Over the past few years, we have witnessed the level of impact young people can have not only on culture, but policy. As our nation’s schools have increasingly become targeted by acts of hatred and violence, so students’ roles in combatting such terrorism have grown in kind. It is perhaps more important than ever to support and recognize the efforts of future generations, as well as the educators who encourage and guide them.

The Anne Frank Center for Mutual Respect is proud to announce the winners of this year’s Spirit of Anne Frank Awards (SAFA) Student Scholarships—Masaraat Asif, Emily Herrmann, Emilia Peters, and Grace Schuler—along with SAFA Teacher-of-the-Year Robert Lurie.

SAFA Student Scholarships are awarded each year to graduating high-school seniors who exemplify Anne Frank’s ideals of hope, justice, and equality, and have proven themselves exceptional leaders in combating intolerance and injustice in their schools and communities. Prizes typically range from $1,000 to $5,000 depending on available funding, and go toward college tuition.

Masaraat Asif, from Frisco, Texas, established “Project LifePack,” an effort dedicated to assisting migrant families leaving detention facilities by providing them with backpacks filled with essential supplies. After weeks of promoting the project and contacting local organizations to ask for donations, in May of last year she traveled to San Antonio to hand out the backpacks and toys to immigrant women and children.

“Asking people to donate to a project to benefit immigrants in such a politically conservative area was a daunting task,” Masaraat wrote of her experience in TribTalk, a publication of The Texas Tribune. By the end of the project, though, she wrote that she was “amazed by the generosity” of her community. “I firmly believe that the power of love and compassion can overcome barriers that prevent us from reaching out and creating change. By galvanizing local support, my community and I were able to come together and create an impact that transcends borders.”

Emily Herrmann, from Clarkston, Michigan, raised funds to install an “outdoor musical playground” in her community for people of all abilities. Inspired by a fellow student with Down syndrome in her choir class, she learned about the power of music to engage children with cognitive and sensory disorders, then partnered with the Clarkston Optimist Club to build the playground at local Depot Park. Emily is a recipient of the Jacob Salzman SAFA Scholarship, donated annually by Leslie and Sybil Rosenberg.
Emilia Peters, from Los Angeles, California, established a program that teaches art classes to homeless children through KEM Creative Studios. Since its launch in 2013, the program has provided professional-quality supplies and curricula to more than 490 students in Los Angeles and Guatemala.

Grace Schuler, from Gaithersburg, Maryland, founded a program called “SpeakOut!” that works with youth to develop self-confidence and public speaking skills. Grace is a recipient of the Jacob Salzman SAFA Scholarship, donated by Leslie and Sybil Rosenberg.

“One of the best ways we can uphold Anne Frank’s lasting legacy is to celebrate those working to fulfill her dream. She saw that even as a child she had the power to know the difference between right and wrong, and she dreamed of a world where people would be respected for who they are and work selflessly for those in need,” explained Sharon R. Douglas, CEO of the Anne Frank Center. “Today, these amazing young women are living examples of Anne Frank’s plea for humanity, that we ‘need not wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.’ Through their service to others they give us hope for the future—and inspire us all to do what we can, every day, in every way.”

The 2019 SAFA Teacher-of-the-Year Robert Lurie, a high-school teacher at Waverly Community Schools in Lansing, Michigan, introduces his students to a wide diversity of faiths and cultures, fostering opportunities for direct engagement with survivors and immigrants from a variety of backgrounds. His students are connected to educational and humanitarian causes throughout the world, including India, Nicaragua, Rwanda, Europe, and elsewhere. Through travel, guests, Peace Corps, and Skype sessions, his curriculum ensures that students understand the world's ongoing history of genocide. As the director of an international professional learning community at Michigan State University, Robert Lurie has created a podcast on “Educating Newcomers” as a guide for faculty to welcome international students and refugees, and to gain a more practical understanding of the opportunities and challenges they bring. We are inspired by his decades-long commitment to education and to Anne Frank's enduring legacy of compassion and humanity.

The Anne Frank Center is also awarding two Outstanding Educator certificates this year to Brendan Murphy of Atlanta, Georgia, and Elliot L. Hearst of New York, New York.

As a high-school teacher at the Marist School, Brendan Murphy has led student trips to Washington, DC, and across Europe to visit concentration camps and other significant historical sites, as well as authored the comprehensive “Bearing Witness” guide for ACIS (the American Council for International Studies) on best practices in Holocaust education. He has worked exhaustively to create interfaith programs connecting Judaism, Catholicism, and Islam, including a program he started called "Peace by Piece." He has also partnered with the local Am Yisrael Chai organization to participate in the Daffodil Project, planting flowers to commemorate each life lost through the Holocaust. He is a frequent guest lecturer and leader in professional development seminars, including through the United States Holocaust Museum.

An adjunct faculty member at Pace University, Elliot Hearst has guided students through fascinating research on the helpers of the Holocaust, through the exhaustive process of documenting stories and identifying photos of one of the families who assisted the Franks at the Secret Annex, including first-person interviews with descendants. He has also worked with student research assistants on "Escape from the List," which documents a Jewish family from the Netherlands whose ancestors had previously escaped the Spanish Inquisition.

These outstanding honorees are joined by 2019 SAFA Human “Writes” Award winner Jack J. Hersch, SAFA Legacy of Hope Award winners Pieter and Susan Kohnstam, and the inaugural SAFA Interfaith Unity Award congregations who have witnessed unspeakable tragedy in the
midst of prayer: Linwood & Al Noor Masjids in Christchurch, New Zealand; Tree of Life "Or L'Simcha Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. The world has been deeply moved by these and other horrifying tragedies throughout the world. The award acknowledges that millions of people both share in the mourning and are inspired by the spirit of solidarity that has emerged—especially important as we approach what would have been Anne Frank’s 90th birthday on June 12, 2019. It is an opportunity to reflect on how much, and how little, has changed in the eight decades since World War II.

The 23rd Annual Spirit of Anne Frank Awards will be held in New York City at the Edison Ballroom on Monday, June 17. To register, volunteer, or make a contribution in honor of any of the honorees, visit www.annefrank.com/safa. Holocaust survivors attend free of charge.

What is done cannot be undone, but one can prevent it happening again.
—Anne Frank

About the Anne Frank Center:
The Anne Frank Center for Mutual Respect offers educational programs, traveling exhibits, and theatrical performances to share the impact of the message of Anne Frank’s diary by promoting respect for all humanity.

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