



Eric Fahrenbach

Lake Forest Academy

There are many successful students who can boast an enviable scholastic track record, but Eric Fahrenbach has the devotion many of those would lack.

He's not just a football player and Misericordia volunteer; he's also the head of the school's discipline committee and a senior prefect.

Eric attributes his involvement at Misericordia to an uncle who is a resident there, but Eric takes great pride in doing his best and encouraging others to do the same.

"I've been blessed with many gifts and believe that I have a responsibility to use those talents to help others who need help," Eric wrote.

Andrew Poska, associate dean of college counseling for Lake Forest Academy, says Eric's devotion extends even to his athletic activities. Poska recounts that the 17-year-old has played three games with a broken leg.

"Respectful, honest and compassionate, (Eric) is not only a remarkable student but a remarkable person who shows exceptional promise to be a successful leader in the future," Poska wrote.

Eric Fahrenbach

School: Lake Forest Academy

Hometown: Lake Forest

Class: Senior

Parents: Gregory and Linda Fahrenbach

Sponsor: Andrew Poska, associate dean

Community service: Volunteer at Misericordia Home, working as a bakery assistant, Web site designer and other tasks; juror and attorney with teen court.



Carina Gonzalez

Mundelein High School

Growing up, Carina Gonzalez did not have much — not a lot of money or a lot of hope.

She grew up in a house with 28 people, living there not by choice, but by need. "Living in those conditions did not allow me to grow up the way my parents wanted me to," she wrote.

As a result, she hung with the wrong crowd and hated going to school. Many of her friends were dropping out.

Then she realized she had to change. "It was my life that made me realize that volunteerism and community service were the only solutions to some of our problems."

She is active in the Mundelein After School Coalition, which provides positive options for middle school students. She also acts as a mentor to younger students.

Eric Gallagher, assistant principal at Mundelein, said Carina has become a role model. "In my 15 years of education, I have never seen a student who had the skill to be a great leader and the passion to implement the goals set by the school and her community," he wrote.

Carina Gonzalez

School: Mundelein

Hometown: Mundelein

Class: Senior

Parents: Jesus and Lilia Gonzalez

Sponsor: Eric Gallagher, assistant principal

Community service: National Hispanic Institute, president of Student Leadership, Transition program, After School Coalition, active in Santa Maria del Popolo Church.



Lauren McClusky

Woodlands Academy

Those who complain that young people today are selfish need go no further than Lauren McClusky to prove themselves very wrong.

From start to finish, the word "service" describes the 17-year-old.

She says she's inspired by the attitude of service she has seen in the host families in Tijuana, where she went with a youth group to build and clean homes for the needy.

"It was humbling to see how these people who had nothing were willing to give everything to us, who they didn't even know and couldn't speak the same language as," Lauren wrote. "It was an eye-opening experience that I will never forget."

Her principal, Madonna Edmunds, says Lauren's activities in Special Olympics have shown her compassion for others. "(Lauren) has an unusual sensitivity to the needs and plight of the less fortunate than she, and to those who have special needs," Edmunds wrote. "This is a young woman for whom service to others has become a way of life, and service will always play a vital role in whatever university program and career path she chooses."

Lauren McClusky

School: Woodlands Academy of the Sacred Heart

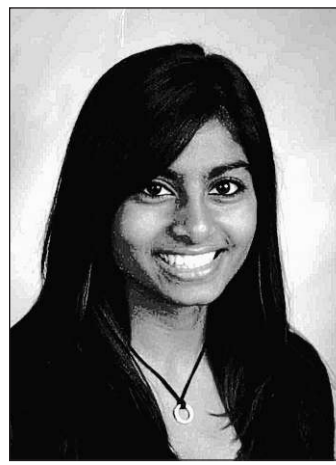
Hometown: Evanston

Class: Senior

Parents: Jeff and Jill McClusky

Sponsor: Madonna Edmunds, principal

Community service: Special Olympics, including creating a benefit concert; mission trips to Mexico and Mississippi



Anokhi Patel

Lakes Community

It was a little girl's smile that set up Anokhi Patel for a lifetime of volunteering.

She had just put a Band-Aid on a stuffed bear at a teddy bear clinic. Anokhi had volunteered before, but it was the girl's smile that made an impact. "It was the first time I had realized the significance of a power I possessed, the ability to make others smile. Since that moment, I have grown to become a more active member of my community and my society."

That she has. Anokhi spends about 11 hours a week at her temple, BAPS Swainarayan Sanstha, working with youth groups. She also helps at the GlenOaks Hospital's Teddy Bear Clinic for kids, and with Lakes' Snowball program.

Anokhi said volunteering "raises my spirits."

"I enjoy being a part of these activities because the only way you can properly appreciate receiving something is by actually giving something — an opposite to the self-centered society we live in today," she said.

Anokhi Patel

School: Lakes

Hometown: Lake Villa

Class: Senior

Parents: Pravin and Bharvi Patel

Sponsor: Cheryl Cox, director of guidance and instruction

Community service: Volunteer at BAPS Swainarayan Sanstha temple, working with youth groups, community outreach and audio/visual; tutor, Snowball.



Jessica Verhein

Grayslake Central

Jessica Verhein remembers having some of her peers in the Key Club joke with her during a volunteer outing at the Lion's Club steer roast. She had been so busy cleaning up plates that she didn't even realize her shift had ended.

"Experiences like this one have become common in my life," she wrote, "and on the ride home I began to ponder possible reasons for the strong passion for and dedication to community service that manifests itself in my behavior."

The answer lies in the fact that she enjoys the example it sets for young kids and teens and the effect on the community. But it also gives her satisfaction to be "helping to dispel stereotypes about my generation."

She is active in the Key Club, which has involved helping at PADS, cleaning trash along the highway, helping plan a party for children at Kids Hope United and working at the steer roast.

Associate Principal Rita R. Fischer, called Jessica a "leader among and a role model to her fellow students."

"In all that she does, this student commits herself to achieving excellence and inspires it in others."

Jessica Verhein

School: Grayslake Central

Hometown: Grayslake

Class: Senior

Parents: James and Sherry Verhein

Sponsor: Rita R. Fischer, associate principal

Community service: Key Club; active in National Honor Society, including peer tutoring and helping in the community.



Heather Gray

Vernon Hills High School

Judy Stone, a counselor at Vernon Hills High School, described Heather Gray this way: "Heather's glass is always half full."

Heather says that optimism is what drives her volunteer work.

"If you could evoke one feeling in others, what would it be?" she wrote. "I would answer 'hope,' because with it, anything is possible."

While she admits there is no "magic pill" that will make all the problems go away, volunteering can make a difference by showing someone you care.

Among other activities, Heather has worked as a student role model for fifth grade classes in the DARE program, volunteered at Special Olympics competitions and helped clean cages at an animal shelter.

"When middle school students approach me excited about how they were able to 'say no to drugs' because of my DARE presentations," she wrote, "or a young autistic boy lights up when he makes a basket at the Best Buddies Special Olympics, or a woman breaks down to tears holding a puppy she just adopted and rescued, that is when I learn the true meaning of community service."

Heather Gray

School: Vernon Hills

Hometown: Vernon Hills

Class: Senior

Parents: Barry & Jacqueline Gray

Sponsor: Judy Stone, counselor

Community service: Speaker for the DARE program, student rep on the Community Partnership for Healthy Youth, gave safety presentations to middle schoolers, organized Adopt-A-Family programs, volunteered with Special Olympics, member of Best Buddies and ACE (Athletes Committed to Excellence).



Rachel Loewenstein

Stevenson High School

Rachel Loewenstein has embraced the Hebrew concept of "Tikum Olam" fully.

She describes the term as referring to the obligation in Judaism to work toward achieving a more perfect world.

"I have worked diligently as a participant and leader to make a constructive and meaningful impact on my peers, my school and the community at large," she wrote.

And she already has this year, said Ted Goergen, community service coordinator, by helping to organize Stevenson's annual Give-A-Thon. In all, the annual project supported 250 families and delivered more than 1,000 boxes of food to the food pantry.

"I have been able to put my trust in her and know that whatever task I ask her to accomplish will be done exactly as I ask or better," wrote Goergen, who added that Rachel has already put in more than 300 volunteer hours with the GIVE service club.

Rachel quotes John F. Kennedy saying of young leaders: "For of those to whom much is given, much is also required." She wrote, "Although I am undecided about my specific career goals, I know that my future aspirations will directly relate, as JFK stated, to what is required of me."

Rachel Loewenstein

School: Stevenson

Hometown: Lincolnshire

Class: Senior

Parents: Pam and Dan Loewenstein

Sponsor: Ted Goergen, service coordinator

Community service: President of GIVE (Givers of Important Volunteer Efforts); NHS, Glass Slipper Project and Maot Chitim of Greater Chicago Family project



Melissa Niedrich

Stevenson High School

Melissa Niedrich used a piece of paper as the symbol for her reasons to be involved in volunteer work.

She talked about how she could doodle on the paper, write her life's ambitions or even spill coffee on it. "But despite our close relationship and mutual dedication for nearly 17 years, I have yet to make a difference in the life of a piece of paper."

But volunteerism is an entirely different matter. Through her work in the school and in the community, she feels like she is involved in the lives of others. She feels bonded with classmates and fellow community members.

Janet Gonzales, Stevenson's principal, wrote: "Students pass through schools every year and very few leave a mark. This candidate has left a legacy."

And that legacy really has nothing to do with the reams of homework assignments or tests, Melissa wrote. "What I will remember is providing a family with a Thanksgiving turkey, giving a child with Muscular Dystrophy a chance to attend summer camp, and how it felt to know that I changed someone's life, even for a moment."

Melissa Niedrich

School: Stevenson

Hometown: Kildeer

Class: Senior

Parents: Rich and Sue Niedrich

Sponsor: Janet Gonzales, principal

Community service: President of NHS, committee head for Spirit Walk, organized Give-A-Thon, volunteer at Odyssey Fine Arts Festival, freshmen mentor.



Madeline Tolmie

Woodlands Academy

If height were measured in global awareness, Madeline Tolmie would be a giant.

Through her words, volunteerism and activities, it's clear the 17-year-old has the grand, but attainable, goal of changing the world.

Madeline describes coming home from a trip to the African nation of Tanzania, influenced by her experience with a native family.

"Returning home, I had a deeper appreciation of the amazing gifts in my life — a family, support, a home and education. These two Tanzanian trips have made me realize I have to move beyond compassion and find new ways ... to be effecting in creating opportunities for hope around the globe," she wrote.

And Madeline's passion for "social justice and the compassionate treatment of individuals" is not lost on her elders, says her adviser, Victoria Browne.

Browne says the school has high expectations for its students but Madeline has both met and exceeded those expectations.

"Not a day goes by when she is not engaged in some activity that makes the world a better place," Browne wrote.

Madeline Tolmie

School: Woodlands Academy of the Sacred Heart

Hometown: Lake Forest

Class: Senior

Parents: Dave and Tracy Tolmie

Sponsor: Victoria Browne, adviser

Community service: HOPE (Help Others Protect Esteem), United Way youth board, Community Service Club, has traveled to Tanzania twice, as well as mission trips to Mexico and Kentucky.



Alecia Wright

Carmel Catholic

Alecia Wright says her family's devotion to community service was instilled in her at a young age.

Wright, 17, a student at Carmel Catholic High School in Mundelein, said she's performed service work in Thailand over the past three summers.

"I am inspired by the Thais I have worked with," Wright said. "Though they have next to nothing in material goods, they are always smiling. They are kindhearted and gentle souls."

Wright added that her work in Thailand prodded her into wanting to devote time to others and be compassionate and accepting of diverse cultures.

Carmel's principal, the Rev. Bob Carroll, nominated Wright for the leadership team. He lauded Wright for her willingness to help fellow students, her academic prowess and a devotion to lofty and distant goals.

"She is one of the finest young people in our school and is universally admired and respected by teachers and peers alike," Carroll said.

Wright's many efforts have included volunteering at Ela Public Library.

Alecia Wright

School: Carmel Catholic

Hometown: Hawthorn Woods

Class: Senior

Parents: Cliff and Celeste Wright

Sponsor: Rev. Bob Carroll, principal

Community service: International Service work with Rustic Pathways, and volunteer with St. Francis de Sales parish, nursing home and the library.