

# Sonali Ranaweera wins Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes

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Sonali Ranaweera, aged 14, from San Jose, California, whose family is originally from Sri Lanka, has been named a national winner of the 2015 Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes in the US. Each year, the Barron Prize celebrates 25 inspiring, public-spirited young people from across North America (US and Canada) who have made a significant positive difference to people and our planet. The top 15 winners each receive a \$5,000 cash award to support their service work or higher education.

Sonali created Recycling4Smiles and had raised \$40,000 by redeeming recyclable cans and bottles to fund 44 cleft-lip surgeries. She has also funded dental care for 1,000 rural children in

Sri Lanka, and has provided school supplies, clothing, and school lunches for hundreds of children in need around the world.



Sonali launched her project as an 11-year-old, when she received \$100 from her parents at Christmas time, with the stipulation she used it to make a difference in someone's life. She decided to raise an additional \$150 in order to fund one cleft-lip surgery through Smile Train, and to do so by collecting and redeeming recyclables, which she was learning about in her Grade Six science class. When she easily met her first goal, she set her next at \$2,000. Three years later, she has collected and redeemed half a million recyclables. Outfitted in long-rubber gloves and with help from her brother and friends, Sonali collects, sorts, and redeems 2,000 cans and bottles in order to raise \$100. She regularly collects recyclables from a number of businesses, and receives bag upon bag of bottles and cans on her doorstep. "I've learned that you can make a difference in the lives of others, and help our earth without needing to have a lot of money or power," says Sonali. "Nothing is impossible if you are dedicated to a cause."

The Barron Prize was founded in 2001 by author TA Barron and was named after his mother, Gloria Barron. Each year's 25 Barron Prize young heroes are as diverse as their service projects. They are female and male, urban and rural, and from many races and backgrounds. Half of them have focused on helping their communities and fellow human beings; half have focused on protecting the environment.

"Nothing is more inspiring than stories about heroic people who have truly made a difference to the world," says Barron. "And we need our heroes today more than ever. Not celebrities, but heroes – people whose character can inspire us all. That is the purpose of the Gloria Barron Prize: to shine the spotlight on these amazing young people so that their stories will inspire others."