

California's Top Youth Volunteers Of 2018 Selected By National Program
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The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards honors Santa Barbara and Portola Valley students with \$1,000, medallions and trip to nation's capital
Finalists also named in San Jose, Chula Vista, Dublin, San Ramon, Garden Grove, Elk Grove, San Diego, Tarzana and Daly City

SACRAMENTO, Calif., Feb. 6, 2018 /PRNewswire/ -- Michelle Qin, 17, of Santa Barbara and Autumn Bright, 12, of Portola Valley today were named California's top two youth volunteers of 2018 by The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards, a nationwide program honoring young people for outstanding acts of volunteerism. As State Honorees, Michelle and Autumn each will receive \$1,000, an engraved silver medallion and an all-expense-paid trip in late April 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 2018.

The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards, now in its 23rd year, is conducted by Prudential Financial in partnership with the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP).

These are California's top youth volunteers of 2018:

High School State Honoree: Michelle Qin
Nominated by Dos Pueblos High School in Goleta

Michelle, a junior at Dos Pueblos High School, is the founder and CEO of a nonprofit organization comprised of more than 100 students in California, New Jersey and British Columbia who work to help girls and women around the world overcome poverty and gender inequality. In 2015, a friend of Michelle's returned from a trip to Guatemala and showed her pictures of girls living in poverty. "I was touched so profoundly because those girls were my age," said Michelle. "Their stories opened my eyes to the spectrum of privilege we live in, and I realized that geographical situations alone can change the course of our entire lives and future."

Michelle decided to organize a club at her school to assist the girls she'd seen in the photos, initially by holding bake sales to help pay education costs. As the club expanded to include more than 100 members in three branches, it obtained nonprofit status and tackled a variety of ambitious projects. So far, Michelle's "Together to Empower" organization has not only raised funds to help 550 Guatemalan girls go to school, but also made it possible for several Ugandan women to learn microfinance skills, organized a two-week computer coding camp for 25 girls, hosted a fundraising banquet to promote safe health practices for African women, and held tech workshops to teach 50 girls how to develop mobile computer applications. The group is now planning to publish an art book depicting various artists' interpretations of womanhood.

Middle Level State Honoree: Autumn Bright
Nominated by Corte Madera Elementary School in Portola Valley

Autumn, a seventh-grader at Corte Madera Elementary School, raised more than \$23,000 last year to build an orphanage for 12 abandoned children in India, and to dig a fresh-water well and purchase school supplies for the kids. During a family trip to India in 2016, Autumn was stunned by the poverty she saw there. "The most shocking part was that a large majority of those on the streets were children around my age and younger," she said. "I realized how privileged we are in the United States."

Upon returning home, Autumn researched aid organizations and learned that she could build her own orphanage through a charity called Angel House, but she'd have to raise \$23,500 to do it. With help from some friends, she began baking cookies, dog treats and other food items, and selling them at a nearby park after school and in front of local grocery stores on weekends. She also became a certified babysitter and emailed town residents offering her services. In addition, she collected money by growing and selling plants, pet sitting, watering neighbors' shrubs and flowers, and soliciting donations. "All of the money I raised will go toward building a twelve-child Angel House and a fresh-water well, as well as buying brand new school shoes and fully stocked backpacks," said Autumn. The orphanage, she said, "will provide the children with a

safe home, healthy meals, a great education and so much love for years to come."

Distinguished Finalists

The program judges also recognized 10 other California students as Distinguished Finalists for their impressive community service activities. Each will receive an engraved bronze medallion.

These are California's Distinguished Finalists for 2018:

Mythri Ambatipudi, 17, of San Jose, Calif., a senior at Saint Francis High School, is the founder of "WoolyWarmth," an initiative that has mobilized 40 volunteers to crochet and knit more than 5,000 items over the past four years for newborn babies, cancer patients and the homeless. Mythri, who has recruited both high school students and senior citizens to create the items, was motivated to give back by the cherished baby clothes the hospital gave to her family when she was born.

Anthony Colarusso, 17, of Chula Vista, Calif., a senior at Eastlake High School, is a dedicated volunteer with the Jewish Family Service's Hand Up food pantry, serving since 2014 with a teen leadership board that recently collected 6,200 pounds of food and \$6,700 for the facility. Anthony, who has been volunteering with the pantry since 2008, has met with legislators in Sacramento two years in a row as a Hunger Action Day delegate for the teen board, and also helped to establish a Hand Up club at his school.

Huong Le, 17, of San Jose, Calif., a senior at Piedmont Hills High School, plays a leadership role in the Rotary Vietnam Project, combatting human trafficking in her native country by raising money for scholarships for at-risk girls and providing soccer balls to children in need in Vietnam and around the world. In addition to supporting efforts ranging from website development to convention outreach, Huong has worked with her co-chair to recruit dozens of young participants to support their mission.

Allison Loo, 17, of Dublin, Calif., a senior at Dublin High School, is the founder of the "Plushies Aimed to Comfort Hearts (PATCH)" club at her school, leading 70 members to collect hundreds of stuffed animals and books and volunteer in a number of ways to support abused children. Allison, inspired to start the club by the beloved stuffed bunny she received from a support center after reporting her own childhood sexual abuse, also secured a city grant to host a child abuse prevention awareness campaign at her school.

Meachelle Lum, 17, of San Ramon, Calif., a senior at Dougherty Valley High School, was motivated by her mother's death from an aneurysm caused by arteriovenous malformation to start an initiative with her dad called the "Lum AVM Organization," raising awareness of the condition and money for charitable causes. Since starting the organization in late 2016, more than \$90,000 has been raised to support causes ranging from brain aneurysm research to scholarships to women and children's charities.

Kathryn Morgan, 17, of Garden Grove, Calif., a senior at Ocean View High School, is a dedicated advocate for local LGBTQ youth, supporting a number of community outreach activities through the LGBT Center OC and leading the Gender and Sexuality Alliance club at her school. Kathryn attended a conference in Philadelphia last year to increase her impact in the community, and recently helped coordinate a drag show to empower local youth and fund a trip to the next conference in Washington.

Jupinder Parmar, 18, of Elk Grove, Calif., a senior at Franklin High School, leads a weekly computer class for children staying at a women's shelter, reaching nearly 90 students over the past four years with instruction on topics from basic functionality to Microsoft Word. After learning that many kids in the shelter had only limited exposure to computers growing up, Jupinder created a curriculum to ensure that they had the skills they needed to fully participate in school activities.

Sarah Ruhe, 17, of San Diego, Calif., a senior at Junipero Serra High School, led the charge in persuading her school administration to adopt the Rachel's Challenge anti-bullying program, and since her junior year has served as president of the "Friends of Rachel Club" that organizes acts of kindness for students and staff. After benefiting from Rachel's Challenge programming in middle school, Sarah worked diligently to ensure that similar programming was offered at her high school, too.

Genevieve Weinstein, 18, of Tarzana, Calif., a senior at CHAMPS Charter High School of the Arts, is an active volunteer with a teen-to-teen crisis hotline, working four to five shifts a month to guide other young people through crises ranging from suicidal thoughts to abuse to school stress. Genevieve completed a rigorous 65-hour training program to qualify for the position; today, in addition to dealing with calls, she also

speaks at school and community events to raise awareness of the hotline and recruit volunteers.

Justin Yamamura, 17, of Daly City, Calif., a senior at St. Ignatius College Preparatory, is the founder of the "Youth Policy Initiative," a nonprofit that has hosted two weeklong civics and leadership summer camps for middle school students from diverse backgrounds. Justin's camps have reached 55 seventh- and eighth-graders with opportunities to learn about politics and advocacy, and to travel to downtown San Francisco to hear directly from city officials and activists.

"Prudential is proud to recognize these remarkable young people for using their energy, creativity and compassion to bring meaningful change to their communities," said Prudential Chairman and CEO John Strangfeld. "We hope their stories inspire others to consider how they can do the same."

"These middle level and high school students have not only improved the lives of the people and communities they've served – they also set an important example for their peers," said JoAnn Bartoletti, executive director of NASSP. "These honorees prove that you're never too young to make a difference."

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 April 30, 10 of the State Honorees – five middle level and five high school students – will be named America's top youth volunteers of 2018. 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 120,000 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, Brazil and Poland. 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.

About NASSP

The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) is the leading organization of and voice for middle level and high school principals, assistant principals, and school leaders from across the United States. The association connects and engages school leaders through advocacy, research, education, and student programs. NASSP advocates on behalf of all school leaders to ensure the success of each student and strengthens school leadership practices through the design and delivery of high quality professional learning experiences. 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. For more information about NASSP, located in Reston, VA, visit 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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