club. Outside of school, Kiana is an active peer to peer supporter and founding member of a youth lead mental health initiative called Peerify and is a member of the Town of Aurora's Youth Engagement Committee. Kiana aspires to make the world a better place and she believes it's the act of volunteering that assures her she is working towards her dreams. An interesting fact about Kiana is that she is a music fanatic. She loves singing, writing songs, playing the piano and anything else music-related!?

CHRISTINA

PARASKEVOPOULOS (Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School)

Christina believes volunteering is an important element in her school and community and finds fulfillment in helping others. She is part of her school's Peer Mentor Group, Art of All event, has assisted in elementary school track and field days, planned and ran the school's annual Swabbing Drive (to match bone marrow donors) and has volunteered at Parents' Night. In addition, Christina has taken on many leadership opportunities, such as being a leader of their We to We Team which holds monthly initiatives to help local and global communities, has led the team Sarah's Stars for the Light the Night walk and has been a dedicated member of the Wildcats Relay for Life team. Giving Back to Christina means sharing her time and skills with organizations to make a positive difference.?

ELISE QUAIL (ESC Renaissance)

?Elise is passionate about spreading positivity wherever she can. She has been a very active volunteer in both her school and community. She is Executive Pastoral Council President, leader of various Pastoral committees, Student Council Vice-President and Relay for Life leader, Grade 7 camp leader, Anti-Bullying Committee member, plus many more. She has been involved with many initiatives that support local charities such as Inn from the Cold, Blue Doors Shelter, and the Aurora Food Pantry. Elise believes that it is important to find joy in every moment and to make meaningful and long-lasting connections with people around her.?

ABIGAIL REIST (Aurora High School)

?Abigail has been committed to making her community better. She has made many positive contributions to students and has demonstrated significant initiatives and generous acts of kindness to those in need. She has dedicated a lot of her time at the Teen Challenge Ontario Women's Centre, a rehabilitation for women overcoming substance addictions. She volunteers at her church where she participates in the band, Sunday School program, summer day camp, and she also sits on the Mission Committee where she helps decide which organizations to support financially. On top of all the hours Abigail spends volunteering, she has had a story published by Polar Expressions Publishers.?

AMANDA ROUND (Aurora High School)

?Amanda is a hard-working student and a dedicated volunteer. Within her school, she founded STEM, a group of volunteers who create eco-friendly projects and educate others about environmental sustainability. She has led a co-ed team to program a weather station, started school-wide campaigns such as #dontrashtech and she has also fundraised for causes such as supporting rain forest conservation in Ecuador. Aside from volunteering Amanda loves singing, reading, and being a plant mom. She plays competitive soccer and has played the French horn in her school band for six years. After graduation Amanda is planning to attend McMaster University where she hopes to major in molecular biology and genetics with a minor in environmental science.?

By Brock Weir