



2021 Recipient ~ Charlie Cooper
The Masters School, Class of 2023

I am a 16-year-old tenth grader at the Masters School. I've grown up with brothers and parents who have been role models for treating others with empathy and kindness and have taught me the importance of giving back to the community. Two years ago, I applied to become a Youth Ambassador for the Tourette Association of America. My older brother has Tourette Syndrome (TS), which means he has both physical and vocal tics. As a Youth Ambassador, I received training so that I could give presentations to raise awareness about TS. During my first year as a Youth Ambassador I visited several elementary schools in Westchester/Rockland counties to teach about TS and to spread a message of tolerance and compassion. The presentations stress the importance of accepting people's differences and being kind to others. I have found these presentations to be extremely impactful. Based on questions and comments made by students in the audience, it's obvious that even elementary school-aged kids understand how they can help those with differences by offering friendship and tolerance. As a Youth Ambassador, I have also become a buddy to a local 10-year-old with TS. The time we spend together is meant to boost my buddy's confidence and give him an opportunity to be himself without worrying about being judged. Kids with TS often feel the need to suppress their tics. My buddy knows that I don't judge him and that I like him as he is.

My actions as a Youth Ambassador reflect the values of St. Vincent's in that I am teaching the importance of respect and compassion for others. In the past year, with COVID restrictions in place, I have not been able to give school presentations, unfortunately. However, I have participated in Youth Ambassador programming and spent time with my buddy. In the year before COVID, I spent approximately 40 hours on public speaking training, presenting at elementary schools, and attending Youth Ambassador events.

Another activity that reflects the mission of St. Vincent's Hospital is a club I started at Masters called Exposure. Through photography, Exposure has partnered with My Brother's Keeper (MBK), a program set up by President Obama to address opportunity gaps faced by young men of color by helping them reach their full potential. As an avid photographer, I wanted to expose the art of photography to students who might not otherwise have such an opportunity and to give them an outlet to express themselves creatively. The Masters was very much on board with the idea and even provided a \$1,500 grant so that Exposure could buy digital cameras for the MBK students to use. The idea of the club is to invite the MBK kids to Masters once or twice per month for approximately 1-1/2 hours. Exposure volunteers (which currently includes 15 enthusiastic Masters student photographers) will "expose" the MBK kids to a brief photography lesson

each visit, followed by time to photograph the campus and practice skills, all while having fun and forming friendships. Due to COVID, we are currently holding virtual sessions every two weeks and are very much looking forward to meeting in person next fall.

Creating and running Exposure has been the highlight of my high school experience. I have spent more than 50 hours in the past year preparing a Power Point presentation to get club approval from the Masters administration, applying for grant money from Sony, Canon and Masters, creating lesson plans and ice breakers for each Exposure session, and enlisting Masters student volunteers. I was gratified when an MBK student recently told me that he wished Exposure met every day instead of every two weeks. Just as St. Vincent's Hospital believes in "excellence in service ... and commitment to the community," I am committed to the MBK community and hope to continue to make a positive impact through Exposure.

Last, I wanted to write about an activity I performed last spring while home from school due to COVID. I put a flyer in neighbors' mailboxes and offered to take "Porch-traits" to capture life in quarantine. I didn't charge for the photos but requested that the families donate to a charity/organization engaged in the fight against COVID. I raised approximately \$800 for various organizations, including St. Vincent's Hospital. I spent approximately 20 hours advertising my services, taking photographs and editing them. I was able to raise money for charities while families commemorated this unique time in their lives. Taking Porch-traits was my small way of using my photography skills to be a useful member of the community. In this way, my efforts were aligned with the mission of St. Vincent's.