



2012 Outstanding Youth Service Award Winner Mikayla Rusk Eastdale Secondary School District School Board of Niagara

Mikayla Rusk is a grade 12 student at Eastdale Secondary School with the District School Board of Niagara. Mikayla is a student that every school desires to have. She is a strong student and a strong leader who is a positive role model to other students.

Mikayla's involvement in school activities is all encompassing. She has been a member of the Eastdale's Eagle Players for four years. Each and every year she takes part in the school theatre. The most recent initiative saw Mikayla not only taking the lead role in the play but direct it as well. The play focussed on cyber-bullying, sexual harassment, sexism and homophobia. Mikayla also led a group of students to create a piece of theatre which resulted in many awards at the SEARS Drama Festival. Along with winning the award, she also was instrumental in organizing performances to local elementary schools in the Region. This resulted in over 1000 students being exposed to their body of work.

Mikayla has also been involved in Eastdale's Safe School Council for the past four years. During her involvement she has been instrumental in bringing important messages to the school body and the local community. She has helped design surveys dealing with bullying and school engagement. One of the surveys that she assisted with revealed that students highlighted a need for intervention in the areas of cyber-bullying and homophobia. From the results of the survey, she has run multiple campaigns focusing on issues such as homophobia, bullying and positive school community spirit and inclusion of all. She has also delivered presentations to incoming grade 9 students on differences between "Ratting and Reporting Bullying", including demonstrations of the school's online anonymous bullying reporting site.

As well as being involved in school issues and activities, Mikayla is also involved in the local community. In 2012, Mikayla volunteered to be part of a project run jointly by the Niagara Region Public Health, the District School Board of Niagara and the Niagara Regional Police Service. This project was aimed at soliciting young peoples' opinions on mental health and mental health services. Mikayla took on the lead role in the project and helped design posters and advertisements. Furthermore, she organized focus groups in the Region. She demonstrated insight beyond her years of how mental health can impact students' academic, social and overall well-being.

Stemming from this work, Mikayla became involved with another youth project with the Niagara Region Public Health Department. This also dealt with mental health but also included areas such as bullying, substance abuse, suicide prevention, homelessness and learning disabilities in youth. The group's work helps inform service providers in all areas that deal with youth. She has made many beneficial contacts within the community and is able to refer young people in need of assistance.

It is due to Mikayla's dedication and involvement with the school and local community that she is the winner of the 2012 Outstanding Youth Service Award.

Congratulations Mikayla!