



**2021 Recipient ~ Gino Diminich  
Iona Preparatory School, Class of 2021**

The Jesuit tradition of engaging in one's community and helping others is one I have been fortunate enough to have been immersed in over the past four years at Iona Prep. Part of Iona Prep's grading system included a service hour requirement. While service was a burden for some, for me it has been an opportunity and in many respects, a gift.

I have served at The New York Common Pantry for the past seven years in New York City, serving holiday dinners for four hours and occasionally bagging groceries for struggling New Yorkers. I also built and painted homes in Peru for a week over the summer of my sophomore year, and brought food to pantries in Westchester for about three hours every school year.

These experiences in my community and broader world around me have opened my eyes to the persisting disparities that so many encounter. I have had the good fortune of being introduced to the importance of service by my father at a very early age. These initial experiences removed any element of fear to engaging with others or immersing myself into different environments.

The mission of St. Vincent's is to serve those who are poor and vulnerable, and I believe my work with the New York Common Pantry has done just that. During the covid-19 pandemic, I had read in the paper about many food pantries in cities worldwide that were experiencing food shortages due to the increased demand for food, and once the time came to form an advocacy project for school, I knew that I could use my connections at the New York Common Pantry to help those who were struggling because of the pandemic. I decided to organize a food drive at Iona Prep, with all the food donations going directly to the pantry I had worked at for a long time. With the help of the school administration and the students, we were able to beat our original goal of 1600 donations and received over 3000 nonperishable items from the upper and lower school of Iona Prep. These donations went directly to the New York Common Pantry where they helped distribute it out to the families who were struggling during this time and needed all the help they could get.

My experience with the New York common pantry has impacted my life in many ways; one such way is in my newfound service towards others in my everyday life. This service is simply little acts of kindness, whether it is helping a friend with their homework or holding the door open for someone, these little things can have a big impact on someone, and the simple smile of thanks is the best reward of them all.