

2020 St. Vincent's Youth Award Winner

Angelo Del Toro Iona Preparatory, Class of 2020

Supported by a belief in respect and compassion for all, excellence in service, the dignity of human life and commitment to the community, St. Vincent's Hospital Westchester has upheld their mission statement of committing to Charity and Excellence in health care in an atmosphere of support and shared ministry. My dedication to service at Iona Preparatory School has very well reflected this mission statement. This is through my experiences campaigning for the separation of families at the border to be stopped, hosting unaccompanied immigrant children at our school, and advocating the right to a nationality in the Dominican Republic, last summer.

My dedication to service began forming during my sophomore year. This was through different clubs at my school. The Human Rights Club and African American Society were the clubs that I enjoyed participating in the most. I regularly attended club meetings, and soon enough I would become an integral part of the Human Rights Club, and was awarded a leadership position in the African American Society.

Although I enjoyed the sense of community and security that the African American Society provided, I realized that there was a lack of representation for the Latinx Community in my school. Because of this, I dropped out of the club and began to plan and form my own club, Latinos Unidos. I envisioned a vehicle of service and inspiration for students looking to provide aid to the global and local Latinx community in Westchester, NY. Around this time, the first project began to take shape.

As I took on more responsibilities in the Human Rights Club. I was elected to the school's ACTION team, a group of 3 or 4 students that attends a leadership/advocacy workshop hosted by the Edmund Rice Christian Brothers North America. It is with this team of three, that I led and organized a schoolwide letter-writing campaign urging senators and bishops to help stop family separation at the US-Mexico border. After a few dedicated weeks, we were able to obtain around 175 student signatures and receive a favorable response from our senators.

Beginning my junior year, I was met with a lot of support in creating the club. And by the middle of the year, we were able to fulfill my vision and establish a relationship with the charity organization, Abbott House. They are a nonprofit that provides a home and community to foster children, unaccompanied immigrant minors, and adults with developmental disabilities. Through this relationship, I was able to host unaccompanied immigrant children for a day at our school and create a service opportunity for my schoolmates. This was a huge success and is something that has continued this year. Everyone enjoyed themselves playing soccer, learning about chemistry, and sharing stories over pizza.

At the same time, a growing sense of altruism, knack for taking initiative, and self-confidence, all pushed me to advocate about an issue that I was touched by: statelessness. The issue in which someone doesn't legally belong to any state or country, it is a human rights violation that is seldom talked about in the news nor readily recognized despite having created a population of "invisible" people in 77 of the world's 195 countries. Statelessness restricts people from attending school, working, getting proper healthcare, marrying, obtaining legal identification, and registering their children at birth. It is particularly a problem in the Dominican Republic.

After a guest speaker hosted by our Human Rights Club told us about the issue and presented us with a children's book about it, *The Girl Who Lost Her Country*, I was drawn to the idea of using the book to help others understand the importance of a nationality. I seized the opportunity to do so after discussing it with the Human Rights club advisor and she helped me devise a plan through which I would translate the book into Spanish, raise money to print copies, and reach out to schools and community centers in the Dominican Republic.

Over the course of that school year and summer, I coordinated the project through different Non-Governmental Organizations, schools, community centers, and printing companies in the Dominican Republic. I raised \$2200 through a school-wide basketball tournament and a private donor and was able to have the books printed in Spanish. Between the 19th and 25th of August, I visited the Dominican Republic and personally distributed over 600 books to six different schools and organizations, talking to their directors and administrators about my project and the issue.