



Princeton Club of Rochester
Elise Fisher
Senior, LeRoy Junior Senior High School

“If you really want to make a friend, go to someone’s house and eat with him.” – Cesar Chavez

“We are better when we celebrate together.” – Desmond Tutu

Breaking bread together – and celebrating together -- have always been powerfully symbolic ways to build bridges. Within her school community, Elise has brilliantly used both as great unifiers.

As President of LeRoy’s MOSAIC Club [an initiative founded by our 2016 Princeton Prize winner at Greece Arcadia, and still thriving today in many schools across our region] Elise designed a plan to host food-centered cultural events. Sharing a range of unfamiliar culinary creations from Ukrainian perogies, to authentic Mexican food, to African American soul food, Elise and her MOSAICS team have been fostering unity and inclusion one bite at a time.

“I created each event as an opportunity that could teach the parts of history that are sometimes overlooked. ‘Appetite for Culture’ taught peers that soul food [for example] represents heritage and the significant impact it has had on the Black community beyond mere taste. It creates a space of unity and fellowship.”

Holiday celebrations, too, offer opportunities for exploring and appreciating others, furthering equity and inclusion. By experiencing unfamiliar traditional celebrations, understanding can be fostered. And so, as another MOSAICS undertaking, Elise created, marketed and delivered “Holidays Around the World,” which are celebrations of unfamiliar cultural holidays. Her selection of Hanukkah introduced a student body with zero Jews to a traditional Jewish dreidel game. The Three Kings Holiday of Mexico was similarly unfamiliar until Elise provided an opportunity for her peers to experience its traditions.

Nichole Bradley explains the extraordinary impact that Elise has had on the LeRoy community:

“Students were abuzz and talking so positively about what they had learned about religions and traditions and unfamiliar foods...When you take into account that food-based events included local small businesses, Elise’s work truly benefits the broader community racially and financially. At a time when so many roll their eyes about diversity and inclusion, the students in our small, rural school are excited to voluntarily attend these educational after-school events, and this is a direct result of the positive impact Elise has made on our school community.”

What a delicious and celebratory way to spread racial equity across our region, Elise. Well done!



Princeton Club of Rochester

Jadon Kane

Junior, Penfield High School

“Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.”

-- President Barack Obama

Jadon’s vision for a future of inclusion, racial equity and an undivided human experience is not rooted in hope alone. Jadon looks to his younger brother and understands that now is the time to formulate and create real change. And he is doing just that.

As a leader in the school’s Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Advisory Committee, Jadon has played a role in creating a district-wide 5-year plan to push forward the groundwork of guidelines and other instructive materials for teachers and students to help ensure true equity and inclusion. Jadon is now working on the Superintendent’s Advisory Committee to put those words into action and make that vision a reality.

Penfield District Superintendent Dr. Tasha Potter explains how Jadon’s work will have a lasting impact on the school and the broader community by helping to foster greater awareness, dialogue and actions around racial equity:

“Through his leadership and participation on district committees, Jadon actively works to interrupt and disrupt bias in policies, practices and everyday interactions. His contributions have supported more equitable disciplinary practices, strengthened culturally responsive approaches to teaching and learning, and elevated student voices in district-level decision-making.”

As a result, says Dr. Potter, the school community has benefitted from a more inclusive climate where bias is addressed directly and students feel more seen, respected and valued.

Jadon says his experiences motivate him to be the change for future generations:

“I have a younger brother who I hope will grow up within the school and have a better experience because of my work. My reason for getting involved is because I want to do the work, not only for myself, but for the students who are coming up behind me.”

You are a beacon for change, Jadon—in words and deeds. Bravo.



Princeton Club of Rochester

Aniyah Matthews

Senior, Pittsford Sutherland High School

“Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.”

-- Confucius

Although Pittsford Sutherland had a Diversity Club, and several of its students had participated in Diversify Pittsford, the school didn't until recently have a Black Student Union. But that changed when Urban Suburban student Aniyah Matthews arrived, saw the need for a Black Student Union, and undertook to become its founder.

The first BSU proposal Aniyah submitted to the school was rejected. Yet undeterred, Aniyah says she *“...did not let this rejection detour me. I just took it as a sign of redirection, and an opportunity to grow and improve.”* And once she persevered, strengthened and resubmitted her proposal, and led the BSU into existence, she had learned a critically valuable lesson: *“...that setbacks can become steppingstones rather than stopping points.”*

Pittsford Sutherland's BSU has, with Aniyah as its leader, already accomplished many things. One was to create what she describes as *“...a safe space I wished I had as an underclassman, where students could talk about race, identity, and fairness without any judgement.”* Normalizing dialogue about race, and uplifting voices that were often overlooked, Aniyah and the BSU are working to *“...make sure that students with brown skin like me never feel outcast.”* She wants to help her school become a nurturing environment where *“students can feel safe being themselves and confident with using their voices.”*

Aniyah stresses that *“...representation, understanding, and equity are not a choice; they are essential for a healthy school community, both in and out of the classroom.”* Her recommender, teacher and mentor Ashley Graves, tells us that Aniyah's BSU *“has empowered students to become informed leaders and change-makers, positively shaping both individual growth and the school's culture...The club has helped create a more welcoming and respectful school climate and has pushed the school to be more mindful of representation, fairness, and cultural understanding.”*

Bravo, Aniyah. You've clearly made your mark – a very positive one – at Pittsford Sutherland.



**Princeton Club of Rochester
Mellodi Flowers
Sophomore, Penfield High School**

“It only takes one voice, at the right pitch, to start avalanche.”

--Dianna Hardy

As one of few black students at Penfield High School, and as an urban-suburban student, Mellodi found herself facing stereotypes and judgement. And so she has immersed herself in programs that promote equity and inclusion, like the Black Student Union, where she can comfortably and confidently speak up and speak out about race-related issues. With her voice and her personal experiences, she is engaging others to educate, advocate and build bridges.

Using that voice and the profound emotion that racism fuels, Mellodi performed a raw and powerful poem at a Juneteenth event about a woman discriminated against because of her appearance. Mellodi’s sympathy with the woman in the poem allowed her to speak from an honest and vulnerable place reflecting the perspective of her own personal history. Black Student Union Advisor Maheen Mustafa George says Mellodi’s honesty and courage prompted many conversations in the staff and student body:

“She raised awareness and was able to navigate difficult conversations with much grace and wisdom beyond her years.”

Mellodi says being involved in groups and activities that promote racial equity have helped her realize her true self and be seen and heard.

“Going forward I would like to be in a position where I make everyone of all races feel comfortable because we all face our own social challenges.”

Maheen Mustafa George offers this glowing description of Mellodi and her promise:

“Mellodi is a wise, brilliant and dedicated student. She is engaged in our school community and very committed to advancing racial equity in our school, our community, and beyond.”

Your voice is your gift and your power, Mellodi. May our world hear more from you. Onward!



Princeton Club of Rochester

Laurenz Rath

Sophomore, The Harley School

“You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated.” -- Maya Angelou

Cambodia, a small southeast Asian nation, has a devastating history that remains largely unknown to Americans. Few can locate it on a map, and fewer still understand the Khmer Rouge genocide that killed 2 million people in the 1970s, an attempt to erase its rich ancient culture. Laurenz has made it his mission to change this, even though his own grandparents, who were victims, had warned him that *“talking about the past brings only pain”*.

At the Harley School, Laurenz raises awareness about Cambodian history and culture through one-on-one conversations with his peers, presentations to teams and clubs, and organizing fundraisers that both educate and support Cambodian communities. He teaches his peers about the Khmer people’s history, culture, and values, breaking down misconceptions about an often invisible ethnic community and creating deeper cross-cultural understanding.

This commitment extends far beyond Harley. Throughout his life – both while being raised in Cambodia and now as a US Student – Laurenz has dedicated himself to nonprofit community work supporting impoverished children and communities through outreach, fundraising, and direct service with Global Children and other organizations that embody what he considers the most powerful gift a person can receive: Education. His videos, translations, social media, storytelling, and authentic student leadership narratives help communicate Cambodia’s story to those at Harley and far beyond.

In the words of his recommender, community mentor Laura Sackler: *“Laurenz embodies intergenerational transformation...demonstrating both the lasting impact of educational opportunity and the power of paying it forward – a shining example of change and even more powerful because he is the next generation of critical thinkers and problem solvers...teaching, breaking stereotypes, and improving intercultural communication and transformation.”*

Harley is lucky to have you with them now, Laurenz, sharing your story and its lessons. Bravo.



Princeton Club of Rochester
Henrietta Kallon
Junior, Gates Chili High School

“This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action.”
--Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

Action requires leadership, and Henrietta is demonstrating that leadership as an Equity Ambassador on her school’s Building Equity Team. Her work has helped identify inequities, facilitated equity-focused conversations that promote racial understanding, and supported initiatives that create inclusive practices. She has been collaborating with staff and students to advance meaningful change -- often based upon her own lived experiences as a teen who just emigrated to the US last year.

“There were many times when I felt isolated or judged, feeling left out due to my skin color and the way I speak English – not because of who I was as a person but because of assumptions people made about my background. Those moments motivated me to transform something painful into something meaningful – because I didn’t want other students to feel the same kind of exclusion that I experienced.”

On her journey into student social justice activism, Henrietta has also been a voice in both “Roc2Change” and the “Gates2Change” Student Race Summits. By helping bring inequities to light diplomatically and maturely, and actively listening to others, Henrietta has grown into a capable leader – fostering inclusive policies and culturally responsive approaches in her school and community.

Teacher and mentor Anicasia Rosario tells us that Henrietta *“entered the school system for the first time eager to learn, get involved, and make a positive impact. Her abilities amaze me. She is enthusiastic, always ready to learn, and a strong role model for her peers. I am incredibly proud of the challenges she has overcome and the leader she has become.”*

You are clearly an inspiration to those who surround you, Henrietta. Well done!



Princeton Club of Rochester
Jingying Xu
Junior, Ithaca High School

***“Justice begins when the unheard are heard.
To listen is to make room for dignity.”***

-- Anonymous

Jingying Xu comes to us from Ithaca High School, where she has been involved in two key initiatives that promote equity and inclusion among marginalized students – whether that marginalization is based upon gender, ethnicity, or race.

As a student who joined the Ithaca City School District Board of Education, Jingying’s role has been to represent the voice of the student, expressing student perspectives and priorities when issues and policies are discussed. When she heard *“students of color being discussed in rooms where they were rarely present”* and *“racial and economic inequities discussed as trends rather than lived realities,”* she realized that *“our schools needed a culture that treated student voices as legitimate.”*

As one of four student board representatives, *“we represent [nearly] 1,400 student voices and have helped transform lived inequities into data and policy, ensuring students are present in district decisions.”* Working with roughly 10 district administrators, board members and teachers, Jingying and her three student peers brought the student perspective into Board discussions about issues such as cell phone policy, *“ensuring that Board governance reflects the diversity of the community it serves.”* Using surveys, data analysis, and testimony, Jingying’s work helped institutionalize student voice rather than treating it as symbolic.

On the STEM front, Jingying realized that women remain significantly underrepresented in senior leadership levels, even when outcomes exceed expectations. As president of Code Red Robotics, she faced the uphill challenge of earning the respect of her fellow students but eventually built their confidence in her leadership as a female who excelled in STEM and could lead their team to victory.

As the only girl on the team, she became president of the 60-member organization yet *“bias did not disappear with the title.”* To prove her credibility, Jingying chose to *“lead with measurable results, such as raising \$10,000 in 28 days – exceeding the previous year’s \$8,000.”* Her team placed 4th overall at regional championships, an outcome she says *“reinforced a lesson I carry into all my equity work: Disparities persist not because of lack of ability, but because credibility is unevenly distributed.”* By grounding her leadership in data, revenue and results, she explains, *“I work to ensure that future students – especially girls and marginalized students – are evaluated by their contributions, not by expectations of who leadership should look like.”*

Her recommender, advisor Barbara Bergman, confirms that Jingying is a *“true leader”* who *“always goes the extra mile, bringing deep and compassionate thought into everything she does.”*

Well done, Jingying. Onward!