

## Teens Encouraging Teens

By Shannon L. Harris

During this time of quarantine, we have all stressed the importance of social distancing and abiding by local, state and federal guidelines for staying healthy and reducing the spread of COVID-19. These messages are unwavering, serious and necessary. Just as important are daily doses of hope and inspiration. The contrast feels surreal but the reality is just that, real. In light of this, Our Community's Children has asked youth serving on the Mayor's Youth Council (MYC) to share online how they are using this time to lift themselves up and in-turn lift one another up.



Maddie, 10<sup>th</sup> grade

"I've gotten a lot of reading done and I've felt calmer and more connected to my life than I have in a while. I've also made sure to get outside and do a hike everyday," said Madeline a 10<sup>th</sup>-grade student at City Middle/High School who is serving a her second term on the MYC.

Pablo is an 11-grade student at Union High School. He also serves as president of the Mayor's Youth Council this year. He's connecting with friends and family through virtual conference calls but finds time to get outdoors even if it's a "chore."

"You all have been on my mind lately. I miss going to city hall and seeing your beautiful faces. I have been well. I haven't been up to much lately. I am happy because I get to work on the yard... Also, I have joy because the environment seems to be recovering due to the lack of human activity."

Adam is a senior attending City Middle/High School and a member of the MYC. He's also the captain of his swim team and is surely missing the ability to participate in that activity but is offering educational resources to his cohorts.



Pablo, 11<sup>th</sup> grade



Adam, 12<sup>th</sup> grade

"Hey there guys, hope all of you are doing well. I know this has been tough on us, especially for my fellow seniors who now are missing out on our end-of-year activities. I have some good stuff for my juniors and seniors who are locked up and bored. To all my seniors who are planning to go on to college next year, I found this list of scholarships due this month. If we're going to be locked up, we might as well get some of these done."

He went on to say, "To all my juniors, I made this SAT/ACT study guide that you can check out. I spent a lot of time prepping for these tests and I decided to compile everything I've learned for others to use. I also offer tutoring, so contact me if interested!"

Youth encouraging other youth during this time is more powerful than we realize.

*Grand Rapids Mayor's Youth Council, managed by Our Community's Children, is a program for 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade students who live within the city limits. This program introduces teens to the inner-workings of city government and provides a platform for them to give direct input into*

*policy issues. They meet monthly with the mayor, participate in community service projects and hold an annual youth forum called KidSpeak. For more information about Our Community's Children and the Mayor's Youth Council, visit [ourcommunityschildren.com](http://ourcommunityschildren.com) and 'Like Us' on Facebook at [ourcommunityschildreng](https://www.facebook.com/ourcommunityschildreng).*

*Shannon L. Harris is the Program Coordinator at Our Community's Children and develops and implements programs for teens and young adults around civic engagement, leadership and employment.*