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## **14 YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS RECEIVE NATIONAL AWARD AND \$36,000 EACH FOR ENGAGING TEENS TO PURSUE SOCIAL CHANGE LOCALLY AND GLOBALLY**

*The Helen Diller Family Foundation Announces Tenth Annual Awards, Honoring Teens who are Improving the Lives of Chronically Ill Patients, Closing the Reading Gap for Underprivileged Students, Building Self-Confidence in Bullied and Special Needs Teens, and Engaging Youth in Meaningful Philanthropic Opportunities*

**SAN FRANCISCO, CA, June 27, 2016** — The Helen Diller Family Foundation, a supporting foundation of the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties, today announced the recipients of its annual Diller Teen *Tikkun Olam* Awards. Now in its tenth year, the national award recognizes youth leaders creating social change and working to solve their communities' pressing challenges. This year's award recipients are working across the nation to address issues from health disparities to economic inequalities, education gaps to bullying. Each awardee will receive \$36,000 in support of their philanthropic vision or to further their education. Descriptions of all 14 Award recipients and their projects are listed at: [www.dillerteenawards.org](http://www.dillerteenawards.org).

The Diller Teen *Tikkun Olam* Awards began in the San Francisco Bay Area in 2007, the vision of Bay Area philanthropist Helen Diller. The awards recognize Jewish teens demonstrating and exemplifying the spirit of *tikkun olam*, a central Jewish value meaning to repair the world. Since 2007 the program has awarded over \$3 million to 84 teens in recognition of their vision, innovation, and demonstration of leadership.

"We are so proud of all the awards recipients," said Jackie Safier, Helen Diller's daughter and President of the Helen Diller Family Foundation. "Each of them has demonstrated leadership, commitment, and a passion for making positive changes throughout the world. Their work reminds us that no matter your age, anything is possible when you put your mind to it."

Beyond bolstering national recognition of the teens and their projects, the Diller Teen *Tikkun Olam* Awards foster a collaborative community among recipients. Past recipients continue to inspire their peers to follow in their *tikkun olam* footsteps and create meaningful relationships with new awardees through networking and mentorship activities. Many past recipients have also been recognized by some of the most prestigious institutions and leaders, including the Jefferson Awards, the United Nations Foundation, The White House, and former President Bill Clinton.

Committees of educators and community leaders from across the United States selected the 2016 Diller Teen *Tikkun Olam* Award recipients. Candidates completed detailed applications describing their projects, goals, inspirations and challenges, fundraising tactics, and ultimate accomplishments. Eligible applicants were United States residents, between 13 and 19 years of age at the time of nomination, who self-identify as Jewish. A celebratory luncheon honoring the teens will be held in San Francisco on Monday, August 22, 2016.

## Meet the 14 national recipients of the 2016 Diller Teen *Tikkun Olam* Awards:

- **Kayla Abramowitz, 14, North Palm Beach, FL: Kayla Cares 4 Kids** – developed an organization that lifts the spirits of young patients nationwide by donating recreational items to keep youth engaged and motivated during long hospital stays.
- **Brittany Amano, 18, Honolulu, HI: The Future Isn't Hungry** – formed a project that combats malnutrition in youth living in under resourced and low-income housing through peer mentoring, cooking lessons, and donations of nutritious food and school supplies.
- **Maxwell Davis, 14, Stoneham, MA: Legislature in Action-Kids Helping Kids** – created a community project that engages youth in advocacy and lobbying efforts to raise funds to provide unaccompanied homeless youth with housing and supportive services.
- **Talia Eskenazi, 16, New York, NY: Celebrate U** – founded a non-profit organization that hosts birthday parties for disadvantaged children, to spread happiness, raise self-esteem, and create memorable experiences.
- **Jessica Goldberg, 17, St. Louis, MO: Performing for Pencils** – co-founded an organization that hosts an annual talent show to raise funds to provide disadvantaged students with the school supplies they need to be successful learners.
- **Alexa Grabelle, 15, Voorhees, NJ: Bags of Books** – formed a program that helps close the reading gap by collecting and donating new and gently used books to students in underserved communities.
- **Isaiah Granet, 16, San Diego, CA: San Diego Chill** – created a non-profit ice-hockey league to offer a welcoming community to children with developmental disabilities where they can connect with peers and gain self-confidence.
- **Corinne Hinds, 16, Walnut Creek, CA: Warm Winters** – co-founded an initiative that engages teen volunteers to collect unwanted warm apparel from ski resorts and distribute it to homeless people to help protect them during the winter months.
- **Alexandra Jackman, 16, Westfield, NJ: A Teen's Guide to Autism** – autism advocate and creator of an award-winning documentary that is used in schools nationwide to increase autism awareness, acceptance, and education.
- **Michael Mottahedeh, 18, Calabasas, CA: Taft Teen Court** – expanded awareness and involvement for a local program that works to reduce juvenile delinquency rates. Teens suspected of committing misdemeanors get chance to clear their records by presenting their case to a jury of their peers.
- **Laurielle Schwab, 18, Running Springs, CA: Rim High Literature Club** – launched a program that pairs teens with elementary school children in one-on one and group settings to help foster a love for reading, build comprehension skills, and increase classroom engagement.
- **Zachary Stier, 18, Paramus, NJ: YMath** – established a nonprofit organization that recruits and trains teen volunteers to provide free one-on-one personalized tutoring to students struggling in math and cannot afford to pay for a private tutor.
- **Eli Wachs, 19, Bryn Mawr, PA: High School HeroesX** – hosts incentivized competitions to give students a platform to problem-solve issues in their community and effect meaningful change on a global scale.
- **Valerie Weisler, 18, New York, NY: The Validation Project** – founded an international non-profit organization that empowers teens to gain self-confidence, overcome bullying and other personal obstacles, and tap into their skills to create solutions for social justice issues.

*\*Complete descriptions are included below. Additional information on each of the recipients can be found at:*  
<http://www.dillerteenawards.org/>

## 2016 DILLER TEEN *TIKKUN OLAM* AWARD RECIPIENTS AND THEIR PROJECTS:

### **Kayla Abramowitz (North Palm Beach, FL): Lifting Patients Spirits During Long Hospital Stays**

Kayla Abramowitz knew from a young age what it was like to spend countless hours in hospitals after being diagnosed with Crohn's Disease, Juvenile Arthritis and Eosinophilic Colitis. During a particularly difficult two-week hospital stay, she discovered the lack of recreational activities in place to offset the frustration, pain and boredom hospital patients with chronic illnesses often experience. This inspired Kayla to launch ***Kayla Cares 4 Kids***, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that collects and donates entertainment and educational items to children's hospitals and Ronald McDonald Houses nationwide. With many medical facilities relying on donations of books and movies for their patients and families, children have limited access to age-appropriate material during their stays. Through Kayla's efforts, ***Kayla Cares 4 Kids*** helped raise the spirit of young patients by identifying what they need to stay engaged and motivated during their recovery process. For her passion for transforming patients' lives, Kayla was named one of 10 Prudential Spirit of Community Award winners nationwide; the 2016 National Christopher Reeve Service Award winner; and the "2015 National Young Entrepreneur of the Year" by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and Young Entrepreneurs Academy. With the help of 13 ambassadors in 11 states, collection boxes and social media campaign, ***Kayla Cares 4 Kids*** has donated more than 11,000 items to approximately 100 facilities in all 50 states.

### **Brittany Amano (Honolulu, HI): Teen's Initiative Provides Groceries, Supplies and Hope to Underprivileged Youth Across the Country**

Brittany Amano's family experienced housing insecurity and homelessness, and relied heavily on the support of local food banks beginning when Brittany was a young girl. Seeing first-hand how hunger and homelessness can lead to hopelessness, Brittany sought a way to stop the cycle. She became a role model for children across the country with her organization, ***The Future Isn't Hungry***, founded in Hawaii in 2010. ***The Future Isn't Hungry*** provides school supplies, cooking lessons, and nutritious food for youth living in low income housing, homeless shelters, and foster care. Brittany has engaged more than 100,000 volunteers to expand her project to all fifty states over the past six years, feeding over 900,000 people and raising \$4,624,064 in funds and donations. Brittany's advocacy work has been recognized by the State of Hawaii and has earned her awards for her service work, including the Prudential Spirit of Community Award, the Peace First Prize, Running Start's Woman to Watch Award, and Variety Magazine's Power of Youth Award. For her work on ***The Future Isn't Hungry***, Brittany received the National Jefferson Award in 2015, considered by many to be the Nobel Prize for Public Service. Brittany is the youngest person to be named to Pacific Business News' 40 Under 40 list. She speaks across the country about her nonprofit work including engagements at the White House and TedxHonolulu.

### **Maxwell Davis (Stoneham, MA): Lobbying for Supportive Services for Homeless Youth**

Max Davis first developed a passion for advocacy through his work with homeless youth in the greater Boston area. Then Maxwell was moved by the story of a young army veteran who, after serving in Afghanistan, became homeless and was reduced to living under a bridge. This led Max to learn more about homelessness and particularly the challenges faced by unaccompanied homeless youth (UHY). In 2013, Max began lobbying for UHY to have housing and services. Then in 2014, Max engaged youth from his synagogue to lobby at the statehouse and created ***Legislature in Action-Kids Helping Kids***. The project's goal was to pass the Massachusetts House bill 135 into law, in support of the 13,000 UHY in Massachusetts. The law would put a system in place to obtain data about UHY and provide them with housing and supportive services. Members of the ***Legislature in Action-Kids Helping Kids*** project began by drafting talking points in support of the legislation, attending meetings with policymakers, and testifying at public hearings about the bill. Following the establishment of the law, Max advocated for necessary funding and urged Representatives and Senators to create \$2M in funding in support of services outlined in the legislation. To date, ***Legislature in Action-Kids Helping Kids*** has raised nearly \$8,000 and garnered the support of local adult and youth community group leaders. Max hopes to continue engaging local organizations to back the mission of ***Legislature in Action-Kids Helping Kids*** while inspiring teen volunteers to end the injustices faced by homeless youth.

### **Talia Eskenazi (New York, NY): Teen Hosts Birthday Celebrations for Underprivileged Youth**

Talia Eskenazi co-founded **Celebrate U** with her friend, Chase Kauder, to take their philanthropic efforts to the next level. Through **Celebrate U**, Talia strives to spread joy by throwing birthday parties for disadvantaged children living in underserved communities. The 501(c)(3) nonprofit works with local and national organizations to donate gifts, crafts, food, music and other services to create memorable experiences for children. Talia discovered that birthday parties are a simple way to recognize children and let them know they are important and provide hope for a brighter year ahead. Talia and her team begin by creating a large birthday banner signed by all of the attendees, followed by various age-based games including sing-alongs. **Celebrate U** has raised more than \$20,000 to host more than 1,000 birthday parties with the help of sponsors such as Magnolia Bakery and Treat House and the volunteer efforts of over 250 New York City student volunteers. Talia has continued to develop her event-planning skills and aims to expand **Celebrate U** and bring happiness to children on a national scale.

### **Jessica Goldberg (St. Louis, MO): Giving Students Hope One Pencil at a Time**

Jessica Goldberg was surprised to learn, while volunteering as a teaching assistant for severely underprivileged students at St. Louis Aim High, that the students she was trying to tutor did not have even the basic tools to succeed and excel in school. In August 2013, Jessica co-founded **Performing for Pencils**, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that provides disadvantaged school students with the basic school supplies they need to be successful learners. As an actor and dancer, Jessica was inspired to combine her love for the arts and education to gather fellow performers from across the St. Louis area to host an annual high school community talent show. Through Jessica's efforts, **Performing for Pencils** provided critical financial support to struggling schools, as well as having raised important awareness of social justice issues, and building bridges across racial and socioeconomic divisions in a city torn apart by violence and distrust. **Performing for Pencils** is currently expanding to the Chicago area and has raised \$35,000 since 2014. Jessica ultimately hopes to position **Performing for Pencils** as the catalyst for changing the lives of kids who are in need of a helping hand.

### **Alexa Grabelle (Voorhees, NJ): Teen Helps Close Reading Gaps by Fostering Love for Books**

Alexa Grabelle was 10 years old when she first heard about "summer slide," which occurs when students lose important reading skills during summer vacation. Alexa learned that students in low-income communities are particularly vulnerable to this effect, because they tend to have limited access to books and learning opportunities when school is not in session. Over time, this lack of access can lead to wide gaps in reading skills and lower literacy rates. Alexa took action by creating **Bags of Books**, a program that collects new and gently used books at collection sites, including schools, religious institutions and businesses, and distributes them to children in low-income communities. In five years, Alexa has engaged hundreds of volunteers, including teachers, students and service organization members, to assist in collecting, sorting and distributing more than 75,000 books to students in need. **Bags of Books** hosts "pop-up" book stores in schools, where students select books and take them home to kick-start their own personal libraries. **Bags of Books** has also donated thousands of books to under-resourced school and community libraries. Alexa is working now to expand Bags of Books nationally through a partnership with the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) charter schools. **Bags of Books** is also aligning with large companies to host internal book drives. Alexa's goal is to make a tangible impact on education equality by promoting literacy and fostering a love of reading in children of all ages.

### **Isaiah Granet (San Diego, CA): Teen Creates Hockey Community for Children with Special Needs**

As an avid ice hockey player, Isaiah Granet believes in sports as a vehicle to help everyone gain confidence and learn about teamwork and commitment. As Isaiah's Bar Mitzvah approached, he thought about what he could do to serve his community and share his passion for sports in a way that benefited others. He became aware of the shortage of athletic opportunities for children with developmental disabilities and decided to create **San Diego Chill**. The program uses a one-on-one mentoring model to teach seven to thirteen year-olds with developmental disabilities, including Autism and Down syndrome, how to play ice hockey and engage in positive social interactions. Teens volunteer as coaches and are assigned to specific players, allowing them to develop deep and meaningful bonds. Lessons are free for participants with all equipment donated. **San Diego Chill** is recognized as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and has grown into a welcoming community for more than 30 players and 25 coaches. Isaiah's leadership and passion has also increased community awareness for children

with special needs. For his accomplishments with *San Diego Chill*, Isaiah was honored with the *CNN Heroes: Young Wonder Award*, presented by Anderson Cooper in December 2016.

### **Corinne Hindes (Walnut Creek, CA): Turning Lost Jackets into Found Opportunities**

Ski-racer Corinne Hindes was home one bitterly cold day when she noticed a homeless man in her neighborhood dressed in only a t-shirt and jeans. Concerned for his safety, Corinne wondered how she could help. A few days later, Corinne was checking the lost and found at the ski resort where she practices, looking for a friend's lost hat. Corinne learned that the resort would soon be discarding the contents of the lost and found – jackets, hats, gloves, and more. And then Corinne put two and two together. She asked whether she could take the items to donate. The ski area staff said yes, and *Warm Winters* was off and running. Launched in 2011, Corinne's initiative now partners with 32 ski areas in 12 states. Through the involvement of 500 teen volunteers, *Warm Winters* has distributed more than 32,500 items of clothing to **18,000** homeless people. Corinne's work has earned her an endorsement from the National Ski Areas Association and training with the Jefferson Awards GlobeChangers Leadership Program. By 2019, Corinne hopes to partner with a total of 60 ski resorts in **15** different states, and to engage 5,000 volunteers to contribute to the cause.

### **Alexandra Jackman (Westfield, NJ): Award-Winning Film Invites Teens into a Day in the Life of Someone with Autism**

While attending summer camp in 2008, Alexandra Jackman met Jamie, a young girl with Cerebral Palsy. Alexandra was at first nervous at the thought of speaking to Jamie, but soon worked up the courage and she and Jamie became friends. The experience opened Alexandra's eyes to two things: the friendships that can be made between differently abled individuals, and how difficult it is for some teenagers to take that first step to interact with a peer with special needs. Alexandra spent the next few years working with people with special needs, and in 2012 developed a 14-minute documentary titled, "*A Teen's Guide to Understanding and Communicating with People with Autism.*" This unique, experiential film addresses common misconceptions about autism, while using visual and auditory effects to help viewers experience the challenges faced by those with special needs. In a vivid and accessible way, Alexandra shares the value of neurodiversity and encourages a deeper understanding of the autism diagnosis. Alexandra's film rapidly gained recognition and is now presented in schools and hospitals as an educational and anti-bullying tool. The film won awards at 10 film festivals including the World Humanitarian Film Festival and the Queens International Film Festival, and is used by Alexandra as a platform to speak about acceptance throughout the country. Her future plans include continuing her autism advocacy efforts and working to incorporate the film into a curriculum that can be used in schools nationally.

### **Michael Mottahedeh (Calabasas, CA): Teen's Efforts Helps Give Troubled Youth a Second Chance**

As the child of Jewish-Iranian parents who came to the United States to pursue religious freedom and opportunity, Michael Mottahedeh was taught to believe strongly in everyone's right to justice and equality. Michael discovered Teen Court in ninth grade and it became his passion shortly after. Teen Court is a community outreach program run by the Los Angeles Superior Court that works to reduce juvenile delinquency rates and recidivism. Through Teen Court, minors suspected of committing a crime are diverted from the traditional justice system and are given the opportunity to present their case to a jury of their peers. If found guilty, youth offenders can wipe their records clean by completing a sentence determined by students who volunteer as jurors, clerks and bailiffs. When Michael first joined the Taft Charter High School Teen Court chapter, fewer than 25 students attended the monthly sessions. In four years, he created social media campaigns, hosted club meetings, coordinated field trips, and organized fundraisers. Michael is now President of *Taft Teen Court* and has grown attendance to an average of 140 students per session. He believes that this program has proved to be an effective solution to mass incarceration, boasting a 90% success rate at keeping minors out of the formal Juvenile Justice System. Michael's work empowers at-risk teens to take charge of their futures, while simultaneously providing more privileged teens with opportunities to partner with peers who would otherwise remain invisible to them.

### **Laurielle Schwab (Running Springs, CA): Teen Enriches Elementary Student Education Through the Power of Reading**

Laurielle Schwab's philosophy has always been "healing begins with one, and in turn, affects many." When funding cuts caused the collapse of the reading program at the elementary school she had attended, Laurielle set out to provide students with the same access to the reading resources and opportunities she had at their age. In October 2014, Laurielle founded **Rim High Literature Club**, an organization that pairs teenagers with children in primary school grades to foster reading comprehension and appreciation skills. Teen mentors work with students to build vocabulary, analyze literature, and explore poetry. Laurielle's organization has thus far enriched the lives of more than 1,000 elementary school students, while engaging 50+ teen volunteers. Teachers report that the program has dramatically increased student engagement in reading and writing. Through fundraising and donations of 300 gently-used children's books, the organization is now expanding to help more schools, with Laurielle's ultimate goal being to see every elementary school in the nation partnered with a high school tutoring program.

### **Zachary Stier (Paramus, NJ): Tutoring Program Helps Kids Succeed**

Zachary Stier loves being a math tutor. With every student who aces a test or who discovers a passion for learning, he is reminded of the impact individual attention and assistance has on a student's performance. His passion for teaching and his ability to make math relevant in the real world resulted in a growing demand for his service. Once he entered high school, Zachary decided to launch **YMath**, a nonprofit organization that provides free one-on-one tutoring to students who are struggling in their math classes but are unable to pay for a private tutor. A team of more than 45 tutors works with students at two venues every week, the Bergen County Academies and the Garfield YMCA. Together, they have helped more than 200 students. Zachary's peer-to-peer approach allows tutors to create personalized teaching plans tailored to meet every student's individual needs and ensure they don't fall behind. Those who are more advanced, work with tutors to discover new applications for their skills and to prepare for math leagues and competitions. Students can join the program at any point in the academic year and at any skill level. In 2014, Zachary was named a Youth Volunteer of the Year by the New Jersey YMCA State Alliance in recognition of **YMath's** success. He plans to expand **YMath** to additional locations and identify students throughout the country who just need a little extra support to succeed.

### **Eli Wachs (Bryn Mawr, PA): Teen Inspires Peers to Solve Problems through Innovation**

Shortly after starting high school, Eli Wachs read a book by Dr. Peter Diamandis, founder of Xprize, an organization that incentivizes the world to fix problems that governments, philanthropists, and the private sector haven't solved. Eli was inspired by the central theme of the book, that many of the world's greatest challenges are overcome by a combination of innovation and growing access to technology. Eli harnessed his passion to identify the issues affecting his city, Philadelphia, and created **High School HeroesX**; a youth movement created with the belief that youth can change the world. The program hosts incentivized competitions by providing high school students with a platform to tackle issues facing their communities. **High School HeroesX** also provides an advisory board of experts to assist in these challenges, and resources to increase engagement from government officials. Projects range from narrowing the education gap with inner-city schools to launching a Beijing Food Safety Challenge. Since **High School HeroesX's** inception in 2013, Eli has become a trailblazer in social entrepreneurship and mending broken communities, both at home and internationally, by inspiring his peers to solve social issues.

### **Valerie Weisler (New York, NY): "Kindness" Program Validates Teens Around the World**

Valerie Weisler was a shy high school freshman when she came across a student being bullied and said two words that changed both of their lives, "You matter." His response, that her words "validated" him, planted the seeds for **The Validation Project**. Having experienced bullying herself, Valerie launched the project to help other teens gain confidence, believe in themselves more deeply, and develop the skills to address social justice issues. Teens identify their skills and passion, partner with mentors in their field of interest and then design campaigns to positively impact their community. **The Validation Project** also incorporates a "kindness curriculum," that has replaced government-led anti-bullying courses in nearly 1,000 schools across the globe. To date, **The Validation Project** has grown from a handful of New York schools into a global organization with

chapters in 105 countries. So far, 6,000 teens have gone through the program, 38,500 teens have joined chapters, 3,000 adults have served as mentors, and \$40,000 in goods and services have been donated in support of the project. In recognition of her success, as well as her contributions to dozens of charities, Valerie has received attention from the White House, the UN, the State Department and several other high-profile organizations, including the NFL, Seventeen Magazine, and the United Synagogue Youth. She also recently gave a Ted Talk in New York City to further spread her message of kindness and validation.