



The Princeton Club of Rochester

Gianna Alexander
Senior, Rochester School of the Arts

"I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change...
I'm changing the things I cannot accept."
—Angela Davis

For Gianna Alexander, a senior at Rochester School of the Arts, impacting real change in race relations has meant uniquely positioning herself in leadership roles that enable her to effectively advocate and educate others. As secretary of the Black Student Union, Gianna offers black students a safe space to hold meetings and organize events. Within these platforms, she uses music, dance, artwork and movies to educate the SOTA community about race struggles and diversity. Gianna says the group's work is making huge strides for racial equity:

"The whole school is impacted by this activity because we educate, celebrate and engage students and spread black love and spirit. We have gained traction from the community and people are noticing what we are doing and are starting to take part, such as sponsoring, joining the club, or spreading the news."

Gianna is also president of SOTA's MOSAICS Club. In this role, she is helping to educate others around the planning events for the annual ROC2Change Summit. To further awareness of racial issues, Gianna was a leading organizer for a Black Lives Matter peaceful student walkout designed to demand racial equity and highlight the struggles black students encounter. She adds that as a black woman she has faced many obstacles, but she champions her ability to lead. She has advice that is well beyond her years to understand and embrace:

"The most challenging part is working with people that might not understand you or your state of living. There will be people that won't respect you because you are poor, or black, or a woman or mentally ill. There are people that may not take your cause as seriously as you do and you may have to take the reins and carry the load yourself."

Teacher and mentor Andrew Episcopo agrees, saying Gianna is uniquely skilled at bringing people together. He describes her as a leading voice at SOTA for diversity advocacy and events and notes that she is a key asset to the school groups' successes:

"Gianna is an exceptionally well-rounded student with a distinct understanding of how the world works in a way that many other people her age don't have. She speaks with confidence and care and works to make those around her comfortable in her presence."

We are so impressed by your powerful maturity and perseverance, Gianna! Onward!



**The Princeton Club of Rochester
Luke Grieshaber
Senior, Fairport Senior High School**

"If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair."
– Shirley Chisholm

Advocating for social justice and racial equity requires us to be creative and resourceful as Luke Grieshaber, a senior at Fairport High School, knows well. As the public relations officer of his school's DREAM (Demonstrate Racial Equality for All Mankind) Club, Luke has channeled his creativity in unique ways, engaging fellow students and staff to Asian culture via traditional food, artwork, and culture-specific displays and demonstrations.

"The challenge I faced in the modern day when so many people are interested in activism, but have yet to take action, was to create environments and opportunities that are low-commitment and an easy gateway to contributing to social change."

The AAPI bulletin board he designed and created -- seen by hundred of students throughout the month of May -- was described by his advisor and mentor, Kathryn O'Brien, as *"one of the most beautiful and artistic displays that a student has ever done."*

Luke describes his work's impact on his school and the community beyond:

"My efforts have helped make Fairport, a town with a very small Asian population, more aware of Asian culture, and the silent struggle Asian Americans face as the model minority group. My outreach in the community has given many people, young and old, the opportunity to get involved in the effort for racial justice."

Luke's efforts draw students to learn about and appreciate Asian culture. He says his methods overcome many obstacles by making displays and demonstrations that are approachable and easy to understand.

Ms. O'Brien says Luke takes pride in his advocacy and debunks stereotypes with his approach:

"Luke adds a unique perspective at every meeting. He is has a clear passion for social justice and positive change within our community. Luke is an ambassador for our club and represents what is best about DREAM Club."

Adds Luke: *"ROC2Change and DREAM club have both been vessels for me to learn more about race, articulate what I was experiencing, and act on racial change. The power of young minds is the belief that we can change the world. That's why us meeting together is so important, so powerful."*

We couldn't agree more, Luke. May your creative advocacy continue for years to come!



**The Princeton Club of Rochester
Elizabeth Komara
Senior, Our Lady of Mercy High School**

"The way to right wrongs is to turn the light of truth upon them." —Ida B. Wells

Elizabeth isn't just turning a light on racial equity and inclusion--she is a beacon and a force for change at Our Lady of Mercy High School and her community. If you heard that students were forced to pray in a bathroom or dismissed from a quiet space where they were practicing their faith, you might think they were at a rural and socially detached school. But these students once walked the halls of Mercy, and Elizabeth was instrumental in bringing awareness of these troubling situations to the school's administrators. Further, she facilitated the implementation of an Interfaith Space room where students of diverse religious backgrounds can now visit and pray in privacy and comfort. As Elizabeth says:

"Change is always hard, especially in institutions that are based on tradition. The fear of angering people and losing their support because of something new, even if it is the right thing, holds many people back."

But she persevered, and today maintains the room she created with a variety of religious writings and symbols for student use. Already, nearly 100 students have utilized that sacred space.

"The Interfaith Space is all about equity. Equity is recognizing that we do not all start from the same place, and therefore must recognize and adjust accordingly to those imbalances. We must overcome biases, whether intentional or not, that stem from systemic structures. I am overjoyed by the reaction of students who now have active support from the school for their religious needs."

As Elizabeth learned, enacting change requires tireless commitment, with political, administrative, and even theological challenges. But she was undeterred in pursuing the creation of Mercy's first-ever Asian Student's Association. Elizabeth engaged peers, teachers and administrators, and now serves as the club's president. Along with fostering a safe and empowering space for Asian students, the club collaborates with the Black and Hispanic Student Unions to create events that bond all students across cultures and races. Elizabeth also helped launch the "People of Color Council" to strengthen Mercy's diversity, equity and inclusion efforts. Retired Mercy President and CEO Pam Baker describes Elizabeth as a pioneer of positive and lasting change:

"After establishing the first ASA at Mercy, Elizabeth has been able to take on issues--be it cafeteria selections, academic readings or general knowledge of the school so the school could better work as a whole."

Baker adds that Elizabeth's leadership and dedication to racial equity was also demonstrated in her earning a coveted Gold Award from the Girl Scouts of America. Her project, "GLIDE, "Growing a Loving, Inclusive Diverse Environment," addressed the issues of diversity, inclusivity and feeling safe at Mercy.

"Her work touched the lives of all at Mercy and opened up needed dialogue on this very important topic."

Congratulations, Elizabeth! Keep shining that beacon of change on the world!



**The Princeton Club of Rochester
Adriana Ochoa
Junior, Pittsford Sutherland High School**

Social justice and racial equity have no boundaries for Adriana Ochoa, a junior at Sutherland High School. One of her first great successes was establishing and leading the school's very first Hispanic club, Unidos. The group's engaging activities include sharing traditional foods, exploring the historical significance of different holidays, and encouraging students to ask questions exploring the many Spanish-speaking cultures.

"Unidos means united and that represents the mission that I have for this group... Unidos was born from a passion to help strengthen the bonds between Hispanic students and students of all ethnicities to show our love for our diverse traditions. This group focuses on helping students feel proud of their cultural identity while creating respect and equity among all students regardless of their nationalities."

Adriana was also a club ambassador and leader for Sutherland's ROC2Change group. In that role, she facilitated meetings and collaborated with the Diversity Club and Superintendent's Student Advisory Council on district events. She spoke at a "Pittsford Parent Power Hour" and hosted a "Lunch & Learn" where students were invited to learn about micro-aggression, social media activism and stereotyping. She then provided presentations on similar topics to younger students, work that Adriana sees as key to fostering racial equity in our youth early on:

"Going to the middle schools helped us realize the importance of taking these topics to a variety of grade levels so students can have a better understanding of what it means to be inclusive at a younger age."

To further promote empowerment and education, Adriana helped prepare a video about her team's work to connect with those younger students. She says,

"It is the younger generations who will make a difference as teaching them the values of what we do will encourage them to spread what they learned to others and apply it to their own life through their actions."

Teacher and advisor Melissa DuPont, describing Adriana's "maturity and selflessness", says she never approaches her advocacy with anything less than her absolute best:

"I've never had a more committed, passionate or organized advisor. She knows the value and impact of the Unidos Club, and has never thought twice to make sure all of the bases are covered. She is proud of who she is, where she comes in, and knows that diversity is what connects people and helps them grow."

We know your work to educate and advocate for those around you will continue to have no boundaries. Congratulations, Adriana!



The Princeton Club of Rochester

Corinthian Reed Junior, McQuaid Jesuit High School

**“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”
--Martin Luther King**

If Dr. King’s words are true, we should expect Corinthian Reed, a junior at McQuaid Jesuit High School, to live a long and exceptional life advocating for racial equity and spreading the word about those challenges things that truly do matter. His activism is at the heart of the Princeton Prize tenets. Corinthian leads the Black Student Union and Mosaic Club at McQuaid and in that leadership role, he is addressing issues here in Rochester and beyond on topics such as redlining, racism and police brutality. As part of his work educating others, Corinthian hopes to broaden peoples’ perspectives about racial equity and those striving to achieve it. He says, boldly:

“One of the things I want to see change the most in my school is the amount of ignorance to world issues and hopefully allow people to see that even though we are only one school, we can make a difference and that you don’t have to be ashamed to be in these types of groups.”

Corinthian aims to expand his efforts by hosting school-wide events that focus on racial issues and bringing in outside speakers to address critical topics. His experiences participating in community programs and ROC2Change student summits have helped strengthen his leadership role.

Teacher and supporter Jennifer Martinez has worked closely with Corinthian in class and also in both the Black Student Union and MOSAIC Clubs at McQuaid. She explains that under his leadership the MOSAIC Club has focused on such topics as immigration, relationships with police, and health care disparities. She tells us how Corinthian’s maturity and ability to lead is recognized as he is often asked to represent the school at various community events. And she describes Corinthian as one of the kindest and most fair human beings she has ever met:

“He makes you want to be a better person by the morals he holds and how he models those for all students and adults. By his mere presence, he shows courage, grace and maturity in our school. He has the utmost respect from peers and teachers alike.”

Keep leading the way and using your voice to educate those near and far, Corinthian.
Bravo!



**The Princeton Club of Rochester
Carly Stevens
Senior, Canandaigua Academy**

“I wonder if there is a school of unlearning?” -- Charlie Mackesy

As a student leader on Canandaigua Academy’s Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Committee, Carly Stevens, a senior, is putting together impactful programs that for years to come should help promote racial equity. The DEI committee, under her student leadership, provides presentations on racial issues like micro-aggression, giving teachers an intimate view of the struggles minorities face. They also provide instructors with valuable tools to create a more positive and racially equitable environment for all. Carly explains:

“By presenting ways for teachers to promote inclusion in their classes, students know that teachers have their backs if something occurs in the classroom such as a micro-aggression. Teachers were in shock about the seriousness of the topic, but are now inspired to make their classrooms more inclusive and safe spaces.”

Carly and the DEI committee also host a school-wide “book talk” where students and administrators district-wide can learn and discuss diversity and racial challenges through the topics explored by the selected books. And to further champion racial equity, the student presentations drawn from the annual ROC2Change Student Race Summit will be brought back to Carly’s school, so that everyone in the district -- not just summit attendees -- can learn from them.

Carly became one of the student leaders this year for Black History Month. She took a bold and creative step by highlighting local community minority members instead of the national figures traditionally discussed. She placed posters and info-graphics about these individuals and their ancestors, and featured them during daily announcements. Carly explains that picking people personally related to minority students makes their peers more curious and open to learning about other cultures. And she also looks to inspire and reassure those younger than herself:

“My whole reason for being part of DEI and taking on leadership in creating an inclusive and diverse atmosphere is so that younger children do not have to feel the way I did growing up. I want the younger generation to know that they are valued and respected.”

School administrator and supporter Marie Windover describes Carly as a powerful champion for racial equity. She says,

“Carly holds us accountable. If she witnesses a micro-aggression or any form of implicit bias, she is poised and collected in her manner of sharing concerns and ideas for resolution. She continues to present ideas to our administration on how to help make our school a place of belonging for all students. The committee’s work will live on after she graduates this spring.”

Well done, Carly. We hope your advocacy continues for years to come -- in Canandaigua and far beyond.



**The Princeton Club of Rochester
Serai Williams
Junior, Fayetteville-Manlius High School**

“Problems can become opportunities when the right people come together.”
—Robert Redford

Breaking down racial, religious and societal barriers can only happen when there is teamwork and communication amongst diverse people and communities. Serai Williams, a junior at Fayetteville Manlius High School and a Better Chance Scholar from Brooklyn, is using creative ways to help those people and communities come together to better understand and celebrate their differences. At school, she shares her African American culture and history by choreographing visual and performing arts as a member of the school’s Black History Month Club. Serai says the performances have truly embedded a sense of respect and understanding among student peers within her predominantly white school:

“As a group we share our experiences that we have faced that truly have impacted who we are as people. When you share to groups of people your age, then they seem to be much more understanding rather than someone else who isn’t a part of their age group.”

Serai seized another opportunity to bring people from differing backgrounds together by participating in, and sometimes facilitating, a program called Community-Wide Dialogue. This series of meetings brings students from urban and suburban districts together to talk openly about critical issues like race, class and gender. Serai describes these conversations as having significant impact:

“They can help to build a sense of community and belonging among students, which can lead to better academic performance and a more positive school experience. Additionally, it helps students to learn from one another and gain new knowledge, ideas and perspectives.”

Serai plans to continue taking an active role in Community-Wide Dialogue next year to further her leadership experience and to help inspire and motivate others to work towards common goals and facilitate positive change. She adds that being a “Better Chance” scholar has inspired her to demonstrate leadership in improving race relations. The program’s goal is to grow young people of color into leaders in American society. Serai clearly understands the challenge before her. She says,

“I have been given an opportunity that many don’t get. I have put in a tremendous amount of work to get to where I am now, and I am truly determined to never stop. My future goals are to direct people in ways that help the society we live in today.”

May you proudly continue leading the charge for change, Serai. Onward!