

# 15 Young People, 4 Groups Honored with the Governor's Youth Volunteer Service Award

NEW CASTLE (May 19, 2021) – Highlighting the difference that young volunteers make in their communities, Governor John Carney will present the Governor's Youth Volunteer Service Awards virtually to 10 individuals, four groups and five emerging leaders in recognition of their service to Delaware.

"Giving back to our communities is one of the most selfless things a person can do," Governor Carney said. "It makes me proud for the future of our state to see the number of young people we are honoring this year and the range of their volunteer activities, despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. These young people are helping to change the lives of people in need and serving as an inspiration for others to follow their lead."

In the past year, the State Office of Volunteerism programs worked with a total of 3,544 individual volunteers reporting 643,863 hours of service to the State of Delaware. In economic terms, those volunteers contributed \$29 million in service to Delaware and its residents.

"In honoring the contributions of time and passion by these young volunteers receiving the Governor's Volunteer Youth Service Award, we recognize youth helping their fellow Delawareans," said Kanani Hines Munford, Executive Director of the Governor's Commission on Community and Volunteer Service. "Their commitment is helping us to build a stronger community through volunteerism, as well as to develop the next generation of leaders."

The 2021 youth award recipients served their communities during a difficult year by assisting with food distribution,

collecting toiletries and hygiene items, making and delivering cards, supporting individuals with disabilities, finding unique ways to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, providing emergency services and working to find alternate ways to continue traditions like birthday parties and local holiday celebrations. The honorees are representative of Delaware's young people who are making a positive contribution to society and inspiring others to do the same.

Honorees will be announced during a Facebook Live broadcast on May 20, 2021, and their stories will be told during a virtual ceremony to air during the 2021 Delaware Volunteerism Conference on August 26, 2021. Those who will not be attending the conference, but are interested in viewing this event can view it for free on the Volunteer Delaware Facebook page or online at [volunteer.delaware.gov](http://volunteer.delaware.gov) beginning immediately after the end of the conference.

The Governor's Youth Volunteer Service Awards, administered by the State Office of Volunteerism, honor the contributions of individuals and groups in Delaware that have made a positive impact in their communities or across the state through service and volunteering. The awards are sponsored by the Office of the Governor, the Department of Health and Social Services, Division of State Service Centers, State Office of Volunteerism, and the Governor's Commission on Community and Volunteer Service.

For more information about the awards or volunteer opportunities, go to [volunteer.delaware.gov](http://volunteer.delaware.gov), or contact Suzanne Farris, Volunteer Services Administrator, at 302-857-5006 or via email at [Suzanne.Farris@delaware.gov](mailto:Suzanne.Farris@delaware.gov). Congratulations to the recipients of the 2021 Governor's Youth Volunteer Service Awards:

## **INDIVIDUALS**

**Brian Alleyne Jr.**

## **New Castle County**

Brian volunteers at The Warehouse as a Youth Ambassador and provides daily upkeep and landscaping assistance to the facilities department. Brian's work makes The Warehouse look and feel warm and inviting when constituents come to visit and/or participate in activities. Brian also assists the facilities department with daily sanitization of the inside of the facility, keeping the building in line with COVID-19 protocols. Brian is an active volunteer at The Warehouse events and never hesitates to jump in and support the team whenever and however he can.

## **Ashley Burns**

### **Kent County**

Ashley made thank you cards that were distributed to first responders; hats and scarves using a crotchet loom for people experiencing homelessness; and no-sew blankets that were distributed to various organizations. She collected canned foods that were given to USO Delaware Community Center. Ashley participated in Polytech High School's Candy-Grams event in which she collected candy that was given to the Milford Veterans Home. Ashley also helped collect birthday party items for "Birthday in a Box," which were delivered to students to help celebrate their birthdays at home. Ashley worked to coordinate a drive-through Halloween Celebration so children in Kent County would be able to celebrate Halloween during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Emily Chesser**

### **Kent County**

Emily spends much of her time knitting beautiful hats and scarves for people experiencing homelessness. She has also collected candy for Stockings for Soldiers and participated in a project with HeartArt making cards. Emily made more than 100 thank you cards to send to veterans, active duty soldiers and first responders. She helped with Polytech High School's Candy-Gram event, in which candy was collected to donate to

the Milford Veterans Home. She has collected birthday supplies to make "Birthday in a Box," helping some of her peers and children in foster homes to celebrate their birthdays at home with all the fixings.

### **Brynn Hovatter**

#### **Sussex County**

Brynn is a member of the 4-H club, Cypress Heart and Hands, and has been able to attend monthly nursing home visits, annual Adopt-A-Family festivities, and Meals on Wheels. Brynn has served as president for the past few years to lead her club members to become better leaders. In Junior Council, she has been an active leader, currently holding the office of vice president and has previously held the reporter office. She has mentored and taught younger youth as a counselor at Georgetown Day Camp, Experience Extension Day Camp, and Fall Overnights. She also has been able to help at the annual Spaghetti Dinner, International Dinner, Operation Christmas Child Trips and Hopkins Farm Tours.

### **Merve Kekik**

#### **New Castle County**

Merve has been a regular volunteer with Zakat Foundation of America and has been actively involved in various projects to serve the community. Merve has helped Zakat Foundation by packing hundreds of boxes with nonperishable food and hygiene items and delivering them door-to-door in Wilmington. More than 100 young kids were fed with healthy snacks packed in small boxes during the COVID-19 lockdown. Merve was instrumental in engaging a group of young volunteers to organize a hygiene items drive, collecting and assembling more than 100 hygiene kits. She helped lead a group of high school students who gave virtual tutoring sessions in math, reading and writing to younger children, which lessened the burden of some families in the community.

### **Ava Rudishvahca**

#### **Kent County**

Ava volunteers with Embrace Delaware, where she serves with a gentle and willing heart to love those affected by disabilities. Ava has provided a relationship and friendship with participants at events she has worked with one-on-one. She has built a friendship with a child who is on the Autism spectrum and struggles to make friends. Ava shows up not only at Embrace Delaware events but also stops by to see her friend with autism at their house. Ava is always willing to go above and beyond when serving our Embrace friends with disabilities.

### **Aidan Stephen**

#### **Kent County**

Aidan spends his Saturdays and Sundays at the Delaware State Fire School from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. training to be a firefighter and emergency medical responder. He also actively volunteers with the fire company auxiliary to help with food service and COVID-19 protocol to ensure a safe environment. He has spent five years volunteering with the Camden Wyoming Fire Company. Aidan was one of the responders after the tornado devastated areas of Kent County in August 2020. He responded to and assisted citizens who were forced to climb out of a window into the arms of Aidan and other responders after being trapped in their home when trees fell on their house. These and many other citizens can sleep well at night knowing they can count on Aidan when an emergency arises.

### **Adithcharan Thyagarajan**

#### **New Castle County**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Adith conducted a Computer for Kids drive. He raised enough funds to donate more than 70 computers through the Urban Promise Organization in Wilmington. Urban Promise is a nonprofit organization that educates and helps low-income family students. Adith was able to help the students of low-income families receive laptops to attend online school during the pandemic, which allowed many students to be able to continue their education and attend classes on Zoom, thus lifting their spirits during this

unprecedented time.

**Aminah Washington**

**New Castle County**

Aminah demonstrated her commitment to social activism by walking 2.23 miles in memory of Ahmad Aubrey. She created signs and peacefully protested the unjust killing of George Floyd. She is also passionate about community engagement. She leads her siblings and cousins in a family service project bi-annually in which bags with toiletries, hand warmers, snacks, feminine supplies and socks are assembled to hand out to individuals experiencing homelessness. Prior to quarantine, Aminah provided more than 50 hours of service to help Rose Hills Community Center's food distribution program. She also assisted with our Bethel AME Food Ministry and Ronald McDonald Meal Prep.

**Shanell Wooten**

**New Castle County**

Shanell has volunteered over 125 hours with various communities throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. She has sorted, lifted, and provided food, gloves, toothbrushes, toothpaste, gift cards and more to hundreds of families. During this time when people were in great need of food, Shanell did not hesitate to assist during food distributions, collecting items and raising funds to provide families with gift cards. She also organized a sock drive, word search and goodie bag drive for our elderly citizens who have been having a difficult time adapting to being unable to see their family members due to COVID-19 guidelines. She is currently working on getting more youth involved with volunteering in their local communities with the food distribution.

**GROUPS**

**Early College High School Hornets in Action**

**New Castle, Kent, and Sussex County**

The Early College High School Hornets in Action volunteered

350 hours putting together the Manna Bags project. Students collected personal care items, such as soaps, lotions, creams, shampoo, toothbrushes, toothpaste, diapers, wipes, and socks among many other items. The group assembled and sorted all items and assembled personal bags. They were able to provide more than 110 personal bags consisting of personal care items for women, men, children and babies, which were distributed to shelters, the Veterans Home and at Code Purple sites in New Castle, Sussex and Kent counties.

### **Masks from the Heart**

#### **New Castle, Sussex, Kent County**

During a critical time in the COVID-19 pandemic, Masks from the Heart provided protective facial coverings to more 2,000 individuals. When school and sports were canceled, Brynn String and Mylee Wilkie (both age 13) found a need in the community and spent hours sewing, organizing, gathering supplies and distributing facial coverings to first responders, nursing homes, hospitals, fire departments and more. When requests started flooding in through their Facebook page, instead of becoming overwhelmed, they sewed for hours every day and did interviews on the radio and with newspaper reporters to recruit more sewers to help them meet the demand.

### **Students at St. Mary Magdalen School**

#### **New Castle County**

The students at St. Mary Magdalen School participated in many projects. They collected donations to help feed the hungry and packed more than 160 brown bag lunches and 120 goody bags for the children in Ministry of Caring shelters and child care centers. The students created inspirational messages on each bag. They made more than 30 fleece blankets, made 24 pounds of fruit salad and collected cases of baby wipes. They collected more 500 coats, hats, scarves, and gloves – and perhaps the most caring of all – prepared a luncheon for the low-income senior residents at the Village of St. John, consisting of baked ziti, salad and dessert, as well as bingo games and

prizes.

### **Zakat Foundation Team with a Dream**

#### **New Castle County**

The Team with a Dream fed many families and children, distributed paper products, hygiene kits, winter relief items, masks and gloves to various organizations and communities throughout Delaware. The young members of the team coordinated with each other to organize the hygiene kit drive and the Knit for the Needy projects to collect all the items needed. In partnership with Family Promise of Delaware, the team served hot dinners to families experiencing homelessness who are temporarily staying in motels. In addition to food relief, the talented team members also helped each other and the younger students by providing virtual learning sessions. Many younger students in the community benefited from the team members' one-on-one support and mentoring.

## **EMERGING LEADERS**

### **Layla Gainer**

#### **Sussex County**

Layla is the founder of Project Sparkle On, Inc. Layla, now 10 years old, has made it her mission to inspire others to join her on her kindness crusade and to inspire other kids to participate in various community service endeavors with her. Through her organization, Layla has raised money to buy 500 superhero capes for hospitalized children to wear in their "Be the Impact Day" event, as well as to send handmade Christmas cards to military troops overseas through their project "The Dear Soldier Crusade." Layla and her organization have adopted residents at several senior-living nursing homes during such holidays as Christmas and Valentine's Day. Layla also conducts multiple random acts of kindness for local police departments, retail stores, and post offices.

### **Arjan Kahlon**

#### **New Castle County**



Arjan saw the disparate ways in which school nurses were recording details about COVID-19 cases and suspected COVID-19 cases and realized the need for an organized system to monitor the cases at each school. Volunteering to find a solution, Arjan consulted with an epidemiologist at ChristianaCare and developed a system for the nurses to record and track important information from parents, doctors, the schools and the Delaware Division of Public Health. This allowed school nurses to effectively communicate when students were safe to return to in-person learning. This system has since been implemented by schools servicing nearly 1,500 students.

### **Divita Taduvayi**

#### **New Castle County**

Divita Taduvayi is the founder and president of Girls Tech Together, an international nonprofit organization that introduces elementary girls to computer science through a novel, interactive curriculum. Through this organization, Divita has taught more than 150 girls through a 10-week program and has also established several chapters globally. She leads the Student Executive Team, consisting of ambassadors, mentors and event coordinators who have expanded the initiative from Delaware into more communities. Divita's programs last up to 10 weeks, and she is able to ensure that each girl is developing over the course of the sessions, creating a lasting impact.

### **Abigale Townsend**

#### **New Castle County**

Abigale has completed hundreds of hours of volunteer work and service both during the year 2020 and throughout her high school career. Abby hosted a School Supplies Drive for the organization Urban Promise Wilmington; sent letters of encouragement to behavioral health hospital patients at Wilmington Hospital; and sent Valentine treat bags to church members with disabilities and to Alzheimer's patients at ChristianaCare. More than 350 school supplies were donated to

Urban Promise Wilmington's school; 70 Alzheimer's and elderly hospital patients received Valentine treat bags/words of encouragement; and behavioral health patients received Christmas cards and letters of encouragement. She encourages others to attend and support service projects and volunteer opportunities.

### **Ann Stewart Wall**

#### **New Castle County**

Ann Stewart took the initiative to preserve the Christmas in Odessa tradition of fresh greens sales and created a record of the process, which up until now, has been an oral tradition. Her goal was to gather information from past greens sales and create a digital record that can be passed along to the next Christmas in Odessa and Greens chairpersons. Ann Stewart not only created a digital record of the past and present, but also led wreath-making events prior to the main event. The success of the Christmas in Odessa Greens sales would not have been possible or successful without Ann Stewart's leadership.

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