

2020



YOUNG WOMEN IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS AWARDEES

Recognizing young women for their commitment to volunteerism, volunteer leadership achievements and dedication to empowering women worldwide



Because Zonta International believes that young women are the key to women's advancement in the field of public service, it offers the Young Women in Public Affairs (YWPA) Award to young women, ages 16-19.

Established in 1990 by Past International President Leneen Forde, Zonta has given 971 awards, totaling US\$1,109,250, to 819 young women from 58 countries.

Read on to learn about Zonta International's 2020 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardees.



2020 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Daria Nastasia



District 7

Citizenship: United States

Daria Nastasia is very involved in coordinating social justice activities at her school. As co-president of her high school's Gay-Straight Alliance, she organized weekly meetings for more than 80 members and outreach activities such as policy dialogues, guest speakers, and booths and displays at schools and community events. Daria also spearheaded a successful effort to persuade the school district's leadership to mention vulnerable groups in anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies. She participated in Key Club and the National Honor Society and has represented various nations in regional Model United Nations simulations.

Daria is also involved in activism activities in her community. She is a member of Gateway to Change, a regional organization—established following the death of Michael Brown—that aims to engage St. Louis schools and businesses in dialogues about inequality and issues underprivileged groups face. She held an apprenticeship in the Teens Make History program of the Missouri Historical Society, participated in the prestigious Youth Leadership Program of FOCUS St. Louis and held a summer internship with Civitas St. Louis. In addition, Daria enjoys volunteering and serving the community at a local soup kitchen, food and clothing drives, and more.

An immigrant to the United States from Romania, Daria has become passionate about government and politics in domestic and international settings. She studied international politics in summer programs at George Mason University in 2018 and Georgetown University in 2019. She was selected for the 2020 National Security Language Initiative for Youth of the U.S. Department of State. Though originally planned as an immersion experience in Russia, it took place as a virtual intensive Russian language learning opportunity due to COVID-19. Daria plans to pursue a double major in political science and international affairs. Her goal is to have a career focused on making public policy and public discourse changes to improve peoples' lives and livelihoods.



2020 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Guadalupe Roman



District 10

Citizenship: United States

Guadalupe Roman collaborated with a group of classmates to form the Safe Spaces club after a teacher verbally harassed a classroom full of minority students, asserting that parts of their identities were unworthy of society. The club offers workshops for principals across her school district and sister schools throughout Texas, and several teachers have reported changing their instructional approach to create a more inclusive learning environment as a result. The students' efforts received financial support from the Embrey Human Rights Program, and Guadalupe was recognized for her work by the Princeton Prize in Race Relations.

Guadalupe became a student election clerk after the 2016 elections and served two very different communities in Dallas County during the 2018 mid-terms and Texas's Constitutional Amendment Election in 2019. Desiring to learn more about different cultures, she applied for and received the National Security Language Initiative for Youth of the U.S. Department of State. Through this program, she studied abroad in Jordan for seven weeks, volunteering with a refugee organization.

An incoming freshman at Southern Methodist University, Guadalupe is a President's Scholar and Rotunda Scholar. She is majoring in human rights and international studies and will pursue a teaching certification. She plans to be an active member of her community by participating in undergraduate research paired with public policy drafting and developing civically engaged youth through the League of United Latino American Citizens as vice president of Youth Councils, a position she received as a prospective student. She also wants to become a college adviser assistant through the Academic Success Program, a nonprofit that helps prepare high school students for college. Guadalupe's career goal is to create equitable success to education—first as an educator and then by creating systemic change through public policy.



2020 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Kennedy Walls



District 11

Citizenship: United States

Kennedy Walls is proud of her ability to bring culture to the student body as president of Chinese club and as a student ambassador. However, her most important school activities were her time as student government representative and co-president of her school's chapter of Active Minds, a nonprofit that supports mental health awareness and education for students. Kennedy's three years as a student government representative taught her invaluable skills, including how to advocate for students of all age ranges and how to negotiate with adult decision-makers.

In addition to her active participation in school extracurriculars, Kennedy is founder and CEO of Aid the Journey, Inc., a nonprofit that provides health and hygiene kits to refugees in Clarkston, Georgia. During a volunteer trip to Clarkston—known as “the Ellis Island of the South” due to the influx of refugees—she noticed the urgent need for health care resources when a Syrian girl did not have a bandage for her wound. Kennedy's mission began with her buying and distributing bandages and has evolved to assessing Clarkston's needs and providing numerous medical products. She is also interested in politics and was one of three high school students selected as an intern for the Stacey Abrams for Governor campaign. Her role included managing communications, tracking and developing campaign finance spreadsheets, conducting mobile community surveys, phone banking and training volunteers. During the campaign's final months, she was the only high school student on the advance team for campaign rallies and presidential visits to Georgia.

Kennedy is an incoming freshman at Princeton University. Her passion for prolonging life and promoting health equality in populations across the globe has led her to aspirations of becoming both a medical doctor and an attorney. Her goal is to continue supplying refugees with medical kits and feminine products through Aid the Journey. Ultimately, she aims to use her acquired French, Arabic and Mandarin Chinese skills to work in leadership for the World Health Organization or the United Nations.



2020 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

E Wen Wong



District 16

Citizenship: New Zealand

E Wen Wong was involved in a variety of activities at her high school, which allowed her to form positive relationships with a range of students and give back to the school. She was head girl, a Year 9 support prefect, chair and founder of Sustainability Council, student council co-chair, member of the symphonic band, and oboe section leader of the award-winning orchestra. E Wen has also represented the school in athletics, road race, cross country, table tennis and orienteering—the sport of navigation using a map and compass. Passionate about civics education and international relations, she was also a United Nations Youth high school ambassador who helped increase accessibility of UN Youth events to local students. In 2017, E Wen helped with the first-ever Model United Nations event in Canterbury. The team won a Canterbury Youth Award for their efforts.

In 2016, E Wen founded P.S. Our Beaches (Plastic Solutions for Our Beaches). The organization, which aims to raise awareness around single-use plastics, has facilitated and promoted litter audits, awareness posts on sustainability initiatives and short interviews with other organizations, such as the Department of Conservation and UNESCO. Last year, E Wen coordinated the inaugural EnviroPAST (Plastic And Sustainability Talks) Conference, which welcomed more than 100 young people for two days of inspiration, education and action on environmental issues. She also volunteers with Sustainable Coastlines, 350 Aotearoa and as a committee member of the New Zealand Poetry Society. In 2019, she was selected to represent New Zealand at the International Geography Olympiad (iGeo) at Istanbul Technical University. The iGeo aims to stimulate active interest in geographical and environmental studies among young people.

E Wen plans to attend university in 2021 and study law and science with a major in geography/GIS and environmental studies. She wants to be a successful environmental lawyer or policy analyst who is involved with hands-on community environmental action by establishing a social enterprise. Her goal is to represent New Zealand at the UN on environmental issues or sustainability. She hopes to expand the reach of P.S. Our Beaches and deliver environmental conferences to a wider range of young people in Aotearoa.



2020 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Leung Ka Chi



District 17

Citizenship: United States

Ka Chi “Katrina” Leung has strengthened her multi-perspective thinking and communication skills through the various leadership positions she has held at her school, including sub-committee member of the student association, leader of the Representative Council, captain of her high school and vice president of the Heep Yunn School Z Club. Katrina provided her schoolmates with resources to make them aware of and better understand gender inequality: She delivered a speech and organized various activities and a seminar on child marriage. She also organized a joint-school Easter service for the children of single parents and a storytelling program for disadvantaged children.

Katrina was elected as a Kowloon Outstanding Student in recognition of her excellence in academics and extracurricular and community service achievements. As part of the Model Legislative Council, she exchanged views with politicians and government officials and exhibited her enthusiasm for social issues such as the standardization of working hours in Hong Kong. Katrina joined the UNICEF Young Envoys Programme, launched by UNICEF HK in 1996, and took a leading role in designing and organizing two community events for more than 10,000 people. The first project, EMBRACE, was an interactive exhibition that combined display boards, video screening, interactive games and virtual reality technology to allow the public to see through the eyes of children with special needs. For the second project, Katrina focused on the impact of AIDS on children in developing countries, using storyboards to share their stories with the public.

With an interest in understanding human and social behaviors, Katrina strives to become a clinical psychologist. Mental illness is an issue worldwide, and she wants to help people with mental disorders. She plans to offer free therapy consultations to people with financial difficulties and to organize workshops and seminars for the public to raise awareness and support of mental health. Katrina hopes to work for the World Health Organization to help improve mental health through prevention, improvement of treatment services and the care of those affected by mental disorders.



2020 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Juanita Alabi



District 18

Citizenship: Ghana

Juanita Alabi has been an active member of her school's Interact club—Rotary International's service club for young people ages 12 to 18—eventually serving as vice president. She joined the club because of her love for service-based learning and her reverence of her school's motto, "Knowledge through the service of Africa." In her tenure, Juanita spearheaded several projects, including raising GH¢3000 (more than US\$500) to paint a hospital's emergency ward, raising money to throw a Christmas party for members of an orthopedic center, and raising GH¢2000 (nearly US\$350) and gathering donations of clothing and school supplies for a school. Juanita was also the writing committee head of her CAS (creativity, activity, service) project and part of the board that led the purchasing of brilliance machines and incubators for a local hospital. She enjoyed the opportunity to spread awareness of jaundice and infant mortality, making an impact and increasing her own awareness of global issues.

Juanita participated in the Global March for Elephants and Rhinos as a member of the design committee. The project was organized so students from all over the world could raise awareness on endangered species and engage in fundraising. Juanita's group created artifacts to sell, made posters and produced a video to spread awareness. She also participated in a competition in which her team had to make two boats out of plastic bottles. Additionally, Juanita has volunteered at a school for children with special needs and as a teacher assistant.

After working with children with special needs, Juanita decided to pursue either neuroscience and behavior or neuroscience in tandem with psychology. She hopes to build better facilities for children with special needs and to create charity organizations that will provide a network of volunteers and other organizations. She also plans to link high-functioning autistic students with universities to help them develop their talents and provide the necessary aid. She wants to educate Ghanaians on special needs and education to curb the existing stigma.



2020 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Peoly Gunaratne



District 24

Citizenship: Australia

Throughout her years in high school, Peoly Gunaratne has had many opportunities to develop a range of leadership skills including communication, emotional intelligence and creativity. Her involvement in Student Representative Council, social justice committee and the senior prefect body has helped her enjoy working in groups to create school events and projects benefitting the school community. Her participation in her school's band, drama club and Diversity Group strengthened her skills of teamwork, credibility and time management. Peoly established an annual non-competition speaking event and a business and entrepreneurial group at her school and she was chosen for High Resolves, a national, not-for-profit educational initiative that enhances students' understanding of various issues such as identity, social justice and conflict resolution.

In 2017, Peoly co-founded the youth organization Provokewoke, a storytelling, change-making platform that empowers young people of color to speak up for issues they are most passionate about. As head of operations, she creates workshops and events—held during times such as International Women's Day, Refugee Week and Reconciliation Week—that bring young people together to create conversation on important national issues. Peoly also participates in Muthuhara, a Sri Lankan youth organization. During her term as president, she led an executive committee and member base of 30 young Sri Lankans to create sustainable stationary packs and educational resources to support children in the poorest communities of Chillaw and Hambantota. She has participated annually in United Nations Youth Australia State Conference camps since 2016 and reached the state championships in The Evatt Competition in 2018, acquiring incredible experience in navigating diplomatic relations.

Peoly is an incoming freshman at the University of New South Wales, where she plans to study humanities subjects including international studies, economics, law and political science. She would like to continue her volunteering by expanding Provokewoke's events and engagement base into university. As president of Muthuhara, she plans to establish unique international initiatives of medical resource fundraising.



2020 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Dipisha Bhujel



District 25

Citizenship: Nepal

Dipisha Bhujel is passionate about helping people who are in need. As vice president of her high school's Junior Red Cross Circle, she organized social work-related programs that included fundraising for people in need. She also represented her school at public speaking platforms and dance competitions.

In 2015, Dipisha started as a psychosocial support volunteer in an Emergency Response Unit, where she worked with a vulnerable population—mainly children and adolescents. Working with psychologists, she helped people improve their mental health and she conducted daily classes to provide children with a safe space to play and learn. As a board member of Jagriti Child and Youth Concern Nepal, Dipisha initiated an online platform that gives young women the opportunity to share their stories regarding menstruation to help eradicate stigmas. She also works with a German international non-governmental organization to educate students from remote areas about health issues, the environment and reproductive health, and she has volunteered with the National Youth Council, organized self-defense training and motivational programs for young women, served as vice president for Global Teen-Hero Alumni Association, and received an outstanding delegation title in Model United Nations.

Dipisha is entering her second year at Padma Kanya Multiple Campus, where she is studying psychology and English literature. She will pursue medicine with a degree in psychology and public health. During her studies, Dipisha plans to run awareness campaigns on mental health, specifically for women on topics such as domestic violence trauma, premenstrual syndrome (PMS), postpartum depression, menopause and puberty. Her goal is to advise and persuade the government to provide quality health care for all.



2020 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Emma Lehbib



District 27

Citizenship: Germany

With a desire to initiate a project at her school that would also affect the world outside school, Emma Lehbib, with the group HBG Against Slavery, initiated several campaigns that drew attention to the inhumane treatments of refugees in Libya and raised €1,000 (approximately US\$1,173) for the International Organization for Migration. The next year, Emma helped take the lead of the group, which they renamed to HBG for Human Rights. They organized a charity run and raised more than €5,000 (approximately US\$5,867) for an orphanage in South Africa. The money allowed the orphanage to finish building an educational establishment and still have a budget for future projects or the ability to care for more children.

Emma learned important skills as a leader in political simulations such as the Model European Parliament (MEP) and Elephant Model United Nations (ELMUN). She helped to organize a conference for 130 students as part of her role with MEP; and, as secretary general of ELMUN, an international summit of 200 students, Emma guided the general secretariat and the staff team. For both conferences, she was partially responsible for finding sponsorships and accommodations, coordinating applications and training the chair team. She was also part of her school's student council.

Emma would like to attend a Dutch university and is contemplating going into politics. She is interested in working for the European Union, United Nations or a non-governmental organization. Throughout her studies, she plans to continue her volunteer work with a focus on human rights, equality and the advancement of developing countries.



2020 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Anaika Chopra



District 29

Citizenship: United Kingdom

Anaika Chopra has taken on many leadership roles, which furthered her skill set and allowed her to grow as a leader and teammate. She ran the Model United Nations club at her school and participated in competitions, took part in a mock election and participated in Young Enterprise. These experiences taught Anaika how to improve in public speaking and provided a platform from which she could practice her skills and confidence with passion.

Anaika also actively volunteers outside of school. Her most memorable experience was spending a week working with Khushii, a nonprofit organization in India that educates and feeds children in schools who cannot afford a healthy meal or proper nutrition. She has also campaigned with both her local and national governments. This opportunity to work with politicians and members of council allowed Anaika to enhance her understanding of the political world and truly experience the daily lives of politicians and the important and extensive work they do. In 2019, she participated in the Global Young Leadership Conference, a political leadership program that took place over 10 days in the United States.

With one year left at St. Helen's School, Anaika plans to study politics and international relations with business at a university before pursuing a career in politics. As a lawyer, she plans to take on pro-bono work; as a businessperson, she wants to maintain charitable interests; as a politician, she wants to work with communities to help resolve any issues she can. Anaika also wants to set up charities and aid the less fortunate and defend causes about which she is passionate.