



**2024 Recipient ~ Shaila Diaz Furment
School of the Holy Child**

I have always enjoyed helping those in need, but it wasn't until I began volunteering at my school that I truly understood my passion for volunteering. At the start of my ninth grade, I began my service journey, participating in an array of different volunteer opportunities with Holy Child's community partners. It was then that I truly discovered my hidden love for helping others which has inspired me to volunteer for over 170 hours since then! Holy Child has exposed me to a variety of areas of service, ranging from card-making to tutoring and even to building. It's also given me the opportunity to join other independent volunteer programs like the White Plains Community Youth Court, which I have now been in for over 5 months! The hours I've spent doing service have invigorated me to do everything in my power to protect the God-given rights of others; whether that be education or redemption or even connection, I now strive to ensure these for as many lives as possible!

Although all the service projects I have participated in have left me with a feeling of fulfillment and joy, supporting the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility and Don Bosco Community Center have been some of my most memorable experiences. With the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, I combined my love for art and my passion for service to create Valentines, Mothers Day, and Christmas cards for the inmates to send to their family and friends to help them reestablish and strengthen relationships that might be strained by both their imprisonment and the pandemic. Although I haven't physically seen how my cards have positively impacted these women, I've been told by the Catholic chaplain there that the inmates absolutely love them and have been using them to reach out to loved ones they haven't been able to previously! This service opportunity helped me understand the importance of human connection, and how everyone deserves the opportunity to have strong and tight-knit relationships with their family and friends, no matter the position they are in.

While I used my love for art to create authentic and heart-warming cards for the inmates in Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, I used my commitment to education to help tutor kids at the Don Bosco Community Center, one of Holy Child's community partners. Thanks to this partnership I have been able to spend some time after school tutoring kids from 2nd through 5th grade and help them with their homework. Because of the pandemic, many children, especially those who are under resourced, have fallen behind in school. The tutoring and support at Don Bosco sets up the children for academic success. It fills me with joy seeing the kids I tutored quickly grasp concepts they were previously struggling with, and I know that with continued support, these kids will soon become confident in their abilities and knowledge! After tutoring sessions, I join my other Holy Child classmates to pack up dinners for the kids to take home. Many of the kids in this after-school program are from families that are struggling economically, and the meals they receive at the program might be the only ones they have access to after school. Volunteering at Don Bosco has not only allowed me to educate and push kids to academic excellence, but has also helped me promote food security in under-resourced households. The Don Bosco Center and this tutoring program truly embody the belief that every person is entitled to the opportunity to excel in their education and beyond!

My volunteer work isn't only limited to Holy Child's community partners, I've also branched out and joined an independent program called White Plains Community Youth Court, a restorative justice program that aims to give young people who have committed minor misdemeanors an opportunity to give back to their community. Youth Court gives its clients a chance to avoid going through the criminal justice system and getting a permanent record that

would follow them throughout their lives. I joined the program at the start of the 2023 school year, and I've loved it ever since. I've taken on the roles of both Defense Attorney and Prosecutor; either defending clients and showcasing positive aspects of their character or creating cases to hold them accountable for their actions. I am aware that the time I spend working for my clients through Youth Court may help them avoid having a criminal record which might limit their access opportunities in the future. While the impacts of my service with Youth Court might not be noticeable now, it might make a big difference when a former client goes to a job interview with a clean record! Redemption is truly the backbone of this program and the work we do there.

Thanks to my service with Youth Court and other Holy Child community partners, I have realized that law and helping others is something I want to explore in my future. I now have plans to be an international lawyer or go into politics, hoping to help millions of people across the world. I hope to forever maintain my passion and commitment to helping others and continue to integrate service into my day-to-day life.