



**2024 Recipient ~ Clara Gornstein
The Leffell School**

Giving back to the community has always been part of me. When I was younger, we had birthday parties where my twin sister, Emma, and I would choose a charity together. My parents felt strongly that we had enough and we could give back. We would then ask everyone to bring gifts or items for that organization. For example, we chose the Birthday Fairies one year. We asked everyone to bring birthday supplies. My mom then drove us to downtown Manhattan. We had the honor of throwing a birthday party for underprivileged youth and giving them presents. I remember I was made to feel special because we were given fairy wings to wear for the afternoon. This is just one example of many we had while growing up.

I'll admit it was hard to understand sometimes, but we did get presents to open from our parents, grandparents and extended family. As I got older, I sometimes had an idea about what I wanted to pick. Once a year, we chose an organization that helped make sure children had enough supplies for back to school (Andrus) and another year, we partnered with Gigi's Playhouse in Ardsley and provided them with some new things they needed. Even at a young age, I knew we had an impact.

At The Leffell School, we are required to do 40 hours of community service. I've never seen that number as a requirement. I've done all types of different things since 9th grade, earning well over 140 hours each year.

We've had multiple opportunities at school and I've certainly taken advantage of those. I'm proud that since 9th grade, I've helped lead the Blood Drive at school and help to make sure we have as many people as possible volunteering to donate. I happen to receive plasma, and I am becoming more comfortable telling my story around why, so I use this to encourage people to donate. Over the last three years, I've donated about 15 hours.

I also co-founded a club, Tender Love and Care (TLC), where we meet after school and create cards to donate to residents of Burke Rehabilitation. I like hearing from the activities manager that the residents enjoy the cards and it makes them happy to receive them. Over the past few years, I've performed ten hours of service with this project.

I took the role of Peer Tutoring in 10th grade. It was not something I had planned to do, but I enjoy prepping material and helping someone else succeed. I've tutored about 15 hours total since I started.

In 9th and 10th grade, I volunteered as a teaching assistant at the local Hebrew School. I enjoyed my involvement with the kids and helping the teachers. I also learned about myself. I had never worked with younger kids before. It was the first thing I did post COVID, after being home, and out of a school building for over a year and a half. I donated about 60 hours each year.

I was also asked to manage the Ardsley Dobbs Ferry Girls Varsity Swim Team in 10th grade. It is a nice way for me to be connected to my old school district and friends. I was able to continue this volunteer position in 11th grade too.

This past summer, I was able to volunteer at Westchester Physical Therapy 4 Kids with young children for thirty hours. I enjoyed this and loved seeing the youngest children learn to walk,

despite their physical challenges. Their faces lit up with joy as they took their first steps to me and I had expressions of happiness on my face and was clapping for them. It also helped solidify that I was interested in a field of healthcare in the future.

My most meaningful projects have been this fall. I taught myself to crochet last spring. Someone gave me a kit and it was fun and I kept going. I am able to create all types of things from animals, clothes and blankets.

For the holidays, I decided to create 25 different small animals and watercolor holiday cards. While it took me nearly 55 hours to complete this, it was worth it I packaged them up and donated them to the Atria Woodlands. I heard that it made such a difference in the lives of these individuals. I was so glad they each got a gift this holiday season.

I also partnered with The Sharing Shelf and their work with Project Linus. I created a baby blanket that will be given, among others, to children in need. This blanket was hand crochet and is 3 feet by 3 feet taking over 40 hours.

I've just finished my most recent project, working on surgi dolls for Project Sunshine. There are dolls that need to be cut out, sewn together, and stuffed. They are then used in hospitals by child life activity coordinators or doctors with their patients. I think this is incredibly important. It took me about 20 hours to do these, but I enjoyed it. I've been in hospitals and I know how scary procedures are and I think if they can be explained well, it can bring a sense of relief to a child. I'm so glad I can participate in this project.

Additionally, I have done some advocacy work with three organizations as a teen ambassador. For me, since I have these illnesses, this work is especially important to me. My work with CSL Behring Plasma Pals, The Arthritis Foundation, and the Immune Deficiency Foundation, is significant. It provides me an opportunity to teach people about some of the needs people like me have and how they can help and make a difference. I've spent over 40 hours doing this kind of work.

I've learned that I enjoy helping others. It is important to give of yourself directly and indirectly. Both types of service are important and serve a purpose. I strive to balance them. I'm always learning about myself. I've learned that sometimes it may be uncomfortable at first or I may be nervous in a situation. And that is ok. And it will be ok. The other person may be also. And my presence there is so important to them, and making such a difference in their day, and even more so, possibly their week.

My commitment to the community that I am in daily at Leffell, and my greater community in Ardsley and Westchester, has grown as I have, as a young adult. I hope to continue to expand my horizons in my future.

Thank you for the opportunity to apply to St. Vincent's Hospital Westchester Youth Awards.