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Friedlander Upstander Award Scholarship
Locust Valley High School
February 2020

An upstander is defined as someone who stands up for what is right, combats prejudice, and promotes tolerance in the surrounding community. I believe I am an upstander because I have dedicated myself to spreading kindness in my community. A young girl in my local community has shown me that kindness can shine through even in the darkest of places.

The first time I started working with Audrey, a 10-year-old nonverbal girl on the autistic spectrum, she instantly grabbed my hand. I will remember that gesture throughout my life, as a simple, yet genuine, act of kindness. My high school has recently adopted a program called "Life Skills", which helps special needs children adapt to daily tasks needed to survive. These children learn how to shop for food, eat properly, put away dishes, wash clothes, and even dress themselves. Every day during my lunch period, I volunteer with this class of students, watching them learn and grow while perfecting new skills. To me, community service means every day getting to see Audrey run up and hug me with a big smile on her face. She has trouble walking correctly and is non-verbal, but I still believe that we have a special bond. Whenever her aid looks away, she rushes at the chance to hug and kiss me, although she knows she will be reprimanded for doing so. Her pure love inside of her is what makes her special: not her special needs that seem to define her sometimes.

The first time I volunteered at "Life Skills", I had butterflies in my stomach, as I have never worked with special needs children before. After the first day, I realized I never had

anything to worry about because I just had to be myself! Every day when the period ends, I walk away a better person and hope in some way I have made Audrey's life a little better too. Audrey gives me hope for the future that one day society will see past differences in religions, races, and genders. Audrey instantly grabbed my hand the first time I met her, and I believe many people could learn from that simple gesture of kindness. Perhaps hate in this world could be resolved if people were judged by the character of their heart, not by the stereotype society assigns them.

As a result of volunteering with "Life Skills", I have decided to become an elementary school teacher. I want to make a difference in children's lives and show them that everyone can make the world a better place through being an upstander. Audrey didn't judge me for the way I look, the way I talk, or the way I dress. She opened her arms with complete acceptance, and I strive to spread the same acceptance to people of all different backgrounds. I want to be able to reach children before society's prejudice consumes them. A bright future starts with instilling powerful values in the younger generations.

(Word Count- 493)