



**2023 Recipient ~ Arjun Menon
Horace Greeley High School, Class of 2025**

Education is an indispensable factor to break the cycle of poverty, and uplift individuals and communities out of destitution. It has the ability to provide opportunity and success to those who are disadvantaged in their upbringing and environment, allowing them to create a brighter future. During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, like all the other students, I was also getting adjusted to the new reality of virtual learning and realizing that it was a huge adjustment for all of the students. In the summer of 2020, when I got the opportunity to volunteer with the Ossining school district to help elementary school kids with preventing the reading slide, I was very excited. Soon, I started realizing the toll of remote learning on children, especially in certain economically disadvantaged communities. I enjoyed reading along and helping the children with their comprehension and more importantly making it an enjoyable experience for them. Having been in the remote setting for so long, the pandemic had exacerbated this learning gap for many students, and I wanted to help in any way to address this new reality.

In March 2022, I started volunteering at Learning Links and Summer Links, where I work with children in an underprivileged neighborhood to help them achieve their academic potential in their after-school program. I assist both first and second grade groups of about 16 students strengthening their academic skills primarily focusing on reading and mathematics. Additionally, after working with these students, I realized that we need to be creative and resourceful in finding ways to engage these children who may not have access to the same resources as their peers. I started conducting enrichment workshops on different topics in STEM and social sciences. This would help them build confidence, develop new skills, and explore their interests further. Hence, I started conducting workshops for the fourth and fifth grade classes covering various scientific concepts and topics in social sciences. My goal was to develop an aptitude for learning and give them a head start in school/education. My engagement in these different activities so far has resulted in about 100 hours of service.

Given that education is a powerful tool for social mobility, I believe it is an impactful way to support and empower these children who may face significant barriers to academic success. Above all, this experience has been immensely rewarding and has made me a more thoughtful and compassionate human being.