

Christian Vega  
Iona Preparatory School  
2/20-21/2025

**Student to attach typed description of at least 300 words detailing the volunteer and community service. Please include the hours served, or individuals impacted and how it reflects the mission of St. Vincent's Hospital. If applicable, please include a personal experience/ story.**

The UN Sustainable Development Goals consist of a list of seventeen objectives aimed at achieving peace and prosperity worldwide. In my first year of high school, one of my teachers asked me to focus on one of these goals, and I chose to reduce inequalities. Social inequalities remain a prominent issue in today's society, whether it be people living in poverty or those struggling with special needs. Action must be taken, and I eagerly embraced the opportunity to contribute.

I have completed more than 80 hours of community service, working with the Lifting Up Westchester organization to sort food packages for shelters. Additionally, I volunteered with Iona Prep Unified and the Special Olympics to raise awareness for individuals with special needs. My most impactful service has been supporting individuals with special needs. I have seen friends and family members with disabilities fall behind in their social and personal lives due to a lack of understanding and support from their communities.

I began my advocacy in my freshman year by participating in a Polar Plunge fundraiser, where Iona Prep raised \$40,000 for the Special Olympics. I then joined an inclusion program at my school that welcomes individuals with special needs and fosters an inclusive environment between Iona Prep students and visiting special needs students. We met weekly to engage in activities such as playing music, board games, and sports.

Through the Unified Program, I was invited to attend an Inclusive Youth Leadership Summit hosted by the Special Olympics, where I was part of a group of Iona Prep students who presented verbal and non-verbal communication strategies for interacting with individuals with intellectual disabilities. While my work with individuals with special needs has been the most significant, I also contribute to Iona Prep's food drives, housing donation initiatives, and service trips to shelters to help organize food distribution for those in need.

The mission of St. Vincent's Hospital is rooted in charity and excellence in healthcare, fostering an atmosphere of support and shared ministry. It emphasizes respect and compassion for ourselves and others, the dignity of human life, and a commitment to the community. My efforts to reduce inequalities have had a profound impact on my local community, but I recognize that there is still more I can do. While social inequalities cannot be eliminated overnight, I am proud to be part of this growing initiative, which has even gained recognition on the Special Olympics website. Volunteering and advocating for this cause has been incredibly rewarding, knowing that I have contributed to fostering a more inclusive community and enriching the lives of numerous individuals.