

From: The Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes Official Website: www.barronprize.org

Basking Ridge teen honored for her programs in Tanzania

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A Basking Ridge teen who created a charity to bring books to girls in Tanzania is one of 10 national winners of the Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes.

The Barron Prize honors outstanding young leaders who have made a significant positive difference to people and the planet. Barron Prize winners each receive \$2,500 to be applied to their higher education or to a service project.

Shannon McNamara, 16, founded Shannon's After-School Reading Exchange (SHARE) to educate and empower girls ages 10 to 17 in Tanzania. She began her work two years ago as her Girl Scout Gold Award project by collecting children's books and school supplies to take with her on a family trip to Tanzania.

Shannon arrived in the African nation with 500 pounds of donated books and supplies. With her family's help, she transformed a dilapidated school room into a library. She also began a "girls-only" reading program for 23 Tanzanian girls with the motto "Today a reader, tomorrow a leader."

Shannon has returned to Tanzania twice since that trip to oversee and expand her program, and has now created four libraries at four schools. Her libraries, which house a combined 23,000 books, are available to the entire communities where they are built.

Shannon recently raised \$20,000 to install electricity in two libraries and solar power in another so that girls are no longer studying in near darkness during Tanzania's eight-month rainy season.

Shannon pays African teachers to stay after school and work on weekends so that girls can practice their reading. Her biggest challenge has been convincing the girls' families that time studying is well-spent, since the norm is for girls to cook and clean in their spare time.

With her newest initiative, SHARE Scholars, Shannon is raising money to sponsor girls to attend a highly regarded secondary school.

"These Tanzanian girls crave and value education—something my friends and I take for granted every day," Shannon said in a news release.