



**The Princeton Club of Rochester
Maiya Doohan
Senior, Penfield High School
Youth Ambassador, Levine Center to End Hate**

“The past can hurt but remember you can either run from it or learn from it. The journey is part of our history, but the future becomes our legacy.” - Unknown

When we consider racial equity and unity, we often draw from history to find the roots of discrimination and hate. Education and deep emotional connections inspire and enable us to seek real change. Maiya began by weaving together two experiences -- the retelling of a Holocaust survivor’s story and a workshop on anti-Semitism -- to help us learn from the past. And “I Remember” was born.

Maiya’s “I Remember” project gives students the opportunity to hear powerful first-hand accounts from survivors of hate and then participate in a related educational workshop exploring hate’s very real risks and inspiring actionable impact. In its pilot year, students heard from three Holocaust survivors. This second year the story now being shared is that of a local mother whose 11-year-old son took his own life as the result of having been bullied by his middle-school classmates. These stories all portray personal events and horrors that prove the devastating result of allowing hatred to grow unchecked.

“My goal of this program is to provide students the opportunity to hear different ways that hate is perpetuated in our society and provide them with the tools to combat it after they have participated. In all we do, this program looks to educate students, and empower them to find ways to positively and constructively address these issues of hate in their own communities.”

The project’s success has led to its incorporation into Maiya’s school’s Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee, where future advocates will be able to build upon what she has created while she moves on to college and other advocacy projects. She has had the foresight to make the “I Remember” project serve as a template for those who carry it forward – and possibly even a pilot for other communities -- by designing the logistical, financial, and other plans and guidelines to ensure its ongoing success.

Community mentor Thomas Cuyler worked with Maiya on “I Remember.” He says the project is a direct result of Maiya’s personal experiences and her deep desire to effect positive change, right here at home and in the troubled world beyond.

“Maiya’s ability to turn personal inspirations into a community-wide educational movement showcases her extraordinary vision and dedication to racial equity. Furthermore, her plans for the program’s sustainability and expansion demonstrate a forward-thinking approach and a genuine investment in the long-term impact of her efforts.”

Maiya, your advocacy is a true gift. Please never give up the struggle to end hate.



**The Princeton Club of Rochester
Sunya Afrasiabi
Senior, Williamsville North High School**

“If we could look into each other’s hearts and understand the unique challenges each of us faces, I think we would treat each other much more gently, with more love, patience, tolerance and care.”
--Marvin J. Ashton

Sunya is an advocate who certainly takes these words to heart, helping others empathetically ‘walk a day in the shoes’ of immigrants to advance racial equity and inclusion. She is the founder and project leader of #MyStory, a storytelling project and youth-empowerment program that aims to unite people by developing immigrant narratives through oral history, narrative therapy and portrait exhibition. Sunya has collaborated with scores of Buffalo volunteers and community partners to bring the program to hundreds of attendees and citywide events. #MYStory showcases immigrant and refugee contributions, highlighting their individual cultures and connecting people through shared experiences. Sunya says she developed the program because of glaring disparities and discrimination she’s seen in and around Buffalo. Sunya says despite many challenges for participants, including fears of retribution, language and other cultural barriers, #MyStory is uniting the community:

“The project became a platform for dialogue and understanding, bridging the gap between different cultural backgrounds. Through these efforts, I aim to create lasting change in Buffalo, making it a more inclusive and harmonious place for everyone, regardless of their background.”

Moving forward, Sunya is looking towards creating national chapters for the #MyStory program to extend its powerful impact.

Founder and Executive Director of Bridges from Borders Yan Liu has worked with Sunya for several years and tells us that Sunya has also shined in their Mental Health Ambassador program, helping raise awareness of mental health issues among immigrant communities and in so doing helping reduce the stigma of those struggles to foster acceptance and understanding.

“Her enthusiasm when it comes to serving the community, promoting social justice and caring for human wellbeing is impressive. She demonstrates strong leadership in the team, is very organized and is always a positive person to work with. She is thoroughly dependable and demonstrates excellent responsibility, making sure to always bring up creative ways to find solutions. I am so grateful to have had her.”

We too are grateful for your work, Sunya. May your story continue to be told by many.



The Princeton Club of Rochester
Zenab Ahmed
Freshman, RCSD School Without Walls

"If you want peace, you won't get it with violence."
--John Lennon

When an application for the Princeton Prize in Race Relations from a freshman lands in our judges' hands, there is a sense that this applicant's advocacy is likely a lifetime commitment. To see a finalist so earnestly working to improve racial equity at such a young age is not only encouraging -- it's inspiring.

Just a freshman at School Without Walls, Zenab is already championing Lennon's words through a series of "Lunch and Learn" panel discussions where she talks about the importance of non-violence, civil disobedience, its history and leaders who successfully employed the practice to advance human rights around the world. She invests time in researching activists for weekly discussions, spreading invites through social media, flyers and personal contacts, as well as collaborating with others to craft her speeches and topics of discussion. Zenab wants everyone to understand why non-violent protests and activism are the best ways to advocate for equality, access, equity and inclusion. By researching and sharing the works of Gandhi, Martin Luther King and others in the Lunch and Learn forum, Zenab hopes to educate others and effect real change:

"I want to increase my peers' and community's knowledge about the importance of using their voices instead of physical force to fight for their human rights. I truly believe understanding the history of nonviolence and its effectiveness will allow us to create a better world for all. Education is the key to liberation."

Roc2Change advisor Leda Williams says Zenab is a driven student leader and a wonderful role model for her peers. Williams has worked closely with Zenab to help make her presentations at the Lunch and Learn events have lasting impact--and it shows. She says,

"Attendees seemed really impressed with Zenab's presentation and could not believe that she was only a freshman! They gave a thunderous applause at the end and said they plan to return for the next session."

Zenab, you've already got the right stuff to bring greater awareness of the importance of peaceful efforts to enact real change. Keep going!



**The Princeton Club of Rochester
Alexander Anderson
Senior, Irondequoit High School**

“Like hidden gems in the sands of time, unsung heroes sparkle quietly, leaving trails of inspiration for those who take the time to look.”

-- Nayana

Like an archeologist who unearths a rare and precious diamond, Alexander Anderson has discovered a piece of Black treasure that he hopes unveiling and preserving forever in music history will not only give the artist their long overdue recognition, but allow everyone in the world to honor, acknowledge and enjoy for eternity.

Alexander embarked on an ambitious task of researching the music of a movie entitled, “*A New Kind of Love*,” starring Joanne Woodward and Paul Newman for a book collaboration. Specifically, he was studying the music written by Black jazz musician Erroll Garner, and independently wrote an essay to be published that will preserve Garner’s accomplishments in jazz -- a critical piece of African American History. It was during his research of Garner’s archives that he discovered previously unknown lyrics Garner wrote for the movie. He was an integral part of the movie score, which ultimately earned orchestrator and collaborator Leith Stevens an Academy Award nomination -- with no mention of Garner. Alexander hopes to shine a spotlight on that incredibly talented yet unrecognized musician. He says,

“By publishing my research and new discoveries, I am able to impact a very broad audience. I am able to extend the impact worldwide by publishing my transcriptions of Garner’s work for the public domain. I have allowed a new generation of musicians to access the scores and play his music. My research on Garner is the first step to telling stories of those marginalized due to race and other factors.”

Author and editor James Doran, for whom Alexander embarked on his research, says the teen’s work went far beyond expectations:

“His diligence and scholarly approach in this comprehensive essay was astonishing. His brilliance and passion for music demonstrate his remarkable commitment to personal growth and excellence in every aspect of life.”

In the future, Alexander plans to research other African American musicians. With technology, research and time, he believes he can make this the career of a lifetime and inspire others to create more racial equity in music history.

We are all ears, Alexander, and grateful for your illuminating work. Bravo.



**The Princeton Club of Rochester
Javier Benzan
Senior, Brockport High School
Youth Ambassador, Levine Center to End Hate**

The academic version of Black history typically consists of slavery, emancipation, civil rights and Jim Crow. As a Youth Ambassador at the Levine Center to End Hate, Javier created “Evolution of the Revolution,” a presentation and workshop designed to dismantle the painful ignorance he believes the education system has left behind and inspire others to do good by creating strategies that proudly advance race relations:

“Our schools do not adequately teach the nuance of black history, and they often focus on negatives such as slavery while ignoring the strength and resilience of the Black community. The goal of ‘The Evolution of the Revolution’ is to enhance understanding of Black history by showing the complexly beautiful history of Black activism.”

Javier has also been working with the Rochester Public Library System to develop Black history resources that include a series of video interviews with local prominent figures to highlight in presentations across communities. His work has already impacted hundreds of participants including students, educators, school administrators, elected officials, community leaders and religious leaders.

“I like to think I help change lives by inspiring others to join the fight for racial equity. It is vital that Black people, particularly Black women of the past, get the recognition that they have been unjustly deprived of by White historians.”

Javier explains that as a mixed race Hispanic he struggled to relate to his Hispanic peers and others, which often left him feeling alone. But he says he is now able to harness those feelings and help forge his own path to racial equity.

“I have learned to use this isolation as an asset. Being a minority within a minority group gives me greater empathy for others who feel ostracized from society as well. My mixed race identity allows me to relate with both my white and my Hispanic peers, broadening my understanding of both groups and growing closer to my friends. It is this perspective that fueled me to become an advocate for racial equity.”

Community mentor Thomas Cuyler describes Javier’s broad commitment to community service and advocacy, and sees Javier as an inspiration to all.

“Javier’s multifaceted involvement in race relations, community service and mentorship, combined with his exemplary leadership skills, make him an outstanding candidate for the Princeton Prize. His work is a testament to his ability to effect meaningful change and continue making significant contributions to race relations in the future.”

Javier, we hope you will continue to enlighten the world – always and forever.



**The Princeton Club of Rochester
Farell Carey
Junior, Vertus Charter High School
Youth Ambassador, Levine Center to End Hate**

“Our ability to reach unity in diversity
will be the beauty and the test of our civilization.” -- Mahatma Gandhi

If Gandhi could see the world through Farell’s eyes, he might find reassurance that the beauty he speaks of could be possible through advocacy like Farell’s. By developing and delivering educational presentations on hate-related topics such as the Black Panthers, Weather Underground, extremism, and bullying, Farell is fostering a dialogue to end hate and promote racial equity and understanding in communities across the Rochester region. He says his experiences have shown him a pathway to inclusion and understanding:

“Witnessing the impact of bullying and stereotypes, especially within my school and community, I aim to challenge these narratives in a way that involves impactful presentations. By doing so, I promote understanding, unity and empowerment within our community. I want individuals to recognize the importance of supporting each other to create a community where collaboration prevails over division.”

Farell says the connections he’s made with a seat on the Youth Ambassador Council of the Levine Center to End Hate have generated strong support for his work.

Community mentor Thomas Cuyler has known Farell since he was just 11 years old and has watched him evolve from a curious, eager young advocate into a driven, insightful leader among his peers. Cuyler describes Farell’s presentations as innovative and impactful:

“Through these diverse sessions, Farell has effectively shed light on the intricate nature of societal issues, fostering a space for critical thought and empathy. The varied audience engagement, from educational institutions to esteemed organizations, underscores the relevance and effectiveness of his presentations in promoting racial understanding and advancing the dialogue on racial equity.”

Farell says he plans to continue his work by seeking out different presentation opportunities on a range of challenging issues. Cuyler confirms Farrell’s deep determination to keep on improving race relations:

“Farell’s commitment to revising and expanding his presentations further illustrates his ongoing dedication to racial equity, showcasing a proactive and visionary approach to leadership. Through his efforts, Farrell Carey embodies the qualities of an influential leader committed to making a significant impact on racial understanding and equity.”

That is truly a beautiful thing, Farell -- we applaud your leadership. Onward!



**The Princeton Club of Rochester
Shuwen Ding
Senior, Pittsford Sutherland High School**

Shuwen has undertaken a multi-dimensional approach towards achieving diversity and racial equity. As co-president of the ROC2Change Club at Pittsford Sutherland, Shuwen has spent the last three years in the group cultivating her activism. Today, she is proudly educating and bringing awareness to a variety of platforms, including indigenous land acknowledgement, bridging urban and suburban schools through presentations or “hack-a-thons,” and raising cultural awareness through inclusion-focused TedX experiences.

For land acknowledgement, Shuwen worked with Ganondagon to raise awareness of the suffering and mistreatment of Iroquois tribes, in our region the Haudenosaunee. By displaying their flag in school, Shuwen provided a constant visual reminder and symbol of appreciation of the people who lived here before us. That flag raises awareness, elicits curiosity, and leads to education about the Haudenosaunee people.

Shuwen also co-organized a program, UpstateHacks, to help bridge urban and suburban schools by bringing successful local leaders and businesspeople of color together with teams of students for a mentorship panel, exploring the elders’ struggles and achievements so that she and her peers might learn from these powerful life experiences.

In yet another effort to educate and open minds, Shuwen was instrumental in bringing TEDx presentations to Pittsford Sutherland. With a theme of "In a New Light", this event acts as a platform to amplify student's voices within the community while also giving the chance for Pittsford residents to sit down, listen to novel perspectives, and consider viewpoints that they may never have before. By opening a floor where ideas of a diverse set of students can be exchanged and celebrated, TEDx encourages a space of acceptance and collaboration.

School advisor and mentor Anne Missel says Shuwen works tirelessly to engage her fellow-students in these various activities:

“Shuwen shows leadership through her commitment and dedication to celebrating diversity. At the same time, she finds ways for both students and adults alike to have hard conversations and reflect on the roles they play in systemic racism...”

“...I have been working with kids for 20 years and I can honestly say that Shuwen is one of the most dedicated, responsible students I have ever known.”

What a wonderful recognition of so much hard and important effort, Shuwen. Well done!



The Princeton Club of Rochester
Shaila Man
Senior, Pittsford-Mendon High School

"Our rich and varied cultural heritage has a profound power to help build our nation."
--Nelson Mandela

Shaila is helping to build a world of understanding and acceptance by leading and expanding cultural awareness through Heritage Days at Pittsford-Mendon. As co-President of Allegiance, the school's cultural awareness club, Shaila spearheads the logistics and execution of Heritage Days, assemblies and student mentoring. The event educates others with displays including the arts, foods, languages and histories of the students' many diverse cultures and ethnicities. As Shaila explains:

"Enabling people from different backgrounds to find commonality and delve into cultural exploration has transformed my perspective of unity in my school. It has changed student and faculty dynamics for the better and provided a celebratory way to honor Pittsford's bright and spirited culture."

Shaila says she takes particular pride in sharing her Indian and Chinese roots with peers and the community, adding that the results are inspirational. She says,

"It gratifies me when small, unseen fragments of Asian culture are seen by the public eye--it's something priceless that cannot be taught through textbooks. I'm energized when other students feel the same and I am humbled to know that it's a source of connection, inspiration and learning to the school community."

Shaila's work also led to fundamental changes in the Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) curriculum at Pittsford-Mendon, with teachers incorporating DEI-focused content into lessons around the Heritage Day concept, thanks in part to Shaila's advocacy.

On a national level, Shaila is also the Western New York Ambassador for STEM to STERN, a national non-profit that promotes racial and socio-economic diversity in the sport of rowing. Here, she is integral in managing all social media content, writing curriculum for students, and growing the program. Her work reaches nearly 75 thousand members -- and still growing!

Pittsford-Mendon Allegiance Club advisor Jude Dietz says Shaila is shining a spotlight on racial equity and inclusion at a school that is highly focused on academia:

"Shaila is committed to actively challenging and changing the status quo, where every single minute must be focused on academic coursework. She aims to inspire, accept, share and celebrate members of all communities. Mendon is lucky to have her."

And we are lucky to have you in our Princeton Prize family, Shaila. Well done!



**The Princeton Club of Rochester
Benjamin Opoku
Senior, Brighton High School**

"Won't it be wonderful when Black history and Native American history and Jewish history and all of of U.S. History will be written from one book. Just U.S. History."
--Maya Angelou

For many of us, the book Angelou speaks of seems a far-off dream. But Benjamin is already hard at work on the spirit and intent of that more inclusive history book. For several years he has been working to broaden the perspective of the history taught at Brighton. Benjamin is impacting his school's curriculum by assembling a comprehensive array of resources that includes a broad range of African and African American historical figures, advocates and accomplishments. With support from district and school administration, Benjamin has already encouraged a more broadly enriched curriculum at the high school level and is hoping to do the same at the middle school level. He believes that racial equity will be fostered when Black history is taught through a more inclusive, more respectful, more honest lens.

"Previous stereotypes of Black inferiority will be diminished, and Black students at the middle and high schools will see representation within their history classes. Social Studies teachers will also have the opportunity to learn more about unacknowledged history as well."

At Brighton, Benjamin also serves as President of the Black Student Union, where he enacted significant positive change by helping re-write the organization's constitution to increase participation and promote joint ventures with other school groups.

And what better way to foster diversity and inclusion than by making it entertaining? Benjamin designed and created a Black History Month Trivia competition at Brighton to engage his peers with a newfound appreciation for Black history and under-recognized people of color. He worked with administration and teamed up with other members of the Black Student Union to use friendly competition to both engage and enlighten students.

Teacher and supporter Amy Maloy says Benjamin's tenacity and drive have resulted in programs that will continue for years to come and have lasting impact. She says his work is growing a base of students who have been inspired to continue educating their classmates about Black history.

"Ben is one of those once-in-a-lifetime students that teachers only dream of working with. Ben's enthusiasm and drive are often hard to keep up with. He shows constant determination, thoughtfulness, and a true desire to educate ALL students. His tenacity and intrinsic motivation have led to unity within our club and student body."

May your work continue to be part of the history books, Benjamin -- in Brighton and far beyond.



**The Princeton Club of Rochester
Tabitha Perry
Junior, RCSD World of Inquiry School #58**

"The fight for racial equality does not belong to one race, it is a fight for all of us.
All races working together to create the world we want for us and our children."
--Ukonwa Ojo

Our community has been fortunate to have Tabitha help transform thinking and motivate others to embrace different cultures and races in two different settings. She started her advocacy in the Black Student Union at Fairport High School and then continued at RCSD's World of Inquiry High School. While at Fairport, Tabitha encouraged inclusivity and understanding by participating in group discussions and organizing events hosted by the BSU. Tabitha says that experience helped her make racial differences among students more relatable:

"As a Cuban American student in the predominantly white school, I sometimes felt misunderstood by other students. By participating in BSU, I was able to connect with other people of the same and different cultures as me as well as spread awareness about my own culture."

Being a member of the Black Student Union has had personal impact as well. She says,

"As a white skin Cuban, often my culture is being denied and joining this club definitely made me feel more secure of myself and my roots. I found that teaching others to care for and be proud of their own identity has taught me to care and be proud of my own culture."

Teacher and mentor Jen Pavone says Tabitha's work helped to educate suburban students on the inequalities that exist in their own backyard and created an environment that is supportive and welcoming to everyone. Pavone adds that Tabitha's ability to reach others comes from within:

"What is most striking to me about Tabi is her intrinsic need to help others. (She) makes students feel welcome, regardless of who they are, where they are from, or where they are going. She is the kind of person who will enact change because of her peaceful, calm demeanor and authenticity in her pursuits."

Tabitha will soon be participating in this year's ROC2Change Student Summit and was recently honored with the Congress of Future Medical Leaders Award of Excellence.

Tabitha, we know you will continue to lead in creating racial equity wherever you go.



**The Princeton Club of Rochester
Corinthian Reed
Senior, McQuaid Jesuit High School**

"Truly remarkable leadership is not just about motivating others to follow, it's about inspiring them to become leaders themselves and setting the stage for even greater opportunities for future generations."
-- Condoleezza Rice

For students at McQuaid Jesuit High School, Corinthian Reed is the familiar face of racial equity and justice. He has been part of the school's Black Student Union and Mosaic clubs since he first came to McQuaid as an eighth grader. He is also no stranger to the Princeton Prize judges, as his growing advocacy was described in his 2023 application.

Currently President of the Black Student Union, Corinthian is now, as a senior, laying a solid groundwork for future leaders. In addition to representing the school with his public speaking, organization of events, and inspiring presentations, Corinthian created his school's first race relations summit. He is also taking the lead in reaching across generations to end racial injustice and educate others about cultural sensitivity and awareness:

"I am trying to change the younger generations and try to end the cycle of ignorance and hate that has been displayed. Most of all, I want people to feel comfortable at the place that I have called home for the last five years."

Corinthian is one of those powerful individuals who never has to shout to be heard, and his quiet demeanor portrays both strength and wisdom. Corinthian is ensuring that students who follow him are prepared and empowered to continue his work. He makes it a point to include younger students in organized assemblies and meetings, and talks openly with them about the issues of racial equity so that they can proudly carry the torch and sustain the progress being made at McQuaid when he moves on.

"When younger guys know that they have the support of their older brothers, it can motivate them. My older brothers at McQuaid always supported me, even after they were gone."

Teacher and mentor Jennifer Martinez says Corinthian's campaign for social justice at McQuaid has had a profound impact on the entire academic community. She says,

"There hasn't been any student over my 24 years of teaching who has made me want to be a better person both personally and professionally. Corinthian is the kindest human being I know."



**The Princeton Club of Rochester
Trevor Wiggins
Junior, RCSD World of Inquiry School #58**

"There is in this world no such forces as the force of a person determined to rise.
The human soul cannot be permanently chained." --W.E.B. DuBois

Trevor Wiggins is a young man who has harnessed that determination and is unleashing it with all of his mind, body and soul to bring strength, success and equity to young men of color. Trevor is the supervisor, spokesperson and youth advisor for the Talented Tenth, a group aiming to end the stigma often associated with young men of color and foster excellence and honor. The Talented Tenth is based on the philosophy of W.E.B. DuBois, whereby engaging and influencing at least a "tenth" of the black male population to pass on their influence, skills and talent to the next generation, will in turn create legacy, hope and change. Trevor says it's his calling:

"I aspire to do great and mighty things for my people. The world is dangerous, and when it's time for us to step foot out into the world, we need to have each other and outsmart the 'game' established for us to lose, so we can all win -- as a God given right."

The Talented Tenth has garnered additional support from local organizations including the Rochester Education Foundation (REF), 100 Women Who Care, Pearl Resources Inc., and RCSD's Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), where Trevor is a mentor and active leader as well. He created the group's logo, assisted in various administrative tasks, and maintains their database. Dr. Rita Gaither, who has mentored Trevor in several organizational contexts, says Trevor's work is invaluable:

"Trevor plays a key role in getting communication out to students and families He is an advocate and a champion for our platform."

In addition to Trevor's local advocacy for equity, inclusion and success, he was recently invited to attend a meeting of the New York State Assembly in Albany, where he was recognized from the podium by lawmakers as one of the Talented Tenth -- a true and highly respectful testament to Trevor's impact and reach.

Dr. Rita Gaither, who has also become for Trevor a close personal inspiration, describes him as a rare and exceptional advocate for change:

"Trevor Wiggins can be categorized as a 'Student of a Lifetime.' All teachers should experience one such student as Trevor. His dedication, attention to detail, loyalty, intellect, faith and devotion to mankind are remarkable. He stands tall in the arena for justice for all, particularly his counterparts, young men of color. He demonstrates that these young men deserve a seat at the tables. I cherish every moment spent with such an enthusiast for life and the advancement of others."

We could not have said it better, Trevor. You should be so proud!