

Georgia's Top Two Youth Volunteers Selected in 18 th Annual National Awards Program
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Roswell and Cumming students earn \$1,000 awards, engraved medallions and trip to nation's capital

Honors also bestowed on youth volunteers in Atlanta, Alpharetta, Augusta, Lawrenceville, Claxton and Milton

David Resnick, 18, of Roswell and Kelsey Hirsch, 13, of Cumming today were named Georgia's top two youth volunteers of 2013 by The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards, a nationwide program honoring young people for outstanding acts of volunteerism. David was nominated by Centennial High School in Roswell, and Kelsey was nominated by Piney Grove Middle School in Cumming. The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards, now in its 18th year, is conducted by Prudential Financial in partnership with the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP).

David, a senior at Centennial High School, plays a leadership role in an organization that throws an annual holiday party for more than 750 children from homeless shelters throughout Atlanta. When David was 10, his sister asked the guests at her bat mitzvah celebration to bring books for homeless kids, and David helped deliver them to a local shelter. "I loved seeing how happy those people were to receive the gifts," he said. Three years later, he decided to do something similar at his bar mitzvah, but asked his guests to bring toys instead of books.

Just before his event, David read about a local girl who years earlier had used her bat mitzvah gift money to put on a holiday party for children at a homeless shelter, and then turned the idea into an annual event called "Amy's Holiday Party." "I was so excited about what Amy had created that I contacted her to tell her that I would donate all the toys that I collected to her organization," said David. Amy responded by inviting David to serve on the teen leadership committee that oversees her holiday parties, which have grown into huge events for more than 750 children, with a DJ-led dance party, carnival games, a catered lunch and two brand-new toys for each child. As a teen leader, David visits shelters, brainstorms ideas, helps fundraise, interacts with local philanthropists, and plans the logistics of each holiday party. He also has been a peer facilitator for students with disabilities at his school, and has collected candy for U.S. troops, volunteered at the Atlanta Food Bank, and mentored a child with autism in his Hebrew class.

Kelsey, an eighth grader at Piney Grove Middle School, sold more than \$14,000 worth of silicone wristbands to help the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN) respond to a recent surge in call volume from victims of sexual violence. After hearing about the allegations of sexual abuse at Penn State University, Kelsey, whose parents are both Penn State alumni, felt she needed to do something to help survivors of sexual assaults. "I want to make sure this never happens again," she explained.

She designed a blue silicone wristband and met with RAINN officials to propose selling them for \$3 each to support RAINN's mission. The organization agreed to publicize her effort, and Kelsey began selling the bands through friends and relatives, social media and events sponsored by other advocacy groups. The money she raised so far has helped RAINN increase its capacity to handle a 47 percent increase in volume on its telephone and Internet hotlines that occurred since the Penn State scandal broke.

As State Honorees, David and Kelsey 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 2013.

Distinguished Finalists

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

These are Georgia's Distinguished Finalists for 2013:

Julia Abelsky, 18, of Atlanta, Ga. , a senior at North Springs Charter High School, founded "Operation

Smiles," a youth-led volunteer group to help those in need and provide an inspiration for other young people to reach out and help others. Since 2009, Julia has raised more than \$10,000 and provided holiday gifts to more than 100 children, donated more than 8,000 holiday treats to shelters, delivered 5,000 cards to hospitals, and sent funds to help those recovering from disasters in Japan and Africa.

Ben Bearup, 14, of Alpharetta, Ga., an eighth-grader at Webb Bridge Middle School, co-founded "Sheltering Books," a nonprofit organization that has provided more than 155,000 gently-used books to homeless shelters in the United States, as well as to schools in need in other countries, VA hospitals and the military. Ben, whose sister co-founded the organization with him, has raised more than \$65,000 to fund shipping costs and has partnered with agencies and companies across the country to help donate and distribute books.

Mary Claire Birdsong, 18, of Augusta, Ga., a senior at The McFarlane School, founded "Go Nuclear," a nonprofit organization through which she hopes to educate the public about the safety and efficiency of medical radioisotopes for use in cancer treatment and energy production. Sara, who started her campaign in 2012, has since raised more than \$5,500, conducted more than 50 presentations, and collaborated with scientists to help spread the message about nuclear energy.

Chase Czaykowski, 15, of Lawrenceville, Ga., a freshman at Atlanta Adventist Academy, produced a video and website to tell the tragic stories of several Burmese refugees who fled their war-torn land and were placed in a refugee camp in Georgia. Chase, whose mom started working with the young refugees at the camp, has helped raise more than \$11,000 through his website to provide food, clothing and other necessities for the families at the camp.

Sara McCorkle, 17, of Claxton, Ga., a member of the Evans County 4-H and a senior at Pinewood Christian Academy, has raised more than \$30,000 in cash and in-kind gifts by chairing her 4-H trail ride events since 2009. Sara, who manages a team of volunteers, reaches out to local businesses for support, coordinates a raffle and live auction, and has been able to provide 4-H camp scholarships to 293 young people with the money she has helped to raise.

Shaurya Verma, 17, of Milton, Ga., a senior at Milton High School, founded "MDJunior," an organization that brings together medical professionals with middle and high school students in underserved communities to help inspire children. Shaurya has raised more than \$40,000 to support the organization, which today has 20 chapters in seven states, 114 mentors and nearly 600 participating students.

"Prudential is proud to honor these students for making meaningful contributions to their communities," said Prudential Chairman and CEO John Strangfeld. "We hope that shining a spotlight on their initiative, creativity and compassion inspires others to consider how they, too, can make a difference."

"Through their volunteer service, each of these young people has made his or her mark on at least one person, school or community," said JoAnn Bartoletti, executive director of NASSP. "When you consider the collective impact of each of these individual acts, it's clear that young people can be a major force for good."

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 HandsOn Network affiliates, were eligible to select a student or member for a local Prudential Spirit of Community Award. Nearly 5,000 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 2013. 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 100,000 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 and India. 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 on behalf of President Barack Obama.

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

NASSP (National Association of Secondary School Principals) is the leading organization of and national voice for middle level and high school principals, assistant principals, and all school leaders from across the United States and more than 36 countries around the world. The association provides research-based professional development and resources, networking, and advocacy to build the capacity of middle level and high school leaders to continually improve student performance. Reflecting its longstanding commitment to student leadership development as well, NASSP administers the National Honor Society™, National Junior Honor Society®, National Elementary Honor Society®, and National Association of Student Councils®. For more information about NASSP, located in Reston, VA, visit www.nassp.org.

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Editors: For full-color pictures of the Prudential Spirit of Community Awards program logo and medallions, click here: <http://bit.ly/Xi4oFW>

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