

## **2020 St. Vincent's Youth Award Winner**

### **Allen Raja Iona Preparatory, Class of 2020**

Firstly, I would like to thank St. Vincent's for the nomination. I would like to thank Iona for enabling me to be at the service of our community and those beyond it. I would also like to congratulate my fellow nominees and thank them for their service. Since I was a child I realized my life is bigger than me. The purpose of my life is to serve others. I can remember being the only kid in my Church and going to senior citizens home, with my Sunday school teacher, year after year celebrating holidays, giving cards, playing piano, and singing. In my years at Iona I tried to serve the community as much as I could from human rights club to peer ministry to music ministry. In my freshman year I tried to do some service, for example, Hope Kitchen, food pantries, and working with the developmentally disabled. In my sophomore year I worked as an intern explainer at the Bronx Botanical Garden. In my senior year I have led the Iona ACTs, Acceptance, Community, and Toleration. In my junior and senior, I have founded and led the Gaels-For-Life. I wanted my service to help as many people as possible and be as diverse as possible.

My junior year my English teacher had offered to be the moderator of a club that I had wanted to do since I joined the Iona community. She, the Father at our school, a religion teacher, and a group of my friends formed the Gaels-For-Life. I became the President and Founder of Gaels-For-Life. "Gaels for Life is a Christ-centered community within Iona Prep. We believe in the dignity of every human person from the moment of conception to natural death. Our goal is to promote, defend, and pray for all stages of life." We were conceived after the RHA was passed in New York and our purpose is to serve, care, and protect the right to life. Our first big movement within Iona was the Mother's Day drive in which we gathered together supplies for mothers and babies in-need and drove down to the Sisters-For-Life in Lower Manhattan to drop off the supplies and talk about their experiences. This year we hope to do the same and at the beginning of the year we had a display with 125 crosses representing the 125,000 lives lost each day due to abortion. My future for the club was to expand the conception of right for life to those suffering from mental health conditions to those with disabilities to human trafficking.

Just as the Sisters of Charity I believe in the dignity of all human beings. All I have ever wanted to do is protect and serve life by respecting and showing compassion for those in need. All I have ever wanted to do through my service, through this club and all my other service, is to help those in need and advocate for them. I have put blood, sweat, and tears into everything I do because I want my life to have a purpose, at the service of others.