

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

### **David Pizzutello Harrison High School, Class of 2021**

My name is David Pizzutello, and I am currently a junior at Harrison High School. I've been involved in community service from a very young age and I hope to continue on throughout my life. I believe that my values align with the mission of St Vincent's Hospital and reflect respect and compassion for others, excellence in service, the dignity of human life, and commitment to the community.

For as long as I can remember, my parents have encouraged me to give back to the community in any way that I can. My passion in life has always been sports, because it gives people a sense of comradery, commitment, confidence and to feel a part of something. I have been able to combine my love of sports with my desire to give back to others.

One way I have been able to do this is by volunteering with the New York Raptors Ice Hockey Club. The Raptors is a unique hockey program open to children and young adults with special needs, both developmental and emotional. It allows those with disabilities the chance to play hockey as an organized league sport. For the past three years I have been fortunate enough to work with the Raptors organization and I look forward to finishing out my Senior year with the team as well. We practice every Sunday from September to April and, together, we share our love for the game of hockey. The players all have a different range of ability, so it is vital that the volunteers really get to know the kids so we can best assist them and help them through their challenges. Over the years I've developed a very good relationship with the players, based on trust and respect for each other.

This year I was honored to get the Raptors involved with my own high school hockey team. We put together an event where the Raptors played in a game before my high school team played. We advertised it through social media and through our schools to get people there to support the Raptors program. Along with auction items and ticket sales we were able to raise over \$3,000 and increase awareness about this incredible program. It was such a great experience seeing how excited the Raptors players were and it was amazing how much support they received. One of the younger Raptors players had the opportunity to take a penalty shot where he gets to start at center ice with the puck with nobody else on the ice. My high school teammates and I, along with an arena filled with supporters, cheered and went wild as Tommy skated across the ice and took a shot at the opposing goalie. Knowing how challenging this was for him, and knowing how much work and effort these players all put into the game of hockey, the smile on his face was absolutely priceless. I know the money we raised from that event will give a lot of other kids the opportunity to partake in the program, but the experience we shared together that day, to play in front of family and friends, was something I know we all won't forget.

In addition, I volunteer my time at the Pleasantville Cottage School. The Cottages is a school and home to emotionally troubled boys and girls. I work with a particular group of ten boys ranging from 7-18 years of age. We play sports together on the weekend, our favorites being basketball and football, and we then have a big lunch afterwards. The weekends are often a difficult time because the kids don't have a home to go to or a family to visit them, so it can be very lonely. My goal is to create a bond of friendship through sports and give the kids something fun to look forward to. I know I always enjoy the time I spend with my group, and when it's time to leave it's sometimes sad, but we talk about what we will do together the next time. Two other areas in which I have volunteered and given back through sport are the New York Rangers

Learn to Skate program and Harrison High School's Buddy Club. With the NY Rangers program I helped teach young children the basics of ice hockey and skating in general. And through the Buddy Club, I have worked with special needs students in my high school after class to play a wide variety of organized games and sports. Both of these programs highlight teamwork, camaraderie and the spirit of sport.

Overall, I know I have grown so much through my volunteer services and I honestly believe that I have gained more than I have given. Finding a common bond, in my case sports, helped me to find the courage to reach out to others and help make a positive impact in their lives. I'm confident that this is just the beginning of how I can be effective in helping others and serving my community.