

JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT OF ARIZONA PRESENTS

The Best and The Brightest of 2023



Junior
Achievement™
of Arizona

18 UNDER 18





Entrepreneurial Spirit

Leadership

Making the Community Better

Extraordinary Skillset

A Note

From the JA President



Dear JA Family,

What drives you?

In reading the stories of our 2023 class of JA 18 Under 18 recipients, I keep coming back to the word “drive.” It is such a powerful word. It evokes energy, determination, focus, accomplishment, willpower.

Our 18 Under 18 embody what it means to be driven. Stories of leadership, founding companies, overcoming adversity, and thinking well beyond oneself to create better lives for those in need. As is the case every year, I am inspired by what these young adults have achieved, despite their age. Frankly, they drive me and Junior Achievement to continue to propel our mission forward of helping kids succeed in work and life.

After all, it’s about taking care of the future now. These young people will change the world – and for the better. Being around our 18 Under 18 recipients, and the rest of the students we serve across Arizona, only re-emphasizes that there is nothing more important than investing in our future generation. It is incumbent upon us to be accessible to their questions, to help them navigate the complexities of life, and to simply show them that we care about their success.

If we take care of them, they will take care of us. As you read through their stories, you will see that these young people have that same pay-it-forward mentality. We could not be more proud of who they are as individuals and to hear about their incredible accomplishments. And it’s only just the beginning for them.

To this year’s 18 Under 18, thank you! You represent the essence of the Junior Achievement brand – entrepreneurial spirit, selfless service, belief in your and others’ potential, and an insatiable hunger to achieve. You inspire me and all of us to do more. You give us hope and energy to keep making our community stronger and more resilient.

To your families and friends, wow! You should be so proud. We know the importance and influence of a solid support network on a young person’s success. And, to our Junior Achievement supporters, we could not do this work without you. Thank you for your belief in the boundless potential of young people.

With that, we are honored to present to you this year’s 2023 18 Under 18 class.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katherine K. Cicala". The script is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized 'K' and 'C'.

President, Junior Achievement of Arizona

Thank You

To our generous sponsors for believing in the next generation
of leaders and supporting JA's 18 Under 18.

RIZING TIDE

IDEAS  COLLIDE



Terry and Darren Hurst Foundation

Carolyn Scott





Meet the Junior Achievement 2023 18 Under 18. These Arizonans distinguish themselves with their creativity, passion and drive.

Read their stories, and don't be surprised if you feel a little inspired yourself.

Meet Arizona's 18 Under 18



Ronak Bhatia
Chandler



Molly Budhiraja
Glendale



Georgia Bukata
Scottsdale



Damian Carrizosa
Gilbert



Sthuthi Das
Chandler



Nathaniel George
Phoenix



Harper Hipps
Phoenix



Nikhil Johnson
Laveen



Daniel Jung
Oro Valley



Alexis Li
Gilbert



Lily Messing
Tucson



Zack Okun
Scottsdale



Abby Pearson
Phoenix



Isabella Serrano
Queen Creek



Sandeep Sethuraman
Chandler



Saba Shakir
Chandler



Sanya Somani
Scottsdale



Jennifer Vo
Gilbert

Ronak Bhatia

Age 17 | Junior | Perry High School | Chandler



Ronak Bhatia proves you are never too young to make a big impact. Bhatia was just five years old when he and a group of service-minded friends first got together in 2011, looking for ways to help support those in need. They called the group “Brothers and Sisters Serving Others,” or BSSO. With a lot of help from their parents and other adults in their community, the group started hosting fundraisers, organizing service projects, and doing simple acts of kindness like visiting nursing homes or cleaning yards for the elderly.

Ten years after that first meeting, BSSO became a registered nonprofit and is now working to motivate students across the country to find creative ways to help local families in need. The organization’s website now offers resources and how-to guides to help kids establish their own BSSO clubs within schools and communities across Arizona and the U.S.

“If kids are given the opportunity to help out in their community, they always will,” said Bhatia. “Learning about different situations and challenges these families face really makes me feel so blessed for the life I have.”

Bhatia and BSSO have raised more than \$50,000 over the years to go toward medical bills and living expenses for families battling serious illnesses. From gaming tournaments a dance marathon to a holiday party for foster and group home high schoolers, BSSO always finds unique ways to serve others. One of their biggest events was a carnival that raised more than \$10,000 to help a man diagnosed with brain cancer pay his mounting medical bills.

“Don’t be afraid to start small, that first step is the most important,” said Bhatia. “Once you get past that first step everything else will fall in the right direction.”

After spending so much time with people battling diabetes, cancer, or other terminal illnesses, Ronak now plans to pursue a career in medicine after high school. He hopes to eventually combine his nonprofit experience and medical expertise to serve those in need from philanthropy and treatment perspectives.



Molly Budhiraja

Age 16 | Junior | BASIS Peoria | Glendale



Molly is a young entrepreneur who saw a huge need for connecting teens with community service opportunities in Phoenix. She founded “My Wish for My Community”, a nonprofit organization in 2020, after seeing many homeless people in downtown Phoenix during the pandemic. She told her mom she wanted to do something to help and organized a blanket drive with the help of her friends. They collected 24 large boxes of blankets and jackets and assembled 200 hygiene kits and delivered them to the homeless population. Her work was featured on Fox 10 Phoenix and suddenly middle school and high school students were reaching out to collaborate and help.

“I saw the need and then developed an app that would connect teens to local charities that needed volunteers for various projects,” said Budhiraja. “My app also logs volunteer hours and students really appreciated that. When you do multiple service projects it’s often hard to keep track of your hours, this keeps it

all in one place and makes it really easy.”

In just two years, Molly has organized and held several events for the community, including making cheerful cards for patients in the hospital through a partnership with Hospice of the Valley, a water bottle drive during the summer of 2022, and a shoe and clothing drive in fall of 2022 to help people experiencing homelessness. Last year, volunteers served approximately 800 hours in their communities.

“I am really proud that everything I have done has been self-taught,” says Budhiraja. “I taught myself to code and create the web site. I learned leadership skills along the way and now I am mentoring young people who want to be involved in the organization.”

Molly’s app has been locally and nationally recognized. She won Congressional Recognition in 2021 from Arizona Congresswoman Debbie Lesko’s office for Congressional District 8, and the President’s Volunteer Service Award Certification in 2022.

She also serves as the Co-Chair of the Mental Health Sub-Committee at the Governor’s Youth Commission, is Vice President of the Class of 2024, involved in National Charity League and serves on the Youth Advisory Board of Punjabi Seva.

Her future plans include expanding “My Wish for My Community” to other cities and getting more young people involved in their neighborhoods. She’d like to pursue a career in activism, public policy or nonprofit work.



Georgia Bukata

Age 16 | Junior | BASIS Scottsdale | Scottsdale



From an early age, Georgia Bukata was fascinated by science and curious about the world around her. In 2nd grade, she participated in the school science fair and did a project on stars and light pollution. From that point forward, she was hooked!

During her freshman year, she reached out to ASU faculty to help her explore ideas she had in the areas of bioscience. She was able to help develop and test a new portable optical spectrometer, finding the capabilities and limitations of this cutting-edge technology that would eventually aid in her experimental design. Initially, she used the device to measure sugar content in fruit to help those with diabetes. After building on this information, she decided to explore the waxes on produce to determine if they were harmful. Her project called “The Comparison of Waxes to Determine Produce Safety Using a Portable Optical Spectrometer” won first place at the 2022 Arizona State Science and

Engineering Fair. In addition, she won a \$1,000 scholarship from the Caris Foundation for her innovative project in biomedical engineering.

“I entered a lot of science fairs before I won anything,” said Bukata. “Students need to know it’s ok to fail before you succeed. Keep going for it and asking for help or connections to people. I was pleasantly surprised at how willing the ASU faculty was to help me.”

Georgia was a research intern with Translational Genomics Research Institute (TGen) Center for Rare Childhood Diseases, where she used her math skills to study protein modeling and coding, and she was able to further her research in biochemistry through the ASU Science and Engineering Experience (SCENE) Program. Last year, she also had an opportunity to participate in a Summer Mathematics Program for High School students, a grant funded, all-expense paid mathematics and research program.

When she’s not researching and learning about science, you’ll find her on the soccer field, volunteering at Gigi’s Playhouse, tutoring other students in math or science, or acting as head chair of the Mental Health Workgroup on the Governor’s Youth Commission. In this position, she leads her peers in creating a social media campaign to expand mental health clubs in Arizona high schools. This has been an important issue for her after witnessing the toll the pandemic took on her peers’ mental health as well as the negative effects of social media.

Georgia plans to study science in college and hopes to go on to medical school and pursue a career in medical research.



Damian Carrizosa

Age 16 | Junior | Gilbert High School | Gilbert



As more and more Americans carry debt from month to month, Damian Carrizosa sees an opportunity. Rather than steer people away from using credit, he focuses on financial literacy and teaches the importance of building credit responsibly. Inspired by his father's mentorship, Carrizosa got involved with FICO (Fair Isaac Corporation), and he is now helping to launch the newest program in the U.S. that provides credit literacy for teenagers.

As the first Lead Student Ambassador nationwide for FICO's Score a Better Future- Fundamentals, Carrizosa is spearheading the program's launch in Arizona, working hard to help young people get a head start in financial literacy by mastering credit scores, credit access and utilization, as well as the pros and cons of leveraging debt. He successfully registered Carl Hayden High School in Phoenix as the first state in the nation to adopt the program and has meetings scheduled with several other superintendents to pitch the program. He also maintains a special focus on disenfranchised, low-income, and underrepresented communities.

"I like to learn about finance and numbers just kind of come to me, but I see that plenty of regions or other communities don't have access to it," said Carrizosa. "I think every community should have the opportunity to learn about it."

In addition to his father, Carrizosa credits much of his success to the education and guidance he's received from mentors in the finance and investment banking sectors. He also channels his passion for helping others into various community service projects, volunteerism, and fundraising.

"Be comfortable while being uncomfortable. You've got to put in work for it," said Carrizosa. "Even just simply building a network can be showing effort. A network can open so many doors that people can't even imagine."

After high school, Damian hopes to study investment banking at ASU's W.P. Carey School of Business. He plans to use his education and experience to help grow the innovative investment banking industry here in Arizona.



Sthuthi Das

Age 18 | Senior | Hamilton High School | Chandler



Sthuthi is an entrepreneur who is using her creativity, leadership, and drive to help those in need. She has spearheaded several projects over the years, selling handmade goods and donating the proceeds to organizations like Phoenix Rescue Mission, Habitat for Humanity, Education Empowers, and Child Crisis of Arizona.

One of her biggest passions, however, is helping the homeless. As a little girl, Sthuthi would give away anything she had with her when she saw people living on street corners. Then, in 2022, she partnered with a mentor from Central Arizona Shelter System (CASS) to take her efforts further. Sthuthi and her friends collected dozens of clothing items and \$450, all of which went to help the Valley's homeless.

"Everyone has the ability to make a difference," said Das. "It's your willingness and drive to help relieve your community, and really better the lives of those around you."

In addition to service projects, Sthuthi is a STEM ambassador and enjoys teaching robotics to young children around the world. Her parents run a library in India and she spends many of her weekends on ZOOM teaching students there about robotics, with a special focus on attracting more women and girls to the field. She has also been doing ballet since she was just four years old and is a talented piano player. She says her mom is her biggest inspiration for "always pushing me past what I think I can do."

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, Sthuthi has taken a keen interest in mental health, particularly among her peers. She developed specialized Google forms and surveyed her entire school to get a better idea of what young people find most helpful in dealing with mental health struggles like depression. The most popular answer: listening.

"Even if you're scared to try new things, I think it can be one of the best decisions you'll ever make," said Das. "You never know what could be waiting for you."

Sthuthi plans to study neuroscience and pursue a career as a neurosurgeon. She hopes to expand her work helping the homeless throughout Arizona and into neighboring states.



Nathaniel George

Age 16 | Junior | Brophy College Preparatory | Phoenix



Nathaniel George founded the Young Entrepreneurs Club at Brophy. During this time, he also participated in JA Inspire, an online career exploration program, and visited StartUpPhx housed at the Burton Barr Library to learn more about resources for small business owners and entrepreneurs.

“I remember feeling a little disheartened that everything at the library was for adults,” said George. “There were not any resources for young entrepreneurs. That’s when I realized I could create something to help other teens.”

In 2022, Nate created The Cactus Flower Initiative for Youth Entrepreneurship. He approached the ASU J. Orin Edson Entrepreneurship + Innovation Institute, Junior Achievement of Arizona and the City of Phoenix about creating more resources for students interested in business and entrepreneurship. He pitched his idea to the library and now partners with StartUpPhx to offer additional resources and perspectives to many of their programs such as their Small Business Expo, their summer Business Roadmap Series for youth and their Pitch-a-Palooza event. He is also on the Burton Barr Library Teen Advisory Council.

“Entrepreneurship has been reserved for adults for a long time,” said George. “Entering this field as a young person was challenging. But I have realized the power of my voice as a young person in motivating and empowering others to create change. My determination and drive to succeed has allowed me to learn new skills and gain more confidence.”

George is extremely involved in his school and community. He serves as Head of Writing for Brophy Literary Arts Magazine, Vice President of the Brophy Stock Market Club, Vice President for Dignity Club, and Director of social media for Brophy’s Indian Subcontinental Student Union. Locally he volunteers with Andre House and the Gift of Mary Homeless Shelter. He is an active member of the Brophy chapter of Best Buddies, which works to create friendships and inclusion for individuals with disabilities. He also serves as a Junior Achievement Young Ambassador, helping at fundraisers and events.

The Cactus Flower Initiative for Youth Entrepreneurship hopes to one day create legislation focused on youth entrepreneurship in Arizona. Nate is currently working with Arizona State Treasurer Kimberly Yee to create a “Youth Entrepreneur Day” in Arizona and plans to study business or entrepreneurship in college.



Harper Hipps

Age 17 | Junior | Xavier College Preparatory | Phoenix



Harper Hipps has always loved science. Her freshman biology class opened her eyes to new possibilities. She knew that children had opportunities to enjoy science at school and through the Arizona Science Center, but while volunteering at Goldensun Peace Ministries, a group home for adults with developmental disabilities, she realized she could bring science to the residents, and they could take part in interactive experiments and learn about science too!

Harper raised her goal of \$600 to create the Immerse Science Pop-Up Club. She used the money to buy supplies and experimental materials. Each month, she brings the Club to the residents at Goldensun and teaches a science lesson and gets the residents involved in the experiments.

"I started volunteering at Goldensun in middle school and by freshman year realized I could share my love for science with others," said Hipps. "We hold monthly meetings and do science experiments. The residents love it and look forward to learning about science."

Due to the success at the first location, Harper has expanded the organization's reach to include Southwest Autism Research Center (SARRC) at their affordable housing complex called First Place-Phoenix. All of the residents have autism or other neuro-diversities, and the complex teaches them skills to live on their own.

"It's so rewarding to see the residents' faces light up as they explore scientific realities through hands-on experiments," said Hipps.

Harper has learned leadership skills, how to mobilize volunteers, fundraise and the importance of creating meaningful relationships with organizations in the community. She hopes the Immerse Science Pop-Up Club will continue for years to come, with her sister or one of the younger classmates hoping to take it over when she graduates from high school.

In addition to being the founder and president of the Immerse Science Pop-Up Club, Harper is a leader in the community as a board member of the Arizona Science Center Teen Advisory Board. She's on her school's archery team, a school ambassador, and enjoys traveling with her church on mission trips to build homes for homeless families.

Harper plans to study Biology in college and hopes to pursue a career in cancer research.



Nikhil Johnson

Age 17 | Senior | North High School | Laveen



Shortly after Nikhil Johnson migrated to Arizona from India at just three years old, he began feeling the strain of cultural differences. Those experiences led to several instances where Johnson felt he was not given the same opportunities as his peers and struggled to access community resources.

Fast forward a decade, Johnson began transforming those experiences into a passion for fostering equity and interest in STEM careers. Johnson was selected to join the Chief Science Officer program, which gives 6-12th graders an opportunity to be STEM ambassadors. He used that leadership position to raise awareness about equity issues, work with organizations to close the technological divide, and champion virtual events for students from culturally diverse backgrounds. He is also a founding member of the Equity for Everyone (EE) committee, helping to spearhead donation drives, diversity training, and

resource equity missions for tribal and rural areas.

Johnson's work stretches beyond Arizona and shows no signs of slowing. He is currently working on a project with the White House to expand the STEM Ecosystem, which is made up of schools, businesses, community stakeholders, and a variety of environments that support education-to-workforce pipelines. He is also passionate about sustainability and works with the City of Phoenix, and others, to ensure the Phoenix Union High School District operates in an environmentally-friendly fashion.

One of Johnson's biggest triumphs, however, has been reworking the way he views and reacts to failure. Through the help of a dedicated mentor, Johnson has learned not to fear failure, but rather to fail fast, forward, and often. It is a life lesson he works to instill in other students.

"Make local changes that cause global impact," said Johnson. "There's a bad stigma that in order to make a change in the real world you have to go big or go home. Imagine what you're doing, if your whole community did it, or if the whole state or country did it."

Nikhil plans to pursue the medical field and continue giving back. He also wants to mentor other young people and inspire them to pursue their dreams.



Daniel Jung

Age 16 | Junior | Pusch Ridge Christian Academy | Oro Valley



Daniel Jung created a nonprofit in 8th grade to help refugee families in Tucson. His desire to help others started during the pandemic. His parents own a restaurant in Tucson and had many of their workers quit. However, the refugee employees stayed and helped his family keep the business afloat.

“They are such hard working people,” said Jung. “We really couldn’t have done it without their help. I wanted to do something to repay the refugee community in Tucson because they helped us during a difficult time.”

SOCA Charity Mission was created in 2020 and has partnered with many organizations such as The Gospel Rescue Mission’s Center for Opportunity, Lapan College and Career Club, and the International Rescue Mission Committee. Daniel has organized charity drives that provide refugee families with food, supplies, toiletries, and holiday toy drives. To date, they have served

over 700 people.

Daniel is most proud of the holiday toy drive. He remembers one mother who picked out gifts for her four children and was overjoyed when she found out the gifts were free.

“She couldn’t believe it,” said Jung. “She was so appreciative of our help and said it was such a blessing. That was the confirmation I needed to keep going. That toy drive holds a special place in my heart because I realized how much our work meant to the community.”

Daniel also offers tutoring to low-income students and refugees in Tucson. When he’s not busy with his charity work, Daniel serves on the Arizona Governor’s Youth Council and their Distracted Driving Committee. Additionally, he’s the secretary of the Pima County Youth Advisory Council and works with other teen leaders to improve the quality of education in Pima County.

He plans to continue operating SOCA until he graduates from high school and has future plans to expand the organization to other cities throughout the United States.



Alexis Li

Age 16 | Junior | Hamilton High School | Gilbert



Alexis Li is naturally curious. When her grandmother passed away from Alzheimer's disease a few years ago, Li channeled that curiosity into a new mission. She founded Innovation Leads the Way, spearheading scientific research and innovation to study diseases and other challenges for social good.

Li has used her passion for programming and AI (artificial intelligence) to focus on making the path to an Alzheimer's diagnosis more efficient and accessible, ultimately giving patients more treatment options and improving their quality of life. She has developed and tested prototypes and is working closely with her mentor from Emory University, to create an AI model that is strong and robust enough for use in a clinical setting. Li has also expanded her area of focus to include mood disorders and other brain-related diseases.

"There's just so much we don't know about ourselves right now and so much we could know about ourselves," said Li. "The brain affects every single part of our lives and every single part of our body, so being able to understand the brain means that we can unlock our own secrets."

While Li enjoys doing scientific research, she realizes the information can be complex and even intimidating for many students. That is why she is working with organizations like Sigma Xi, a highly prestigious, nonprofit honor society for scientists and engineers, to create a program that makes scientific research easier to understand and more accessible for students from all backgrounds. She also thrives through volunteer work, and launched a STEM4ALL AI camp with the Salvation Army last summer to help students participate in academic competitions and research.

"There are so many issues out in the world, we really need innovations and people to be able to ease our current circumstances," said Li. "The younger people start, the more invested they can get in the field."

Alexis hopes to launch her own start-up company one day and run her own research lab, with a focus on the role of AI in biology or medicine, and ways to give more people access to this type of innovative technology.



Lily Messing

Age 17 | Junior | The Gregory School | Tucson



Lily Messing is the founder of 100+ Teens Who Care, a giving circle made up of high school students dedicated to making authentic, meaningful changes in their community. From providing essential supplies to homeless youth to supporting mental health services for children and funding housing for those transitioning out of the foster care system, Messing's organization is helping young people make an impact.

"Teens have the power to change the world," said Messing. "My whole mission is to show teens you don't have to be an adult to make a difference."

Messing's passion for helping others has deep roots. Her family started a nonprofit in honor of her uncle, who passed away from sudden cardiac arrest just before she was born. However, it wasn't until she attended an event for 100+ Women Who Care Tucson that she felt compelled to start her own organization.

Fueled by the increasing need and isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic, Messing launched 100+ Teens Who Care in Tucson, not only to inspire young people to give back but also to help them socialize and connect with others. The group meets quarterly, and each student gives \$25 at each meeting. The organization chooses a local charity to receive the combined donation. In its first year, the group gained 200 members and donated more than \$20,000 to local nonprofits. She also partnered with local philanthropists and businesses to provide scholarships for teens who want to join the group but cannot afford the quarterly donation.

"Doing good and having fun are not mutually exclusive," said Messing. "You can do both!"

Since that first meeting in Tucson, 100+ Teens Who Care has now expanded to 18 other chapters in cities around the world. Messing has developed a variety of templates and resources and meets with each chapter every other week to help and support their efforts. She is also focused on the organization's sustainability and has certain recruiting practices in place to make sure students of all grade levels are involved in each chapter.

Lily plans to pursue college after high school and dreams of running a large nonprofit one day.



Zack Okun

Age 17 | Senior | Desert Mountain High School | Scottsdale



Zack Okun has loved STEM and robotics since third grade. However, it didn't take long for him to truly appreciate that early exposure and experience.

"Not everyone has the opportunities I've had to build things with my hands, to learn these STEM skills and get those soft skills that are so critical to their future," said Okun.

Okun started making small project kits and distributing them to schools in his area. Then in 2019, he founded the nonprofit STEMducate, an organization dedicated to advocating and sharing the importance of STEM learning for all age groups. Through various programs, competitions, curriculum development, and special events, STEMducate aims to increase access to quality STEM resources, help students get the quality education they deserve, and help prepare students for the exponentially growing number of STEM jobs available.

Entirely student-run, STEMducate is already making an impact around the world. In just a few years the nonprofit's programming has reached more than 24 states and 11 countries, provided more than 10,000 volunteer hours and 75 full curriculum lesson plans, and distributed more than 800 AIM (Advancing Innovative Mindsets) kits to students in elementary through high school.

"Do the things that you love to do, find the passion, something that you're interested in," said Okun. "From there, see what you can do with it!"

In addition to STEMducate, Okun is also CEO of Okun Enterprises, a digital marketing firm that provides digital marketing, SEO, Web design, and graphic design services to local companies. He is also president of his school's Student Advisory Board and is a certified Cyber Patriot Tech Caregiver by the Air and Space Forces Association, volunteering to teach seniors how to interact safely with the internet to avoid being scammed.

Zack will attend ASU's Barrett Honors College, where he plans to study manufacturing engineering. He hopes to run his own engineering firm one day and be an engineering professor to help shape future generations of STEM leaders.



Abby Pearson

Age 16 | Junior | Xavier College Preparatory | Phoenix



Abby Pearson has always been passionate about the environment and limiting her family's carbon footprint. At the beginning of COVID-19 she convinced her family to start composting by eliminating almost all organic waste in their trash can. She learned about carefully balancing the amount of green and brown materials, cutting the moldy, smelly vegetables and maintaining a garden where the compost is used.

From there she started asking neighborhoods for their organic waste and as the project grew, she looked for a composting project in Phoenix that she could partner with. She found the Pierson Street Garden and much to her delight they needed greens for their composting.

Today, Abby has approximately 25 neighbors participating. Each week, she delivers a bucket to them for their organic waste, and they deposit their old fruits and vegetables, flower trimmings and coffee grounds. She takes the full buckets to

Pierson Street Garden. Her efforts have resulted in redirecting over 1,000 gallons of organic material from a landfill to the Pierson Street Garden compost pile.

"As the project grew, I tutored a student in biology to earn money to buy the buckets for my neighbors," said Pearson. "I have learned so much about persevering when you face a challenge and the composting process in general. It feels good to be doing something to help my neighbors, community, and the planet."

Abby's love for the environment started in middle school. Her science teacher created a "green team" and it made her think about what her family and beyond could do to help. She was involved in the campus garden, reducing waste throughout the entire school and helping others become more aware of environmental issues.

She's always been a leader in her community and school. Abby is President of the Arizona Science Center Teen Advisory Board, a group of 26 teens selected by the center to boost teen engagement and interest in science. She is a mentor and coach at her boxing gym's nonprofit, Chavez Youth and Community, a place that provides free boxing classes and leadership skills to disadvantaged youth. Abby is also captain of her soccer team and is a Student Ambassador.

Abby wants to study physics or nuclear science in college and hopes to pursue a career in sustainability or clean energy.



Isabella Serrano

Age 18 | Senior | Queen Creek High School | Queen Creek



Isabella is committed to serving her community through volunteering. Throughout her four years at Queen Creek High School, she spearheaded several events for the Animal Welfare League and Pinal County Animal Shelter, Project Sleep Time, as well as creating care packages for Firefighters.

Her passion to give back started in 8th grade, with her older sister as her role model.

“At the end of middle school, I realized I wasn’t that into sports and wanted to find something to do after school,” said Serrano. “I love animals and wanted to find a place where I could make a difference and help the community. I worked with Animal Welfare League for about two years and then started with the Pinal Animal County Shelter.”

Over the years, she’s organized many drives to collect leashes and pet food to support both shelters. Last year, she collected over 50 canned and dry cat food and 20 leashes for the Pinal Animal County Shelter.

One of the events she’s most proud of is collecting dental hygiene items for underserved populations. In 2020, she sent toothbrushes to underdeveloped countries through Mission: Toothbrush.

In addition, she also helps Project Sleep Tight and regularly collects toothbrushes, books, stuffed animals and blankets for children in foster care and makes care packages with snacks for the local fire department.

Isabella says, “More young people should get involved because it’s a great way to learn about your community and find what you are passionate about.”

When she’s not volunteering, Isabella has been involved in the FFA leadership team for the past two years. She runs events for the Town of Queen Creek Parks and Recreation and is an officer for the biomedical program at Queen Creek High School.

Isabella plans to be a veterinarian one day and continue her passion of caring for animals. She will be attending Penn State University in fall 2023 and looks forward to finding new organizations to volunteer within Pennsylvania.



Sandeep Sethuraman

Age 15 | Junior | BASIS Chander | Chandler



Sandeep Sethuraman is an avid chess player. When the world shut down in March 2020 due to COVID-19, Sandeep saw a need to grow the game in the state of Arizona by starting online tournaments and tutoring. In 2021, he created The Chess Effect and set out to make chess accessible to anyone who wanted to play.

“Chess can be an expensive sport,” said Sethuraman. “Some private coaches can cost \$100-\$200 per hour and that means many children who would like to learn, simply can’t afford it. I wanted to remove the barriers for people and started offering free lessons.”

He organized two online chess tournaments and selected Arizona Helping Hands, a nonprofit that provides essentials to children in foster care, as the beneficiary of the funds. In the past two years, 50-60 new players have participated in each online tournament, and he’s donated over \$2,000 to Arizona

Helping Hands.

“I have taught more than 70 kids to play chess,” said Sethuraman. “It’s really rewarding to see all of them improving and many of them going on to win tournaments. The Chess Effect has given them an opportunity they may not have had.”

Sandeep has been captain of his high school chess team since he entered 9th grade and has led the school team to two national championship runners-up, two AIA state championship winners, and one AIA state championship runner-up. Since he became captain of the team three years ago, he has increased participation by 300%. Sandeep is the 2nd highest rated active chess player in Arizona and the 2nd highest nationally ranked player for 15-year-olds.

When he is not playing chess, Sandeep is on the high school basketball team and enjoys tutoring other students in math. He plans to pursue a business degree in college and hopes to continue his work with The Chess Effect. His goal is to expand his free lessons and get more teachers on board, as well as hold more fundraisers in the future.



Saba Shakir

Age 17 | Senior | Hamilton High School | Chandler



Saba Shakir knows the power of connection and adaptability. As a freshman in high school, she began volunteering at a local memory care center after writing a scientific essay for a class project on the mental health benefits of gardening for people suffering from dementia. However, when the COVID-19 pandemic brought volunteering to a halt, Shakir soon found herself feeling isolated and thinking about the impacts of quarantine on those living in memory care centers.

Rather than wait for volunteer opportunities to begin again, Shakir started writing cards and encouraging notes and delivering them to the memory care center. The response was overwhelming.

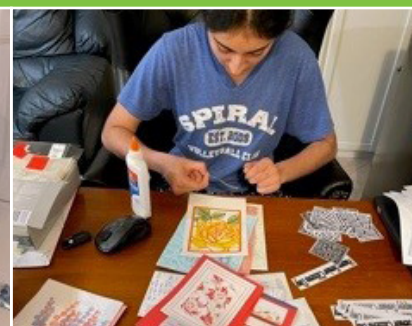
“We heard back from the director of the memory care center who said the residents loved it and it made their day,” said Shakir.

From there, her effort expanded into a volunteer group made up of a few friends. They officially became a Chandler Chapter of the Lionsheart Volunteer Organization and have spent the last three years delivering more than 200 handmade cards every month to three different memory care centers. Shakir researched card-making techniques and watched countless tutorials to improve her skills. She then started a small-scale business selling some of her cards, as a way to pay for the volunteer group’s ongoing supply needs.

When she is not making or delivering cards, Shakir is fostering connections within her high school. Whether guiding incoming freshmen as they adjust to a new campus, or bringing students of all backgrounds together as vice president of the “We Dine Together” club, Shakir is constantly looking for new ways to support and inspire others.

“Be open to new opportunities and new ideas,” said Shakir. “Don’t be afraid to change something and don’t just give up on a project just because of an obstacle.”

Saba will be attending ASU’s Barrett Honors College and plans to pursue a pre-med pathway with the hopes of becoming a pediatrician.



Sanya Somani

Age 17 | Junior | Phoenix Country Day School | Scottsdale



For Sanya Somani, the devastating impact of COVID-19 was a call to action. Inspired by her father's work as an entrepreneur and business owner, Somani co-founded the nonprofit HealthforHer in December 2020. The organization is dedicated to providing health and educational resources for underserved women and their families worldwide. From fundraisers and supply drives to menstrual kits for refugee women and those living in foster care, HealthforHer is focused on breaking the silence surrounding feminine hygiene-related topics.

"It's really eye-opening being able to immerse yourself in an issue that you don't experience yourself every day," said Somani. "It's a great way to learn about other cultures and other people."

Somani has engaged in the nonprofit's work in a variety of ways. During a recent trip to India she met with girls from a rural community to get a better understanding of their lifestyles and also provide resources and education surrounding these "culturally taboo" topics.

"It's not normal to talk about this stuff in other parts of the world," she said. "In order to learn how to help care for yourself and others, you need to talk about it."

HealthforHer has expanded its efforts around the world, with ambassadors in the UK, Canada, Pakistan, South Korea, India, Tanzania, Russia, Armenia, and China. In Arizona, Somani has been instrumental in partnering with local hospitals and other organizations to provide healthcare and informative resources to underserved women and their families. She has also collaborated with and organized events at various schools, encouraging other young people to get involved in community service.

"If you have the desire to do it, then you can," said Somani. "You just need to believe in yourself and realize that your age doesn't define what you can do."

Sanya plans to continue expanding HealthforHer and helping others. She also hopes to start her own business and travel the world.



Jennifer Vo

Age 17 | Senior | BASIS Chandler | Gilbert



Jennifer Vo founded the Arizona chapter of Generation Ratify, a movement by youth advocates to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment. She's grown the chapter to 70 members in just two years and lobbied Arizona Congress to support ERA and Equality Act, organized school walkouts with Support Equality AZ, collaborated with youth groups such as AZ Youth Climate Coalition, and more. In addition, she started the BASIS Chandler UNICEF Chandler chapter and helped Utah and Nevada start Generation Ratify chapters in their states.

"My passion for advocacy work started at a young age," said Vo. "I was shy and quiet in middle school, but joined the environmental committee and pushed for our school to adopt recycling measures. I learned you can make an impact by fighting for what you believe in and collaborating with school administrators and teachers."

Vo recently worked on Nevada's Equal Rights Amendment campaign, and they are now the most inclusive state regarding rights for everyone regardless of age, disability, race, gender.

In 2022, she was selected as Gabriel Giffords youth fellowship for Giffords Courage, a gun violence prevention movement. She flew to Washington D.C. for two weeks in the summer to learn more about gun violence solutions and to grow gun violence prevention advocates.

Jennifer has been involved in her school's debate team. She is ranked as 7th Best Public Forum Debate Team by the National Debate Coach Association and #1 Public Forum Debater in Arizona by the National Speech and Debate Association.

This spring, she will be traveling to D.C. to lobby for Equal Rights at Congress and in the summer, she will be taking part in the 100th-year anniversary project with Columbia Law School.

Jennifer wants to study Political Science or International Studies in college. She is also interested in being a pre-medicine student to learn a more holistic view of the world. Her dream would be to work with Doctors Without Borders for a few years and then become a doctor in the United States or internationally and help people without access to healthcare.



This is JA

How does JA shape the future of Arizona? By preparing today's students to be successful in their tomorrow.

For the last 65 years, Junior Achievement of Arizona has been empowering the futures of millions of students by giving them the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in work and life, no matter the challenges they'll face.

And, we will be here for the next 65 years, meeting students wherever they are learning and ensuring they receive JA's critical education so they are prepared to manage their money, succeed in their future careers and to think innovatively.

We will continue to launch high-impact programs that directly meet the needs of students, educators and businesses in Arizona. We will focus on having students graduate with a vision and pathway for their future, and with the knowledge of how navigate important complexities of adulthood.

Junior Achievement is an important part of our community and economy's future. The students we reach today will go on to build thriving communities for decades.

Skills + Knowledge + Potential =

Dreams



Our Mission



To inspire and prepare
AZ young people to
succeed in work and life.

JA Impact



JA is shaping the college- and career-readiness conversation, and we play an important role in Arizona's workforce and economic development.

JA students are **30%** more likely to get a Bachelor's and **67%** more likely to get a Master's.



JA students demonstrate, on average

A knowledge gain of
35.8%

JA Students, as Compared to Non-JA Students

HAVE



34%

higher critical thinking skills

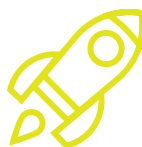
EARN



20%

more in the workforce

ARE



143%

more likely to start a business



99% of teachers would recommend our JA programs to a fellow teacher.

Graduation

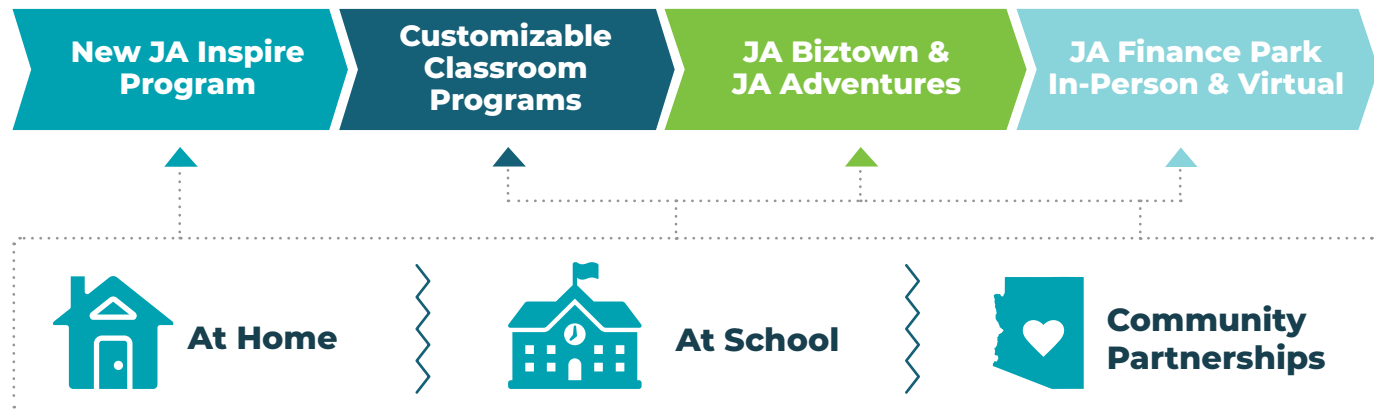
93% JA ALUMNI **vs. 88%** AVERAGE

93% of JA Alumni have graduated with a High School Diploma or have a GED, compared to the national average of 88% according to the U.S. Census data.

Career
51%

of Alumni will work in the same career field as their JA classroom volunteer.

Reaching Kids Wherever They Are Learning



4 in 5

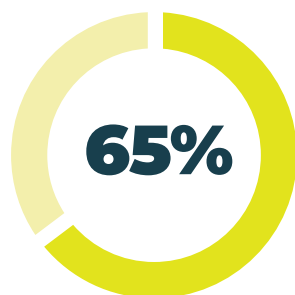
Alumni credit JA for influencing their career path

53%

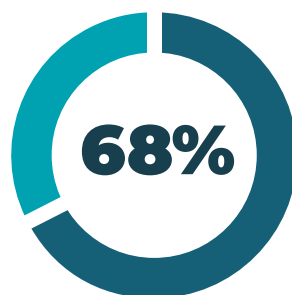
of JA Alumni have started their own business



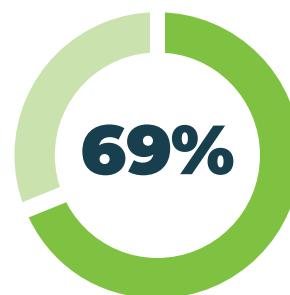
JA students now see their future potential and are equipped with the critical skills needed to achieve it.



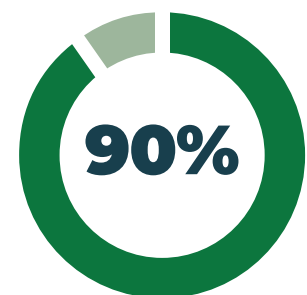
of the students we serve are from low-income households



are financially independent from their parents (age 18-29)



of JA alumni have their dream job



of JA alumni say JA influenced the belief they could achieve their goals

Support AZ's Youth

ARIZONA CHARITABLE TAX CREDIT

Impact Today



Sponsor a Classroom \$1k

Goal: 1,000 Classrooms/year



Sponsor a School \$10k

Goal: 300 Schools/year

Impact Tomorrow

Invest in Priority Initiatives

Goal: \$2.5M



CIRCLE
OF CHANGE

1 @
\$500K

2 @
\$250K

5 @
\$100K

10 @
\$50K

10 @
\$25K

25 @
\$10K

Impact Forever

Leave a legacy gift that will impact youth and our community forever.



You are inspiring students for the careers of the future and unleashing their potential.

Donate Today:
jaaz.org/support



AZ Charitable Tax Credit

It's not too early to donate and apply against your 2023 AZ taxes!

Donations to Junior Achievement of Arizona qualify for a dollar-for-dollar AZ charitable tax credit, up to \$800!

And, it's stackable with standards school tax credits, too!



How It Works

- 1 Donate to JA to help students succeed
- 2 File your taxes and claim the credit
- 3 Receive the tax credit in the form of less taxes owed or bigger refund in 2023



2023 Recipients



Past Recipients

2022 Recipients

Jessica Burke
Hurshneet Chadha
Claira Chong
Sonya Colattur
Karasi Colter
Charlotte Gould
Mihira Karnik
Jenna Lee
Arun Moorthy
Ashley Nevison
Theresa O'Connor
Eduardo Rangel
Eden Sapien
Prisha Shroff
Sripriya Srinivas
Mallika Sunder
Ivanna Vilorio Enciso
Radia Wong

2021 Recipients

Mostafa Afr
T.J. Borowski
Katelyn Cai
Ximena Camacho
Reva Chaudhry
Loralei Cook
Joshua Fink
Ella Hamer
Arin Khanna
Bhavya Makkar
Aryan Mathur
Viraj Mehta
Clara Moffitt
Ayden Schure
Riti Singh
Josephine Taylor
Steven Ugol
Audrey Wood

Past Recipients

2020 Recipients

Elaina Ashton
Kayli Battel
Alexander Burt
Viveka Chinnasamy
Jordan Davis-Wiley
Cameron Deal
Laura Dunham
Heather Jensen
Leila Khan

Dominique Luna
Jonathan Martinez
Hannah Mason
Arjun Moorthy
Chandler Plante
Suraj Puvvadi
Ethan Scher
Grace Schlenker
Ryan Vakil

2019 Recipients

Addie Daniels
Alexis Hatch
Anissa Ferris
Caillou Pena
Catherine Broski
Colton Cagle
Dash McDonald
Dylan Baca
Elisa McRae
Emma Suttell
Fatima Bitheri
Grace Dietz
Jackson Bukata
James Daniel Lacno
Jordan Young
Marcus Chavez
Nadira Mitchell
Priscila Romero Guevara

2018 Recipients

Aleena Valdez
Anthony (AJ) Aguilar
Charles W. Hall
Christopher Whitmeyer
Joseph Ross
Karlina Riggs
Kellen Vu
Kira Householder
Kylie Hunts-in-Winter
Maximus Smith
Nikhil Dave
Prateek Pinisetti
Rocco Gump
Saul Ontiveros
Tatum L. Stolworthy
Taylor Veschio
Trinity E. L. Peters
Vanessa Strait



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Sign-up for email at
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in November 2023.

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