

2006 Barron Prize Winners and Honorees

E = environmental project

WINNERS

Daniel, Age 18, Arkansas

Daniel directs Cayce's Charities, a non-profit organization that provides a myriad of services to people living in poverty. Known locally as "Dan the Can Do Man," Daniel began his service work as a preschooler alongside his mother and grandmother, distributing food to the hungry. He's been helping others in his county – one of the poorest in the nation – ever since. His "Recycle to Reuse" project has distributed over 80,000 tons of second-hand appliances, furniture, clothing, and other necessities – items that would otherwise end up in landfills – to those in need. Daniel solicits donations (a horse trailer loaded with items from out of state recently pulled into his driveway), and then every few months, holds a "free yard sale" in his school's gym. More than 2,000 people line up to take items they can use.

With his No Child Left Behind in Nutrition program, Dan provides food for an evening meal and for the weekend to more than 250 students in his school. He has also convinced Gerber to donate 30,000 pounds of baby food and related products, which he has distributed to health departments, preschools, and welfare agencies across Arkansas. "I was taught that my life had a purpose: to help those less fortunate," says Daniel. "I have learned that an act of kindness – whether large or small – can have an enormous impact on society."

Evin and Angela, Age 16, Ohio (E)

Evin and Angela co-founded Save Our Stream, a group that educates the public about the threatened native Ohio brook trout and works to preserve its habitat. As seventh graders, the girls (along with a third classmate) began wondering if pollution was affecting the streams in their backyards. After testing the water quality and analyzing historical data, they found out that pollution was a problem – and the cause of the dwindling Ohio brook trout population. The girls began spreading the word of the threatened "brookies," and educating others about how to help save them. Three years later, Save Our Stream has designed eleven educational trail signs at two local parks, written a book on the native brook trout, created curriculum modules for the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, and made presentations to more than 3,000 students and teachers.

The girls have received over \$35,000 in grants to support their efforts, including ways to help homeowners understand how their behavior impacts the health of the local watershed. They have placed stickers on neighborhood storm drains, organized river restoration projects, and designed a pamphlet for residents about creating riparian buffers on their properties. "Through this project, I've discovered the incredible power of the individual," says Evin. "I've realized I can improve the future of our environment," adds Angela.

Additional Media Coverage

Weekly Reader *Current Science* – 4/20/2007

Talia, Age 11, Iowa

Talia organized Trick or Treat for the Levee Catastrophe (T.L.C.), a fundraising effort that united thousands of children across the country in raising over five million dollars for victims of Hurricane Katrina. Shortly after Katrina hit, Talia stopped again and again at a lemonade stand set up to raise money for hurricane relief, and thought “there must be a better way” to fund raise. With Halloween fast approaching, she realized that kids could ask for quarters that night instead of candy, and decided to pose a challenge to children across the country: raise one million dollars by trick-or-treating for Katrina relief.

She convinced Hy-Vee Foods, a Midwestern grocery chain based in her hometown, to help by printing trick-or-treat grocery bags – over 8 million of them – bearing her T.L.C. message. She also appealed for help from the Governor of Iowa, who agreed to contact each state’s governor’s office, which in turn spread the word. In the end, kids in approximately 4,000 schools trick-or-treated or held hurricane relief fundraisers and reported their earnings – over five million dollars – on Talia’s website. “I learned that you can do anything if you put your mind to it,” says Talia. “It might be hard, but when you get worried, just remember all the people you are helping.”

Vasanth, Age 16, South Carolina

Vasanth has greatly improved the educational opportunities and facilities for 1,200 students at a school in India. His work there began four years ago, when he traveled to his father’s native village for the summer and volunteered to teach English to students in grades 5-12. He was disheartened to hear the principal tell him he was wasting his time, “since the students would only amount to shepherds and servants,” and was dismayed to find children sitting on cement floors, 60-70 to a class, in 100 degree heat without books, computers, or a library. Ignoring the principal’s comments, Vasanth dove head first into teaching the students – both that summer and the next one – and saw great results.

Back home, he got busy fundraising for school improvements, and raised \$8,000 through presentations to numerous schools and Rotary Clubs. Vasanth took the money to India, and immediately spent \$2,000 to pay all of the school fees for the 1,200 students. He put the remaining \$6,000 into a government incentive program which quadrupled the amount to \$24,000. With those funds, he arranged to have 275 six-foot desks and benches made, bought and installed ceiling fans, and refurbished the science lab – all before the summer’s end. He also met with government officials who, impressed and inspired by what he had accomplished, announced they would build a wing onto the school, air condition it, and install a computer lab. That work has been completed, and Vasanth is now fundraising to purchase a water purification system for the school. “I want to help these children in so many ways,” says Vasanth. “I want to make their dreams come true.”

Website/Social Media

www.TNISF.org

Erika and Kayla, Age 18, California (E)

Erika and Kayla created the Annual Salmon Run Relay to increase awareness of the plight of the salmon and its importance to the health of the Hupa, Yurok, and Karuk tribes of Northern California. The girls were inspired to start the relay following the salmon kill of 2002, when 68,000 salmon died of disease on the lower Klamath River before reaching their spawning grounds. The kill was devastating to native tribes, whose heritage, health, and way of life are heavily dependent on the salmon, and served as a wake-up call for Erika and Kayla.

Now in its fourth year, the Salmon Run Relay's three-day route mimics the run of the salmon from the mouth of the Klamath River up its two major tributaries, where wild salmon still spawn. Each year, hundreds of runners – many representing different organizations affected by the fish kill – participate in order to draw attention to the salmon's plight and importance. This year, the run was extended to Irongate Dam on the Klamath River, for a total distance of 214 miles. Yearly themes such as "Fish be not Dammed" and "Fish for Wellness" provide a focus for the panel discussions, informational booths, presentations, letter signings, and children's fair which are now a part of the relay weekend. "The world is out of balance and needs help," says Erika, "and it's up to us to see that its needs are met."

Additional Media Coverage

IndyBay.org – 5/18/2006

Phebe, Age 17, Vermont (E)

Phebe founded Change the World Kids, a non-profit group that has raised over \$100,000 to purchase and protect nearly fifty acres of critical rain forest habitat in Costa Rica. The purchased parcels link existing wild lands to create a migratory corridor for wildlife, including indigenous species and neo-tropical songbirds. Phebe's group of students has raised money by selling Costa Rican coffee, holding raffles, writing grants, and organizing dinner parties that feature Costa Rican biologists as guest speakers.

Change the World Kids is also a force for good in Phebe's corner of rural Vermont. Each week, the group reviews requests for help from area residents, and determines how it will respond. The students have completely renovated an elderly woman's dilapidated home, stacked firewood, cleared yards, and provided food for families in crisis. They also install clotheslines for residents, free of charge, to minimize the use of clothes dryers. "I want to tell other young people that the work and motivation to make the world a better place don't happen miraculously," says Phebe. "Those things really come from the heart."

Website/Social Media

www.ChangeTheWorldKids.org

Zander, Age 16, Florida (E)

Zander works tirelessly to save endangered loggerhead sea turtles from extinction. Zander's passion for the animals began at age 11, when he started volunteering to walk the beaches near his home, monitoring loggerhead nests. He immediately saw the need to raise awareness of the turtles' plight, and dreamed of creating an educational program that would do just that. Soon, he was writing grants and meeting with marine biologists to gather information for his program. A year later, Turtle Talks was born, and Zander began taking his program to schools, libraries, and special events.

In the four years since then, he has presented his interactive program to thousands of children and adults, teaching them about marine turtle anatomy and behavior, and ways that people can help protect these ancient animals. Zander has created an accompanying Turtle Talks Activity Book (half of the 6,000 copies produced were "spoken for" before they were even printed), and he recently arranged for his high school Spanish class to translate the book into Spanish. Zander is currently training other young people to present Turtle Talks, so that his sea turtle conservation efforts will continue once he goes to college. "I'm passionate about sea turtles and have a real sense of ownership of my project," explains Zander. "That's why it's been successful."

Additional Media Coverage

Family Circle – 7/2007

Know Your World Extra – 4/6/2007

Kennedy, Age 9, Pennsylvania

Kennedy has raised over \$36,000 for the Hershey Medical Center's Children's Heart Group, the American Heart Association, Children's Miracle Network, the American Red Cross, and other charities through her Kisses for Kaeden project. Kennedy was inspired to begin fundraising when her brother Kaeden, now age 3, was born with a heart defect that required numerous surgeries. She rallied her peers to join her Kisses for Kaeden group in order "to raise lots of money to help organizations to find cures and buy medicines and equipment for children that are sick and sad."

Kennedy and her group of young volunteers hold garage sales, bake sales, and auctions, set up lemonade stands, and participate in local relays and events to raise money. They have also organized toy and clothing drives, cleaned up local parks and highways, and collected hundreds of stuffed animals for the local police department. "I have to help those who are not so fortunate because I want to," says Kennedy, "and because I can."

Smitha, Age 15, Arizona (E)

Smitha founded Arizona Activists Karing for the Environment (AWAKE), a group of students that educates others about water pollution and conservation. AWAKE members tested dozens of reclaimed ponds and lakes around Tempe , and found that over half of them tested positive for coliform, a dangerous type of bacteria. Concerned about the health implications of using this water for recreational purposes, AWAKE is working to prevent ski resorts in the nearby San Francisco Peaks from using reclaimed water to make artificial snow. The group has collected 500 signatures on a petition, joined forces with Native American tribes opposed to the idea, and has written impassioned letters to state politicians.

Smitha also founded the Kids Chapter of Asha Arizona, a non-profit group that provides education for children in India. For the past two years, the group has organized an annual walk-a-thon to raise money for water purification systems for schools in India. The walks, held on Mahatma Gandhi's birthday each year, have raised over \$4,000 to fund clean water systems for more than 3,000 children. Quoting Gandhi, Smitha says, "Working with other kids, we really can 'be the change we want to see in the world.'"

Eric, Age 18, New York

Eric initiated a program to teach English as a Second Language (ESL) to homeless immigrant day laborers on Long Island. Eric's advocacy for immigrant workers stems largely from his volunteer experiences in Latin America. For the past two years, he has served as chairperson for his school's annual trip to Nicaragua, rallying nearly 100 fellow volunteers to raise over \$98,000 for the housing and nutrition projects they completed for impoverished people there. Back home on Long Island, Eric learned of the plight of 150 Latino immigrants in a neighboring town, primarily undocumented men in great need of services.

In the face of considerable anti-immigrant sentiment among local residents, Eric began making weekly visits to teach the men English and to stand in solidarity with them. He had soon convinced over thirty students and teachers to accompany him. When he heard of a similar group of immigrants in a different town, he organized several dozen volunteers to join him in spending two nights each week with those men, teaching them English, playing cards, and developing friendships. "Because of our work, these men know there are people who do care about them," says Eric. "We can help to change the world."

HONOREES

Aaron, Age 15, Ohio: Aaron launched an initiative to raise awareness of the plight of the San Bushmen tribe from the Kalahari Desert, part of one of the oldest cultures in the world. Raised nearly \$6,000 for the Kalahari People's Fund.

Alex, Age 13, Rhode Island: Alex created an e-waste reuse and recycling program in his town. Collected 21,000 pounds of computer and other electronics.

Amy, Age 18, Texas: Amy is committed to helping teens and young adults with disabilities become self advocates, able to avail themselves of all the laws and supports they need to live full lives.

Ariane, Age 16, California: Ariane created ScienceSmart to expose low-income preschoolers to science through hands-on activities. Designed lesson plans, organized materials, and recruited and trained nearly 30 high school volunteers.

Bailey, Age 10, Florida: Bailey started the Hero Hugs project – sending care packages to soldiers serving in Iraq. Over 5000 kids across the country have pitched in to help.

Brantley, Age 15, Mississippi: Brantley co-founded Students Aiding Indigent Families (SAIF), a non-profit group that helps families living in poverty purchase homes.

Brittany, Age 15, Massachusetts: Brittany founded Cell Phones for Soldiers, an organization that recycles cell phones and uses the money to purchase prepaid phone cards for soldiers serving in Iraq.

Charlee, Age 17, Alaska: Charlee spearheaded a youth petition drive with Alaska Youth for Environmental Action, asking state and national leaders to take action to reduce global warming.

Farah, Age 18, Illinois: Farah is committed to clearing land mines in Afghanistan. She authored the book *The Story of My Life: An Afghan Girl on the Other Side of the Sky*. Farah also serves as Youth Ambassador for Paul McCartney's Adopt a Minefield organization.

Jason, Age 17, Washington: Jason created Beams and Dreams, a non-profit group that provides boating outings for people battling cancer and other serious illnesses. He has taken more than 600 people from nine cancer support agencies boating on Lake Washington.

Kevin, Age 18, Iowa: Kevin initiated a Barn Quilts project in his county as a way to preserve historic barns, involve youth in rural development, and provide an economic boost to the county.

Lily, Age 18, California: Lily led the effort to preserve a four-acre chaparral on the outskirts of the city that was slated for development.

Margaret, Age 18, Illinois: Margaret founded a teen mentoring program for severely abused and neglected children at the Don Bosco Children's Center.

Rob, Age 17, Florida: Rob created a 250-foot oyster reef in Tampa Bay, which provides a natural cleansing system for the bay and buffers wave action that causes erosion, threatening native plants.

Zac, Age 18, California: Zac organized a climb up Mount Whitney that raised over \$13,000 for pediatric brain tumor research.