



**2021 Recipient ~ Mia Suarez
School of the Holy Child, Class of 2022**

Throughout my time at Holy Child I have grown to appreciate the importance of giving back to the community. Over the last three years, I have dedicated over 130 hours to helping less privileged and food insecure people in different ways. During the summer after my freshman year, I spent three days a week volunteering as a camp counselor at the Boys and Girls Club of Northern Westchester; a non-profit organization dedicated to serving local youth, located in Mt. Kisco, NY. As a counselor, I enjoyed working with and mentoring the elementary school kids who attended the camp. They were so appreciative of the time we spent together each day and it was equally rewarding for me to know that I was making a difference in their lives.

Leading up to the summer after my sophomore year, I was once again looking forward to returning as a volunteer for the Boys and Girls Club. However, the pandemic emerged resulting in the cancellation of the summer camp. While the pandemic prevented me from working at the camp, I was determined to find other ways I could give back; specifically, how I could continue serving those who were vulnerable and in need.

After doing some research I learned that, although the Boys and Girls Club was not running a camp, they had become a food delivery site for Feeding America. The Club was looking for volunteers to help unload food from their trucks and hand it out to local families in need and I knew I wanted to help. Last summer, we fed at least one hundred families each week. This experience opened up my eyes as I had no idea as to how many food insecure people lived locally in my community.

As my desire to give back grew, I became eager to get more involved with Feeding America and all it encompassed. So, I also took action and worked that entire summer babysitting for local families. With the money I earned, I donated about half of it to Feeding America. Then, I introduced Feeding America to my school by co-founding a club dedicated to raising awareness of food insecurity and organizing a food drive for Feeding Westchester. Our club became an incredible success story. With a total of thirteen members and the support of our entire student body, we created one of the biggest food drives Holy Child has ever hosted. Countless student volunteers helped with counting the cans, organizing them into boxes, and packing them into the cars. In addition to preparing for the food drive, we also got the chance to educate the community through prayer, videos, and games. As a result of this food drive, we collected and delivered over 2,000 lbs. of food to Feeding Westchester and other local food banks. I could not have been prouder of our new club and its accomplishments.

Volunteering these past few years has really opened my eyes to how important it is to give back to our community and make it a better place for everyone. I look forward to finding new opportunities and continuing to dedicate my time to helping others.