



your "seedling" from the samara foundation

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Samara Awards 2008 Scholarships

The **Samara Foundation of Vermont** is pleased to announce the recipients of its 2008 scholarship awards. **Samara** is a community foundation, a public charity created by and for people who share a common concern to improve the quality of life in their community. In **Samara's** case, that community is Vermont's lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning [LGBTQ] citizens.

This year, **Samara's** Scholarship Committee recommended scholarships totaling \$5,500. The Scholarships Committee recommended and the Board approved the following awards for 2008:

to **Kirsten Muckstadt**, an Essex High School senior who plans to attend the University of Rochester and major in computer science and/or creative writing.



Kirsten's school counselor describes her as an "active participant" and a "dedicated and thoughtful member" of her school's Gay-Straight Alliance [GSA], a calm leader who has made many contributions during her tenure at EHS.

While living in Maine, Kirsten joined her school's GSA and participated in relatively "common" GSA activities such as the "Day of Silence." As the state of Maine faced an effort to overturn the current anti-discrimination law, Kirsten's GSA became involved with "Maine Won't Discriminate"; she acknowledges her own recognition that "this marked the point when it became not just a matter of helping people be comfortable and aware but also a matter of ensuring basic rights."

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After moving to Essex, Kirsten again joined the GSA and became a student leader. She presented the "Day of Silence" program to a faculty assembly and spoke of the event in many of her classes. Additionally, Kirsten has been involved in planning to propose a "more integrated curriculum, one that will bring LGBTQ issues in the classroom much as other civil rights are discussed or covered."

to **Emily Coon**, a Mount Mansfield Union High School senior who plans to attend Eugene Lang College and major in gender and women's studies.



Emily's social studies teacher called her a "bright" and "committed young woman" and as a "passionate" social activist. Emily is a dedicated leader who, by her own description, "rather than dedicating one hour each week or month to the interests of the LGBTQ community, spends [her] days dedicated."

Emily's contributions to the MMUHS community include approaching the administration to unblock websites providing helpful information regarding sexuality and human health, the founding of a Peace Club (which incorporates the cause of LGBTQ rights and support), and writing several papers highlighting LGBTQ issues, including a sophomore term paper on "differing types of love and eroticism in the sonnets of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Elizabeth Barrett Browning."

While Emily wrote a compelling piece about her mother's struggle with cancer, and her family's approach to that struggle, it was her commitment to activism, her eloquent portrayal of that commitment, and her high likelihood to participate as a leader and activist well into and beyond college that set her apart.

to **Elizabeth Sander**, a Proctor Junior-Senior High School senior who plans to attend the University of Vermont and major in biology and/or mathematics.



One of Liz's school group advisors wrote that "Liz Sander keeps me on my toes. She's like a bulldog, or an elephant. She never gives up, and she never forgets. She is committed and passionate about her beliefs, and makes us all better for it."

Liz was "the main student organizer" of a high school group called SURFERS (Students Using Real Facts Educating Real Students) for which she has written and performed skits, and facilitated discussion groups for faculty; her efforts resulted in the creation of a formal method for reporting bullying incidents. Liz also helped organize a statewide diversity program, during which she led anti-homophobia workshops.

Liz describes herself as a well-rounded and disciplined lover of learning. She's a classical pianist, treasurer of her schools chapter of the National Honor Society, and a practicing Buddhist. She loves "math, the outdoors, theater, music, social justice, and even making [her] own clothing." She claims, "In whatever I do, I learn. And more than anything, I am not afraid to be myself. I am not a stereotype."

to **Katelyn Smith**, a Champlain Valley Union High School senior who plans to attend Smith College and major in English.

Kate's GSTA Advisor writes, "I believe [Kate's] social presence to be as important - or more so - than her political one for, as an "out" teen she has been an inspiration to her peers to get comfortable with who they are and to also be openly present as part of the fabric of CVU." Her advisor believes that "every day her [Kate's] life impacts the perceptions of the people around her in regard to the issues of homophobia, tolerance, and the freedom to live ones own life."



Kate describes herself, in relation to her schools, GSTA, her school and her community, as someone who is supportive of queer youth, who challenges derogatory language use, and as someone that "people can talk to about queer issues and know they'll be supported."

Aside from participation as co-leader of her high school GSTA, Kate is a regular participant in Outright Vermont events and serves on the Outright Speakers Bureau. Kate is a "leader by example" whose

commitment to living out loud will continue well into the future and which serves her current school and community well.

to **Hannah Macon**, a Bellows Falls Union High School senior who plans to attend Landmark College.

Hannah's GSA Advisor described her as a "talented and spirited young woman who has come forward this year and taken on a strong leadership role." She refers to Hannah's assisting a friend at another school in starting a GSA, to her true dedication to the "needs of LGBTQ youth," and to her hard work ensuring "that all students have access to safe and welcoming learning environments." Hannah has pursued the acquisition and inclusion of gay-themed books at both her school and her local library, joined her school's GSA, and participated in the Vermont Youth Council and the Vermont Youth Summit.



Hannah is an earnest young person working hard to be herself and to ensure that others have access to tools to do the same, to make a genuine and tangible contribution to their school, community, and world.

to **Levon Cota**, a Spaulding High School & Barre Technical Center senior who plans to attend Johnson State College and major in music.

Levon has personal experience of overcoming adversity; he is a young person of color living in Barre, and trans-identified. As his LGBTQ advisor mentioned, he lacks exposure to role models and to a world that could accept him as a male-to-female transperson. While Levon assisted in "jumpstarting" and "transform[ing] the mission of" his school's GSA, his recommendation describes him as "a quiet student who has struggled to be true to himself" and not as an activist. Levon's essays are filled with a deeply sincere desire for fairness and access to a kind and gentle culture.

Levon is just the sort of young person, academic or "resume" accomplishments aside, that **Samara** wants to reach out to, support, and provide affirmation to.

Samara Foundation of Vermont

Your Community-building LGBT Community Foundation

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