



**2021 Recipient ~ Justine Karp  
Scarsdale High School, Class of 2022**

On a Saturday night last summer, two friends and I found ourselves with nothing to do, like most other nights that summer. We hadn't been in school since March due to Covid, and we were wondering if we'd even be back in school in the fall to start our junior year. In the past, this was the time of the year that we prepared our annual pilgrimage for new school supplies. We entertained the idea of driving to Staples, but returning to school seemed unlikely at that point. I had noticed an article in our local newspaper that said several struggling communities were seeking school supply donations for their students to work effectively from home during the pandemic year. Since we could not yet buy the supplies for ourselves, we became excited to get them for others. Soon, "In The Bag" was born.

The idea was simple: utilize social media to reach out to everyone we knew to contribute gently used backpacks and secure financial donations. We raised over \$1,300 dollars and received over 175 backpacks. Our next stop, of course, was Staples. We recruited "helpers" and created assembly lines in my dining room to fill the bags with fresh supplies and PPE items. We then connected with Ryer Avenue Elementary School in the Bronx and Westchester Jewish Community Services to help us distribute the bags. In less than two weeks, I helped to make a simple idea into something tangible that would have a direct impact on other kids. Over time, we created a more systematic way of handling the process, so we could complete our mission more efficiently than ever.

I credit much of the success of In The Bag to my experiences with other service organizations, including my regular shifts at the soup kitchen at St. Bartholomew's Church in White Plains and my co-founding of Baby2Baby at Scarsdale High School. At St. Bartholomew's Church, I have developed profound relationships with many of the soup kitchen attendees, and there is one man in particular, John, who I have developed a friendship with. After bringing out the food, we often sit and discuss current events and movies. For the past ten years, I have continued to build these relationships at this soup kitchen and they have changed my perception of the world around me. I have also dedicated significant time to Baby2Baby, an organization that is like In the Bag in its commitment to having a direct impact on nearby communities by delivering diapers and other baby and child products to needy families. We have donated over 7000 diapers and more than 500 jackets to donate to 914Cares. We raised these items through the result of bake-sales and various fundraising efforts as well as easily accessible drop-off stations. I believe my work at St. Bartholomew's Church, Baby2Baby, and In The Bag epitomize the St. Vincent's mission; I have become more compassionate and socially aware of my surroundings and the needs of others.

I named our organization "In the Bag" for obvious reasons, but for me it had a double meaning. For months prior, I had internalized the pandemic, focusing on how it stunted my ability to do all of the things that I felt excited about. Still, I was able

to learn remotely on my own computer, get a summer job, and even prepare for my school soccer season! Yet only a few miles away from my house, people were suffering terribly from the physical and economic impact of the coronavirus. It didn't feel like it, but in the scheme of things, much of my life was still "in the bag" compared to almost everyone else. I like to think that the bags I delivered helped empower students in some small way at a time when their lives are upside down.