



**2024 Recipient ~ Jiyu Kim  
Summit School at Nyack**

I still remember the day I met my dog Toby for the first time: the excitement turned into fear when I was greeted by Toby's loud barking. Toby was a white miniature poodle, and just by his appearance, it seemed he had gone through a variety of difficulties. This was the earliest encounter with a dog that I know of. However, day after day, Toby began to adjust to his new home and had a surprising attachment to people. After approximately 7 years, Toby is thriving at our home and continues to greet people with hypo-energy. Last year, Toby was welcomed by a new friend - a miniature brown poodle named Milo. Throughout my years of living with dogs, I didn't know this was only the start of my devotion to dogs.

My first day volunteering at A Good Dog Rescue in Vernplanck, NY was honestly nerve-racking. I wasn't sure if I could handle walking big dogs, since I was only experienced with a small dog. The first dog I walked was named Jingles and he was full of energy. After I successfully went on a walk with Jingles, I felt accomplished that I was able to handle walking a big dog as well as inspired to come back to the shelter and make a change for even more dogs. Exercise for dogs comes with significant benefits, and I knew that the dogs at the shelter had limited exercise opportunities compared to dogs who have found their forever homes. I have consistently walked dogs at A Good Dog Rescue from January 2023 to July 2023 for a total of 34.6 hours. The names of the dogs I have walked throughout the 7 months include Sasha, Swayze, Adeline, Tag, Hondo, Lucy Marie and Kona. Although I have walked some dogs only once, I know that every walk matters to shelter dogs as it may be the only time when they experience socialization and the outside world. Developing a relationship with my dogs as well as the shelter dogs has helped me go through an aspect that is critical to an individual's prosperity - mental health.

Starting in December of 9th grade (2021), I began to experience extreme mental difficulties with my surrounding peers. I had no idea what to do because everything made me feel paranoid, anxious and depressed, which caused me to avoid school. Around this time, I met my therapist and I began to experiment with different psych medications. A few months later, I was hospitalized at a mental hospital. Discharging from the mental hospital left me feeling lonely and very nervous about what I should do next. Thankfully, my therapist introduced me to several opportunities that would not only ease my mental health struggles but also give me a chance to help others experiencing the same. During the summer of 9th grade (2022) and 10th grade (2023), I participated in Healing Camp, which is a 2-day group event led by the Esther Ha Foundation and mental health professionals. Healing Camp is an event where youth and young adults gather in person to discuss their mental health concerns, learn how to deal with life obstacles and support others. Even though participating in the Healing Camp for the first time as a 9th grader was stressful and fearful, participating in the Healing Camp as a 10th grader gave me the full confidence to explore all factors of my emotions. Through the Healing Camp, I was able to express my raw feelings and gain different perspectives, while accumulating 38 community service hours. Although it was challenging, I continued to stretch my mental health capacity by participating in the 39th Mental Health First Aid (Esther Ha Foundation) and the Saturday Youth and Young Adult Support Group (Esther Ha Foundation).

The 39th Mental Health First Aid (Esther Ha Foundation) was a course that taught me how to provide initial help to someone experiencing a mental health or substance abuse

challenge. This course has encouraged me to help others as much as possible because I don't know what they've been through. Following the end of the course, I received a certificate and gained 8 community service hours. Currently, I have been participating in the Saturday Youth and Young Adult Support Group (Esther Ha Foundation) every Saturday since the beginning of September 2023. The support group is where teenagers and young adults address psychological difficulties, relating, supporting and empathizing with each other through a 2-hour Zoom meeting. During the discussion, I familiarized myself with a variety of mental health topics, which would result in helping me lead and initiate conversations. So far, I have accumulated 34 hours by participating in the support group for 17 weeks. I hope my community service for the Esther Ha Foundation reinforced the idea that it's okay to ask for help, especially when undergoing a hard time.

The numerous benefits of walking the shelter dogs, such as a decrease in stress, muscle growth, and the enablement of senses strengthen the compassion I serve to others. My own experience with mental health concerns and my efforts to help others who are going through the same dignifies the meaning of human life. My community service has not only aided others, but also it has helped me to grow as an individual who is caring and appreciative. My determined mindset has resulted in a persistent effort to lend a helping hand to others for 3 years. I hope my community service inspired others to branch out into their communities and do the same. By significantly reflecting all aspects of St. Vincent's mission, I have fulfilled what it takes to become an applicant for St. Vincent's 2024 Youth Awards. No matter the outcome, I will continue to take the path towards dedication and selflessness.