OTEF 2017 Recipients

PHOTO AND BIO
Caryn Croll
Franklin Park, NJ

Caryn Croll is currently an intern at GiGi’s Playhouse Hillsborough. Caryn is also a literacy tutor and helps run the LMNOP program. For fun, Caryn likes to spend time with her friends, the “Fantastic Friends” and TEAM programs. Caryn is also a Special Olympics athlete in swimming and bowling, a member of the Special Olympics Athlete Congress, a part of the Athlete Leadership Program, a Global Messenger, a Learn-to-Swim instructor, and a volunteer. Caryn has been a public speaker a various events, including the 2016 GiGi’s Playhouse “I Have a Voice” Gala and the 2016 Somerset Arc Angels Gala. Caryn has also given presentations at multiple school districts, the Franklin Women’s Club, and Special Olympics fundraisers. Caryn has also appeared on TV for News 12 New Jersey’s Spotlight on NJ. Some of Caryn’s hobbies include swimming, music, reading, dancing, acting, exercising, watching movies, television, and Broadway shows, and singing karaoke and spending time with her friends. Caryn also enjoys tutoring and reading to children. Caryn hopes to take more public speaking courses to become a better advocate for individuals with Down syndrome, as well as courses that will help her get a good job and live independently.
Dalton Cron
Cottondale, AL

Dalton played basketball from first to tenth grade, he then became team manager. At age 14, Dalton won the Knights of Columbus free throw competition for his age group. Dalton was also the football team manager for two years and sang in the school choir for twelve years. Dalton belongs to his church youth group and volunteers to work at all fundraisers. Dalton was elected homecoming king by his classmates in 2016 and has been an honor roll student all of middle school and high school. For fun, Dalton loves hanging out with his friends. Dalton hopes to go to Clemson, learn to live independently, get a good job and eventually have his own coffee shop.
Adam DeBacker
Springfield, MO

In July 2016, Adam DeBacker was a delegate in the Missouri Youth Leadership Forum: selected by a state-wide application process to attend program for young people with disabilities to build leadership and advocacy skills. Adam is also the chef and owner of Truffles E Truffles Handmade Chocolates, where he handles all aspects of business including production, marketing, accounting and sales. Adam has also been an invited speaker/presenter for the National Down Syndrome Congress in 2014. Some of Adams goals include: opening a storefront for his business Truffles E Truffles, host an SNL episode, compete on Food Network shows, graduate college, and own a house.
Sam Dess
Wauwatosa, WI

Sam Dess has been a part of Best Buddies since 2012. Best Buddies is the world’s largest organization dedicated to ending the social, physical, and economic isolation of the 200 million people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Sam is now a Best Buddies Ambassador. Same gives speeches about who he is and what he does. As well as advocates for “Spread the R Word to End the Word”. Sam stands up for people with and without disabilities. Sam is also in the Special Religious Educations (SPRED) program at St. Peter and Paul Church in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, has been in the Special Olympics since he was eight years old, and dances hip-hop with a team called the Energizers Dream Team. Sam hopes to go to Edgewood College in Madison, Wisconsin and get a degree on special education, he also hopes to become a dance instructor.
Luke Drumright loves working with Master Angel in Taekwondo. Luke started Taekwondo last summer, and got his yellow belt and has two stripes before he can test for the green belt. Luke also swims with the Special Olympics Team every week, this will be his 8th season of swimming. This year Luke will also help coach the Jefferson Middle School Swim Team. Luke helps the swimmers in lane one during practice. His job at meets is to encourage them and help them with starts. Luke hopes to live independently as well as open his own business to teach swimming lessons; he wants to make learning to swim fun.
Olivia Elder
Minneapolis, MN

Olivia like’s painting, coloring and sketching. She also took a sewing class where she was able to make gifts for her friends. Olivia also likes to read mystery books, cookbooks, hymnals and the Bible. Olivia exercise’s every day and goes to her local YMCA a few times a week. Olivia has been going to Tae Kwon Do for eight years and has a purple belt. On Sundays and Wednesdays, Olivia gets together with other Christians for Bible study and worship. She has met some of her oldest friends through church. Olivia hopes to get a job where she will feel useful and possibly work with food. Olivia also hopes to lead dance classes at the YMCA or exercise studio.
Brennan Eve
Cincinnati, OH

In High school, Brennan was part of softball, swimming, performing arts, poetry club, key club, yearbook photographer, was on the cheerleading team as well and also assisted the cheerleading coach. Brennan was also part of the Special Olympics for over six years where she was part of swimming, basketball and bowling. Brennan enjoys reading, writing, and doing craft projects. Brennan currently works at Bella Care Hospice as an office assistant, and at the Jewish Hospital mailroom. After graduating from TAP at the University of Cincinnati, Brennan hopes to get a full time job and live independently.
Caleb Hawkinson
Chicago City, MN

Caleb currently works at a grocery store and volunteers at the food shelf, library, youth center, and at his church as a greeter. Caleb loves his church choir and songs. Caleb is a part of the Special Olympics where he does gymnastics, bowling, and swimming. For fun, Caleb loves playing the guitar, reading the bible, exercising, coloring, praying, drawing, and playing Wii and PS2. Caleb also enjoys sports and bible studies on Sunday nights. Caleb hopes to work with music, write songs, record them on CD’s and inform the world about Christ.
AnnCatherine Heigl
Zionsville, IN

AnnCatherine is a varsity cheer leader at an All American cheer camp. For fun, AnnCatherine likes to play tennis and cheer at football and basketball games, go to YoungLife club, hang out with friends, and watch movies. AnnCatherine’s favorite movies are “Just Go With It” and “Harry Potter”. AnnCatherine hopes to live independently, and find a job she loves.
Mary Lapkowicz
Harrisburg, PA

Mary Lapkowicz is the sixth child in her family. She has five older brothers and one younger sister. Mary’s favorite hobby is cooking but she also enjoys watching wrestling, especially high school wrestling and watching movies on the television. Mary is part of the Newman Club and Four Diamonds Club at Millersville University and works at the Upper Deck dining hall. Mary is excited that college will help her gain skills that will help her live independently, learn new things about computers and science, and make new friends. After college, Mary hopes to get a good job and have a new house where she can live near her friends.
Robert Lewis

Nashville, TN

In high school, Robert managed football, basketball, and soccer and loved being part of the teams. Robert also enjoyed being a part of Best Buddies. Last summer he attended the Best Buddies Best Buddies Leadership Conference where he made friends and learned how to make a speech. Robert also loves his church youth group and choir. As a senior in high school, he worked at Publix where he helped bag groceries and enjoyed speaking with customers. Now, a freshman in the ClemsonLIFE program at Clemson Robert is part of many activities. Every week he rides horses in the equine program and helps children with special needs play baseball in Challenger baseball. Robert is also part of the intramural basketball team at Clemson where he enjoys playing basketball with other students on Sundays. Currently, Robert is interning at a sporting goods store called Mr. Knickerbocker's in downtown Clemson. Robert hopes to have a good job either with a sports team or fishing where he can make enough money to eventually live independently and buy a lake house.
Voshon Moore

Southfield, MI

Voshon Moore plays baseball in the Miracle League of Michigan Competitive League in Southfield, Michigan and has been on Team Southfield Special Olympics for four years. Voshon also participates in Southfield Special Forces which is a social group for individuals with Special Needs in the community. On Wednesdays, Voshon delivers meals in Farmington Hills, MI. Voshon also works at the Woodside Bible Church Store on Monday and Friday through a Community Based Instruction program with his school Rising Stars Academy. In the future Voshon hopes to become a chef and live independently.
Megan Ryan
Columbus, OH

Megan Ryan is a lay minister at St. Catharine’s church. On Friday’s afternoon she volunteers at the Nationwide Children’s Hospital. Since June 2010, Megan has completed 480 hours. Megan’s hobbies include singing and dancing, knitting hats and fleece blankets, watching television and movies, and listening to music. Megan Ryan hopes to graduate from the TOPS program and work in childcare.
Bethany Wissler
Toledo, OH

In highschool, Bethany Wissler did the morning announcements, was part of student council, youth advocates and was in the school play. Bethany was also a cheerleader and in 2013 was voted homecoming queen. Since highschool, Bethany has been working part time as a hostess at Outback Steakhouse. Bethany is currently going to school at the University of Toledo where she has learned new things, joined the RockeTHON committee and made new friends. Bethany hopes to write a childrens book about Down syndrome and live independently.