

Mississippi's Top Youth Volunteers Of 2018 Selected By National Program
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The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards honors Nettleton and Indianola students with \$1,000, medallions and trip to nation's capital
Finalists also named in Natchez, Ackerman, Watervalley and Oxford

JACKSON, Miss., Feb. 6, 2018 /PRNewswire/ -- Grace McAllister, 15, of Nettleton and Jameshia Attaway, 14, of Indianola today were named Mississippi'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, Grace and Jameshia 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 Mississippi's top youth volunteers of 2018:

High School State Honoree: Grace McAllister
Nominated by Monroe County 4-H in Aberdeen

Grace, a freshman at Nettleton High School, has collected and donated more than 1,000 new stuffed animals to comfort children traumatized by sexual abuse and let them know that they are not alone. Grace knows firsthand the immeasurable pain of being abused by a person she trusted. "Being a survivor of sexual abuse at the hands of my own father, the one person who should protect me, not hurt me, I decided I wanted to help other victims," Grace said.

Grace was abused from the age of 6 until, at 10 years old, she found the courage to tell her stepmother what was happening. What followed were months of interviews, counselors, lawyer visits, court appearances and the disbelief of some family members, she said. She felt nobody understood. So, Grace created a YouTube video to tell her story and encourage others to "break the silence." It's been viewed more than 40,000 times. She then contacted a local Family Resource Center with a proposal to provide stuffed animals to young abuse victims. She held collection drives through her Facebook page, raffled off a huge teddy bear to raise money, and partnered with local businesses to collect stuffed animals. She also started an "ambassador" program to encourage children in other states to collect stuffed animals for their local resource centers. "I have gained the knowledge that I am a survivor, not a victim," said Grace. "I have seen that small tokens of love and hope can make a difference. I have gained back myself from volunteering."

Middle Level State Honoree: Jameshia Attaway
Nominated by Girl Scouts Heart of The South in Memphis

Jameshia, an eighth-grader at St. Joseph High School, supplies five schools in her area with personal hygiene items that she collects for students who have a need for them during the school day. An avid volunteer whose role model is her mother, Jameshia was inspired to start her project after hearing a girl in her school restroom say she needed a sanitary napkin. "She was embarrassed to walk out of the restroom," said Jameshia. "Seeing young girls the same age as me having to leave school because they don't have sanitary napkins, or a child being picked on because they smell, made me sad. I promised myself that if I ever got enough money, I would place personal hygiene products in schools within my area."

So, after getting permission from the school district and arranging for staff members to assist her, she began raising money and collecting donations by competing in pageants, speaking to civic organizations, soliciting businesses, and applying for grants. Within three months, she had supplied five schools with personal hygiene items such as soap, towels, deodorant, toothpaste, toothbrushes and sanitary napkins. She recruited two students at each school to stock the items and notify her when supplies run low. "Students don't have to leave school or call home if they need something," she said. "They can stay in class and

learn."

Distinguished Finalists

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

These are Mississippi's Distinguished Finalists for 2018:

Mae Holyoak, 15, of Natchez, Miss., a freshman at Cathedral School, has helped to raise more than \$70,000 for the Natchez-Adams County Humane Society over the past 10 years by selling lemonade, baked goods, crafts and sponsored T-shirts through her annual "Mae and Friends' Lemonade Stand." Mae, whose efforts began at 5 years old as a fundraiser to buy a \$50 pet bed, also volunteers with her friends at the animal shelter.

Madison Ray, 18, of Ackerman, Miss., a senior at Choctaw County High School, has spent the past four years providing essential hands-on support to a local dog shelter, from cleaning out pens to awareness-raising to helping with repairs. Madison was moved to help the understaffed shelter by the stray dogs she'd seen in her town, and has persuaded peers to volunteer at the shelter, too; her efforts have helped to restore the health of and find homes for numerous abandoned dogs.

Sarah Tidwell, 17, of Watervalley, Miss., a senior at Lafayette High School, has traveled across Mississippi, raising awareness about the dangers of caffeine overdose and persuading state and local officials to support legislation prohibiting the sale of caffeine pills and powders to minors. Sarah, who worked with the family of the boy the law was named for, chose the issue as her pageant platform after seeing her peers drinking and taking the same caffeine substances as he did.

John Wilkinson, 13, of Oxford, Miss., an eighth-grader at Oxford Middle School, was one of the first students to volunteer with his school's inaugural peer tutoring program, where his responsibilities have ranged from understanding different learning styles and making study skills videos to teaching English to students learning it as a second language. Since it started last school year, John has supported the program as it's grown to help 50-100 students a month.

"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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