

2020 St. Vincent's Youth Award Winner

Mary Branley The Ursuline School, Class of 2021

When I realized that I was able to help in my school community in middle school, I was eager to start helping with the Religious Education Program. I started volunteering at the beginning of my Seventh Grade year and they assigned me to help a Third Grade class. I would come after school every week for an hour and a half and help the teacher and the students in any way I could. After that year, I realized that I wanted to become an educator in the future because I enjoyed seeing what it felt like to help others learn in the classroom and helping them to grow as students. The next year, they needed help in the First Grade classroom and I have helped in that First Grade class ever since I was in the Eighth Grade. This teacher has shown me different teaching methods in the classroom which has made me even more eager to want to become a teacher.

This teacher also gave me an opportunity to help with another program that she runs outside of the Religious Education program. She runs a program called *Fun for Cure*, an organization that teaches children with disabilities to engage in many activities such as tennis, yoga, and music. I have helped with many of their programs and I started the summer after Freshman year, right after I was informed of the program. The first program I had helped with was the Adaptive Tennis Program over the summer. In the beginning, many did not know how to play. By the end of the 5 sessions, some were able to play and I was even able to have a rally with some of them, which I saw as a huge accomplishment.

While a lot of my volunteer work has taken place outside of my high school community, I also try to stay involved within my school. I am part of my school's SADD club, which is the Students Against Destructive Decisions. I have been an active member of this club since the beginning of my sophomore year. In our club, we have hosted events such as a dance for 9th and 10th grade students to raise money for the Lexington Center in New Rochelle. We have also bought toys for the children with parents who are receiving treatment at Lexington Center and gift cards for their parents and we went and handed them out at a Christmas celebration.

My community service reflects the mission of St. Vincent's Hospital because they show commitment to their community, and I try to help my home and school communities by helping with the Religious Education program, volunteering with *Fun for Cure*, and by being an active member of my school's SADD Club.