

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

### **Scott Goldban Scarsdale High School, Class of 2021**

My volunteer work this year has been for The Innocence Club, which is a club that I founded at Scarsdale High School in the fall of 2018 in order to raise awareness about wrongful convictions and the need for criminal justice reform.

I was first exposed to the issue of wrongful convictions and false imprisonment while on a civil rights journey to the South in eighth grade. On that trip, I visited the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama, and I learned that approximately five percent of the people in jail are actually not guilty of their crimes. As the President of the Innocence Club, I organize and lead presentations about this issue at bi-monthly club meetings. I also bring in speakers (both exonerees and legal experts in the field) to educate the SHS community about this great injustice. A proud moment was on Global Citizenship Day in October, when I organized a panel discussion in the auditorium led by John Bunn, an exoneree, and Glenn Garber, the founder of The Exoneration Initiative, the legal defense organization that helped set him free. At a club meeting in December, I hosted a skype seminar with Northwestern professor Sarah Sommervold, who discussed her work with the Center for Wrongful Convictions at Northwestern University. In February, I brought in Jeffrey Deskovic, an exoneree from Westchester, and Mimi Rocah, former US attorney and candidate for Westchester County District Attorney, to speak to SHS students about criminal justice reform.

In addition, we have held fundraisers for the Exoneration Initiative and we recently completed a book drive, collecting approximately 6,000 books for the Voice 4 The Unheard, an organization that distributes used books to prisons to help promote literacy. Most of these books are going to inmates at Rikers Island. I hope that awareness about wrongful convictions can impact the prevalence of such cases, and that by helping to promote literacy in the prison population, inmates gain the tools to help themselves (both in and out of prison). I especially value the relationships I have developed with exonerees, which give me perspective about what it truly means to have faced adversity and overcome it. I am now currently working on the social media platforms for The Exoneration Initiative, John Bunn, and Jeffrey Deskovic, who are all working towards the common goal of freeing innocent people from prison. I spend approximately six hours per week volunteering my time towards this cause.