

2020 St. Vincent's Youth Award Winner

Christopher Betancourt Fordham Prep, Class of 2020

Prior to becoming a student at Fordham Preparatory School, I volunteered at the after-school program run by my elementary school, Immaculate Conception School (ICS), in the Melrose section of the Bronx. I decided to continue with that program through my high school years, as I recognized from my own experience that students in my neighborhood are at great risk on many fronts, and also I saw how important it was to have teachers and mentors who believed in you. I am now a group leader, whose responsibilities include assisting children with homework, implementing fun activities, distributing snacks, and organizing special events, etc. By the time we broke due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I had completed almost 300 hours of service. I completed around 70 hours per year during my four years at Fordham Prep, the last 70 were required as part of my senior service project. I have also served at Part of the Solution (POTS) with my senior religion class.

Starting in the beginning of my Junior year, I joined a community-based, activist group called "Take Back The Hub" Committee, which attempts to stem the tide of drug abuse in my part of the Bronx known as the Hub. Since I have joined, I have participated in several rallies, written speeches that were then delivered publicly, and been interviewed by various media outlets (*Bronx Times*, *New York Times*, *News 12 The Bronx*, and *The Mott Haven Herald*). As a result of our efforts, the community has become safer and we have given voice to the people who lacked one. We feel increasingly empowered to seek justice, to demand affordable housing and access to healthcare, and to find ways to help our neighbors who struggle with addiction. I have worked with that committee for several hours a month during both junior and senior year.

In my volunteer and community service experiences, the main groups of individuals I have impacted are children through tutoring at ICS; drug addicts of all ages through our committee's call for action; and all members of our community through advocacy to make our neighborhoods safer and a good place to live for all. I believe that I have developed a commitment to my community and have realized the true importance of treating every individual with dignity. I learned that, especially, in coming to recognize that persons who suffer from drug addiction are my fellow human beings, who ought to be treated as possessing the same God-given dignity that everyone else has. From the initiatives I have taken and the values that ICS and Fordham Prep have instilled in me, I believe that I have developed a lifelong pattern of volunteerism. I thank the St. Vincent's Hospital Westchester Youth Awards Committee for this opportunity to apply for this prestigious award.