

2022



ZONTA
INTERNATIONAL

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 1,054 awards, totaling US\$1,303,750, to 882 young women from 60 countries.

Read on to learn about Zonta International's 2021 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardees.



2022 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee



Sruthi Kurada

District 1

Citizenship: United States

Sruthi Kurada was her school's first female varsity math team president in its 15-year history. The team, which strives to educate younger students and instill in them a love for math, partnered with its school's middle school team to organize their meets and mentored members by teaching them competition math topics. Sruthi was also captain of her school's varsity tennis team and co-founded a computing club, where she taught Microsoft Azure Fundamentals to more than 30 members and brought in expert speakers from the industry.

Sruthi led the creation and development of Steam Splash, an online educational platform to teach science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) to kindergarten through 12th-grade students. Through this process, she learned that to diversify the STEM field, she needed to create inclusive environments for young women to thrive. This inspired her to found and act as executive director of MetroHacks EmpowHer, which launched an international STEM competition for high school girls. She also taught elementary school students to program and design robots and created activity sheets for nursing home residents when visiting hours were limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sruthi is an incoming freshman at the University of Pennsylvania. She previously worked as a student researcher at the BayesMendel Lab at Harvard Medical School, where she helped to develop a novel all-cancer risk assessment model. She also worked on identifying molecular pathways for a potential drug as part of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Mathematics Department's yearlong Program for Research in Mathematics, Engineering, and Science (PRIMES). In her career, she plans to combine her passions for computer science and medical technology to design solutions for unavoidable diseases while inspiring the next generation of female sciences and innovators.



2022 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Khadijah Dhoondia



District 6

Citizenship: United States

Khadijah Dhoondia was very involved in her high school, with roles as a student representative for her school district board—where she reached out to students and staff to represent their perspectives in monthly board reports—and president of the National Honor Society, speaking to community members in need. She was also an officer of Key Club and student senate, vice president of Future Business Leaders of America, elected representative for the Principal Advisory Board and more.

Khadijah co-founded and acted as the chief marketing officer for LOAF, which served 3,000 people with food pantries and shelters for women, refugees and homeless people. She led 13 team members to raise US\$31,000 for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, which awarded her the Community Involvement Award. As a participant in the American Civil Liberties Union Summer Advocacy Program, she discussed the history of racial injustice and civil liberties with government officials. She was a youth speaker with Who is Hussain?, delivering speeches at marches in Milwaukee and virtual advocacy in Zambia to inspire social justice and advocate positive representation of Islam. She earned the Girl Scouts Silver Award for organizing an intergenerational reading event with the Girl Scouts and an assisted living home.

An incoming freshman at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Khadijah is majoring in neurobiology on the pre-medicine track. She hopes to pursue an MD-PhD, a dual doctorate program for students who are interested in careers as physician-scientists. She aims to support patients through clinical practice and contribute to scientific advancement through research. She also plans to volunteer and is interested in serving at a local free clinic and internationally with the Peace Corps.



2022 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Shae Dolan



District 8

Citizenship: United States

Shae Dolan is the founder and president of her school's female empowerment club, a supportive environment created to promote gender equity on campus and in the community. The group organizes period drives to provide menstrual hygiene products and funds to women experiencing domestic violence. She also represented 1,500 students in school-wide decisions as her school's Associated Student Body vice president, pushed for a sustainable school culture as the secretary and founding member of the environmental club.

In her community, Shae represented more than 1.1 million students as chair of the Washington Legislative Youth Advisory Council, where she advised more than 150 legislators and agencies, drafted and passed youth-centered legislation relating to mental health support, and partnered with the Office of Equity to improve the legislature's accessibility for students. Dedicated to climate advocacy, she led communications and policy efforts for Washington Youth for Climate Justice, spearheaded climate strikes attended by more than 20,000 people, and planned canvassing events for local and state electoral candidates. Shae testified for statewide environmental policies as a Washington field representative with Our Climate. She was also the environmental co-chair of the Mayor's Youth Commission of Tacoma, voicing youth concerns to the city council and mayor. Finally, Shae researched youth sociopolitical development and Washington's education policies alongside the University of Washington School of Social Work and Columbia University.

Shae plans to pursue anthropology or public policy with a concentration in education policy at Stanford University, where she wants to participate in Cardinal Policy Group, the Undergraduate Senate, and Students for a Sustainable Stanford. Her overall career goal is to serve as a public defender, but she would also enjoy teaching as a professor of public policy or environmental studies.



2022 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Catherine Xu



District 9

Citizenship: United States

As a student trustee with her school district, Catherine Xu provided the board with a youth perspective on behalf of 18,000 students. She also served as chair of the Student Directory Advisory Council, where she led 25 students in advising the school district on educational topics including dress code and health curriculum. She served as district lead and a policy director for Diversify our Narrative, a national nonprofit organization. In addition, she played on her school's varsity lacrosse team, was co-president of the Green Alliance Club and was president of Critical Conversations, which she created to bring together students to talk about sensitive topics like racism, culture and identity.

Catherine is also an active volunteer in her community. She was the governmental affairs policy director for the California Association of Student Councils, where she secured US\$500,000 in state funding, led coalitions for two youth-centered bills signed by the governor and drafted language for education bills. As the elected chair of the Thousand Oaks Youth Commission, she led 13 youth in advising the city council on topics like housing and transportation, environmental policies, and more. Catherine organized the first youth-moderated Candidates Forum in her county and encouraged youth to learn about candidates and register to vote. She was also the executive director of Empowerment Collective, a student organization that engages and mobilizes youth in the legislative process through hosting candidates' forums and workshops in local communities to educate youth on civic engagement.

Catherine is an incoming freshman at the University of Southern California, where she plans to study public policy. Specifically, she would like to analyze effective policy and its intersection with race, economics, environmental and global affairs. In the future, Catherine intends to continue her involvement in the legislative process, hoping to run for office starting at the local city level and eventually going into capitol affairs.



2022 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Lena Kalandjian



District 11

Citizenship: United States

Lena Kalandjian co-founded and acted as co-president of the Students Against Violence Everywhere (SAVE) Promise club at her school. Nationally recognized eight times, it was named the best overall club—out of more than 3,400—in 2021. She oversaw nine officers and more than 100 members from grades 3-12 who organized violence prevention initiatives through creative and original youth-led approaches, collaborated with community organizers to participate in the Sandy Hook Promise’s national call-to-action programs, organized community-wide assemblies, workshops, outreach and fundraising events, trained more than 2,500 students on Sandy Hook Promise’s Know the Signs violence prevention programs, and produced a podcast episode about how to foster a more inclusive school community.

Lena also served in multiple roles, including the executive president, in her student government. During her time in student government, she served as a global ambassador for a website that centralizes access to community service aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals in more than 70 international schools, spearheaded an environmental sustainability campaign to remove single-use plastics and enforce paperless classrooms on campus, advocated for a US\$21,000 budget and managed the funds to revitalize post-pandemic school unity, authored governing documents to implement a bicameral legislature, and incorporated diversity and inclusivity education into all initiatives by collaborating with other clubs.

A Sandy Hook Promise National Youth Advisory Board member, Lena was one of 10 students selected to represent and sustain more than 3,400 SAVE Promise clubs. In this role, she advised on a violence prevention action plan with the Biden-Harris transition team, advocated for suicide prevention legislation with U.S. Congress members, contributed to a TIME magazine article about youth mental health, co-organized a webinar about social media responsibility and youth, and planned and hosted the annual National Youth Summit, which was attended by more than 400 people. Lena was also part of the Broward League of Women Voters, an intern for a Florida state representative and a congressional youth cabinet member for a U.S. representative.

An incoming freshman at Vanderbilt University, Lena is studying human organizational development and Chinese language and culture. She is interested in continuing to work with non-profit organizations to increase diversity education and youth violence prevention measures in global communities. Her goal is to earn a master’s degree and pursue a career in international social enterprise with a focus on community development.



2022 Young Women in
Public Affairs Awardee

Supipa Sirikul



District 17

Citizenship: Thailand

Supipa Sirikul served as captain of one of the six houses in her school and was in charge of 166 students. She was responsible for organizing and leading house events and holding weekly discussions to better understand the student body and identify areas of improvement for future events. She also led the Community Engagement Team, which partners with nine different charities across Thailand. As a representative of her school, Supipa was assigned to regularly communicate and track her partner organization's progress.

Supipa co-founded Wishing Well, a nonprofit organization aimed to improve the motor skills of people with autism. Wishing Well organizes and runs jewelry-making workshops at four autistic schools around Bangkok to develop hand-eye coordination and help with overstimulation. The jewelry is sold and all the profits are used to fund classroom materials. After interning at three hospitals across Bangkok, Supipa realized that one of the biggest problems in the Thai health care system is unequal access to medical services due to patients' financial status. To alleviate the issue, she created an art-focused project, ColouredCreations, in which she sold her artwork to provide health care for people who cannot afford it. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Supipa was part of a research team that conducted the Thai People's Knowledge and Attitudes Towards COVID-19 Vaccines survey research. The paper was published in the Chulalongkorn University's monthly medical journal and later used in Thai parliament discussions to help analyze the population.

An incoming university freshman, Supipa hopes to study medicine with a joint degree in management. She plans to become a doctor so she can have a greater ability to implement change within the hospital, manage budgets and make health care services in her country more accessible.



2022 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Maisy Baer



District 18

Citizenship: Ghana

Maisy Baer was the editor-in-chief of her school's publication team, where she created a portal so anyone could find their voice, nurture their imagination and take steps to express their creativity. She served as head girl and house captain for the 2021-2022 school year and led the 2022 graduation project, which raised awareness on the dangers of unhealthy eating and advocated for a healthier lifestyle. The students raised nearly GHC100,000 (around US\$12,000), which will be used to refurbish the kindergarten washroom block and water supply at a primary school.

Last year, Maisy opened a bakery as a way to express her love for baking while taking her first step toward financial independence. She also participated in volunteer work with Letters Against Isolation, where she wrote letters to help combat the loneliness many older people faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. To show her appreciation and support for the elderly and inspire them to live each day to their best, she sent letters to retirement homes in the United Kingdom and South Africa.

Maisy plans to study computer science with a business-related minor. Though she has not decided on her specific career path, she hopes to work at an established information technology company and further continue her endeavors as an entrepreneur. She aspires to be a role model and voice for women who have not had the same opportunities she has enjoyed.



2022 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Kertu Birgit Anton



District 20

Citizenship: Estonia

Kertu Birgit Anton is the student representative on the Sustainable Development Committee at the University of Tartu, where she participates in creating a comprehensive action plan and helps put the university on a path of sustainable development. A passionate climate advocate, she designed and taught an extracurricular activity on climate change to middle school students. In high school, Kertu Birgit co-founded and led SISU Kott, a social enterprise that collaborates with people with disabilities to produce upcycled fabric bags to replace plastic bags. Her roles included designing the bags, finding partners, creating content for social media, securing supplies and more.

Kertu Birgit has volunteered for Fridays for Future (FFF) Estonia, the local chapter of the global youth climate movement with the same name, since it was founded in early 2019. She has had a leading role in organizing multiple large climate strikes and has encouraged people to join in the smaller weekly protests. She built up and led the social media team and has repeatedly spoken about the climate crisis in the media. She is also the main spokesperson for the group that filed a court case seeking to stop the construction of a shale oil (fossil fuel) plant in Estonia.

With a strong interest in climate law—both policymaking and litigation—Kertu Birgit plans to finish her bachelor's degree in law and continue studying at the master's level. She is especially interested in exploring and developing the connection between environmental questions and human rights. She plans to continue working with FFF at the national and international levels.



2022 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Cat (Nickie) Tran



District 24

Citizenship: Vietnam

Cat (Nickie) Tran was on her school's Student Representative Council for four years and was made a school captain for her contributions toward multiple fundraisers and school based-initiatives. She served as vice president and secretary of the Interact Rotary Club, where she helped with Operation Christmas Child and increased awareness for "R U OK Day." Nickie was selected to be on the New South Wales (NSW) Department of Education's Student Voice committee, where she played a pivotal role in evaluating a platform that helped enhance students' perspectives on their experiences in their community.

Passionate about advocating for social justice in her community, Nickie participated in Story Factory's Read Aloud program, which reached more than 3,300 people. StoryFactory, a nonprofit creative writing center for young people, has helped her understand how important literacy skills are for young students in Western Sydney. A two-time NSW state public speaker, Nickie organized a seven-week workshop for primary students, which successfully promoted communication skills, confidence and a greater capacity to engage with relevant societal issues. She also founded and is the co-host of the "Teenaging" podcast, which aims to break the stigma about periods, increase awareness of the Black Lives Matter movement and discuss mental health among adolescents.

In pursuit of a career in law, media and social work, Nickie plans to earn a bachelor's degree in law and psychology. To reinforce her goal to become an immigration lawyer, she plans to volunteer at the asylum seeker center in Australia for a long portion of her time in school. She would also like to continue volunteering with writing centers that focus on disadvantaged students.



2022 Young Women in Public Affairs Awardee

Sophia Zuo



District 31

Citizenship: United States

As vice president of her high school's Key Club, Sophia Zuo led a group of 80 people through numerous service projects such as beach cleanups, charity donations and public events; they raised NT\$25,000 (US\$835) for organizations including UNICEF and local institutions. She was also editor-in-chief for her school's newsprint and a class student council representative, collecting student affairs, presenting them to the council and organizing school events as a committee head.

In the wake of COVID-19, Sophia established and served as executive director of the Panther Program, a summer camp that taught creative writing, high-level math and recreational activities to children. Her team of six raised more than NT\$17,000 (US\$568), which they donated to a child foster organization that supported children from abusive, negligent or parentless households. Sophia has served as an administration member, delegate, chair and secretary general for Hsinchu Model United Nations, a three-day international MUN conference. She is also involved with multiple nonprofit organizations and writes for Project Borderless, which is dedicated to fighting gender inequality in Taiwan through open dialogue and bilingual empowerment. She hosts the podcast for Detester Magazine, a youth-led nonprofit platform dedicated to amplifying people of color, youth activism and socio-political issues. Focusing on the international experiences of minorities and women, she discusses topics ranging from current events to introspection regarding people of color around the world.

Sophia is entering her final year of high school and is interested in majoring in sociology and journalism, aiming to become a civil rights lawyer or journalist. She plans to incorporate her love for humanity and community into her profession and free time by using her voice to represent unheard minorities. As a civil rights lawyer, she aims to help underprivileged communities who cannot afford private attorneys in court and amplify their voices during times of abuse, corruption or violation of basic rights. As a journalist, her goal would be to connect the reader to the people presented on paper; spread their stories, and ultimately motivate readers to increase their awareness and pursue more tangible action.