



**2024 Recipient ~ Katherine Dyer
Byram Hills High School**

Since I could talk I have always loved to be around people, always laughing and talking and experiencing. Many people say that the best thing you can do in life is help others, and I have learned and come to agree that the best way to be happy and bond with others is to help them. Throughout the years I have looked for ways to get involved.

I have been researching the effects that art has on the brain, designing a study to take place in England this summer in hopes of enhancing art engagement experience. Art is a very significant part of my life, and I wanted to get more involved beyond the study I'm planning. Therefore, I looked for a way to apply what I learned from my research, specifically art therapy. I have been volunteering with the Westchester Medical Center Health Network, specifically the Child Life department at Maria Ferreira Children's Hospital since this past October. It is my favorite volunteer experience I have ever had, and for so many reasons. First, the experience I have gained at the hospital has been so eye opening, learning the nuances of how a hospital works, and all the different procedures set in place to provide the patients with a better hospital experience. Second, I get to spend more time truly involved than any other experience I have had due to the routine schedule, a few hours each Thursday. More importantly though, the time I get to spend with each patient has been extraordinary. The happiness from each child when we draw or paint, play games for hours, endlessly talk, give their parents some well-earned rest, or even when I clean and organize, it is such a privilege knowing I'm helping them.

Outside of my volunteer work at the hospital, I am a ski instructor at Adaptive Sports at Mount Snow: a ski school catering to skiers with disabilities. Throughout the past few years I have greatly enjoyed helping others learn to ski, working primarily with children. I try to teach as many lessons as I can throughout the year, driving to Vermont and skiing with them at my favorite mountain. Sometimes the goal is improving on the magic carpet or skiing all the way down from the mountaintop; each time that I write a report after lessons it is so gratifying to know that I help in their progress. In the past few winters, I have taught a handful of lessons each year: each a few hours long so I can get to know the student. Again, I find myself drawn to volunteering in areas which are important to me, hoping to bring that to others.

Before my current volunteer positions, I had frequently volunteered at an animal shelter (Northwind Kennels) in eighth and ninth grade, spending tens of hours with the animals. I usually spent time helping the rescued animals become more social, providing them with more exposure to people. It was so rewarding to play with cats and walk dogs, helping them get adopted by a loving family. Last year I had even adopted my own cats from Northwind Kennels.

Lastly, I have enjoyed more brief volunteering opportunities within my community such as helping run a stand at a local parade and participating in other town and school-based events. Opportunities like organizing bake sales for good causes, participating in district art projects, joining volunteer clubs, helping younger students, and many other options within my school and larger community have been very exciting and rewarding. Some of my favorites of these experiences have been my induction into the National Art Honor Society (NAHS), where we have hosted and participated in many local and national events to give back, and helping coach younger kids in field hockey and golf. As a part of my life that brings me so much joy and inspiration for the future, I hope to embrace volunteering far past my high school years.