

**Ohio's Top Youth Volunteers Of 2019 Selected By National Program**  
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**The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards honors Mason students with \$1,000, medallions and trip to nation's capital**

**Finalists also named in Mount Vernon, Grove City, Mason, Delphos, Kent, Cincinnati and Cleveland**

COLUMBUS, Ohio, Feb. 5, 2019 /PRNewswire/ -- Bryan Yan, 17 and Tanya Keskar, 13, both of Mason, today were named Ohio's top two youth volunteers of 2019 by The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards, a nationwide program honoring young people for outstanding acts of volunteerism. As State Honorees, Bryan and Tanya each will receive \$1,000, an engraved silver medallion and an all-expense-paid trip in early May to Washington, D.C., where they will join the top two honorees from each of the other states and the District of Columbia for four days of national recognition events. During the trip, 10 students will be named America's top youth volunteers of 2019.

The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards, now in its 24<sup>th</sup> year, is conducted by Prudential Financial in partnership with the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). These are Ohio's top youth volunteers of 2019:

**High School State Honoree: Bryan Yan**  
***Nominated by St. Xavier High School***

Bryan, a senior at St. Xavier High School, formed a nonprofit organization that recruits volunteers to provide academic and other kinds of assistance to local children who are not being raised by their biological parents. Because Bryan's mother teaches at an inner-city school, he has been very aware that some students live in foster or group homes because their parents are addicted to opioids. "Mom worries about her students even after work," he said. "She tells me frequently how much her students need and deserve support." So, as a freshman in high school, Bryan began volunteering at a ministry serving people who need help. But when he realized how many children were affected by the opioid epidemic, he decided to organize an effort specifically to address that crisis.

Over the past three years, Bryan has recruited more than 50 volunteers from local high schools, the University of Cincinnati, companies and organizations to lend individualized support once a week to kids living with non-biological parents. They provide academic assistance, mentoring and extracurricular activities at various locations, including libraries, group homes and food banks. More than 800 kids have benefited so far, and of those who have received academic help, over 80 percent have significantly improved their school grades. Bryan's organization also has sponsored two youth symposia to connect young people to mental health services, job opportunities, college admissions personnel, GED programs and other resources; organized an annual summer camp for 88 elementary and middle school students in need; and distributed printed materials at city events to raise awareness of the impact of drug addiction on children. "I truly believe all children should have the opportunities to achieve their fullest potential regardless of family circumstances," said Bryan.

**Middle Level State Honoree: Tanya Keskar**  
***Nominated by Mason Middle School***

Tanya, an eighth-grader at Mason Middle School, built a website to raise awareness of the poverty she had witnessed in the slums of India, and hosted an event that brought in \$1,000 to cover a full year of education expenses for 40 Indian children. Before Tanya visited several slums on a family trip to India, she had no idea that some people lived in such poverty. "The people were living without proper schools, roads, houses, food, electricity and opportunity," she said. "It was so sad." Then, she added, "I realized that I had all the resources I needed to make a difference. I knew I had to help them."

Upon returning home, Tanya founded a nonprofit organization called "Realize to Act," and created a website describing her experience in India with words, photos and videos. Afterward, she decided to host a "giving event" to further increase awareness of poverty in India, and to raise money for the education of children there. With help from her parents, Tanya designed promotional fliers, secured sponsors, booked a venue, lined up multiple speakers, sold tickets and served as master of ceremonies. Proceeds from the event were donated to an organization that works to educate Indian children in need and break the cycle of poverty.

"What is the point of life?" Tanya asks. "I believe it is to help our world. If we all work together to make the world a little bit better, imagine how beautiful it could be."

### **Distinguished Finalists**

The program judges also recognized eight other Ohio students as Distinguished Finalists for their impressive community service activities. Each will receive an engraved bronze medallion.

These are Ohio's Distinguished Finalists for 2019:

**Matthew Dinnen, 17, of Mount Vernon, Ohio**, a senior at Mount Vernon High School, uses language skills he learned in his high school Spanish classes to volunteer with HOLA, a community program that offers educational assistance and social support to local Hispanic families. Along with helping children complete homework and improve their English, Matthew also helps facilitate Hispanic cultural activities and recruits other students to participate in the organization.

**Cameron Gantz, 17, of Grove City, Ohio**, a senior at Grove City High School, has contributed hundreds of volunteer hours to his community, including cleaning up his high school as a National Honor Society member, leading the children's nursery at his local church and visiting children in hospitals and daycares, dressed up as a superhero. Inspired by family and friends who also volunteer, Cameron hopes that he can make a difference in the lives of those in his community.

**Rishika Jeyaprakash, 13, of Mason, Ohio**, a seventh-grader at Mason Middle School, created and leads "Little Helpers," a volunteer team of more than 450 youth volunteers who work together on different volunteer opportunities each month, from collecting more than 1,200 toys for the Cincinnati Children's Hospital to visiting residents at retirement homes and creating thank-you cards for local police officers. Rishika is currently in the process of establishing the organization as a nonprofit.

**Allison McClurg, 18, of Delphos, Ohio**, a senior at Delphos Jefferson High School, is an active community volunteer who recently helped plan and execute an "Aware Fair" for more than 500 students from two local high schools, dedicated to educating students about self-defense, drug and alcohol abuse and mental, spiritual and emotional health. Allison was inspired to coordinate this event after experiencing a home invasion last year.

**Rachel Mileski, 15, of Kent, Ohio**, a sophomore at St. Vincent-St. Mary High School, is the founder of "Ray's Hope," which organizes a variety of volunteer opportunities for teens, from cooking meals for a drop-in center for youth struggling with homelessness to fundraising for homeless pets. Rachel was inspired to start volunteering for those experiencing homelessness after helping an elementary school classmate who didn't have winter boots or a coat in the Ohio winter.

**Manasi Singh, 16, of Cincinnati, Ohio**, a member of the Greater Cincinnati-Dayton Region Red Cross and a junior at Indian Hill High School, serves as an American Red Cross National Youth Council field ambassador; along with other ambassadors, Manasi implemented national campaigns and increased youth involvement for the organization. Manasi is also the founder and president of her high school's Red Cross chapter, now the school's largest service-related club with more than 100 members.

**Xavier Walsh, 13, of Cleveland, Ohio**, an eighth-grader at Ohio Connections Academy, is a contributing member of the youth ambassador program for the Renee Jones Empowerment Center, a nonprofit that provides services for human trafficking and sexual assault victims in Northeastern Ohio. Along with playing music for the organization's documentary video, Xavier participates in monthly street outreach, offering social services to people living in areas with high levels of prostitution and drug abuse.

**Danyang Yue, 15, of Cincinnati, Ohio**, a junior at Indian Hill High School, is the founder of "Better Education for Stronger Teeth" (BEST), a nonprofit that has provided oral care education and products to more than 7,000 kids living in the U.S., China and Cambodia. Working directly with communities around the world, Danyang was first inspired to start BEST after learning about the lack of oral hygiene education and resources in the rural villages in China where her parents grew up.

"These young volunteers learned and demonstrated that they can make meaningful contributions to individuals and communities through their service," said Prudential CEO Charles Lowrey. "It's an honor to recognize their great work, and we hope that shining a spotlight on their service inspires others to consider how they might make a difference."

"Each of these honorees is proof that students have the energy, creativity and unique perspectives to create positive change," said JoAnn Bartoletti, executive director of NASSP. "We commend each of the 2019 honorees for their outstanding volunteer service, and for the invaluable example they've set for their peers."

### **About The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards**

The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards represents the United States' largest youth recognition program based solely on volunteer service. All public and private middle level and high schools in the country, as well as all Girl Scout councils, county 4-H organizations, American Red Cross chapters, YMCAs and affiliates of Points of Light's HandsOn Network, were eligible to select a student or member for a local Prudential Spirit of Community Award. These Local Honorees were then reviewed by an independent judging panel, which selected State Honorees and Distinguished Finalists based on criteria including personal initiative, effort, impact and personal growth.

While in Washington, D.C., the 102 State Honorees – one middle level and one high school student from each state and the District of Columbia – will tour the capital's landmarks, meet top youth volunteers from other parts of the world, attend a gala awards ceremony at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, and visit their congressional representatives on Capitol Hill. On May 6, 10 of the State Honorees – five middle level and five high school students – will be named America's top youth volunteers of 2019. These National Honorees will receive additional \$5,000 awards, gold medallions, crystal trophies and \$5,000 grants from The Prudential Foundation for nonprofit charitable organizations of their choice.

Since the program began in 1995, more than 125,000 young volunteers have been honored at the local, state and national level. The program also is conducted by Prudential subsidiaries in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Ireland, India, China and Brazil. In addition to granting its own awards, The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards program also distributes President's Volunteer Service Awards to qualifying Local Honorees.

For information on all of this year's Prudential Spirit of Community State Honorees and Distinguished Finalists, visit <http://spirit.prudential.com> or [www.nassp.org/spirit](http://www.nassp.org/spirit).

### **About NASSP**

The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) is the leading organization of and voice for principals and other school leaders across the United States. NASSP seeks to transform education through school leadership, recognizing that the fulfillment of each student's potential relies on great leaders in every school committed to the success of each student. Reflecting its long-standing commitment to student leadership development, NASSP administers the National Honor Society, National Junior Honor Society, National Elementary Honor Society, and National Student Council. Learn more at [www.nassp.org](http://www.nassp.org).

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***For Spirit of Community Awards program logo and medallion graphics, please visit <https://spirit.prudential.com/resources/media>***



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