

## ALLYSON ZABELL SCHOLARSHIP FINALIST



### ALLYSON ZABELL

**is a senior at Orange High School. She is class president and a member of student government; she is also proud of her leadership with Share What You Wear. Allyson performs in school musicals and is student producer for Stagecrafters Youth Theatre, where she mentors young theatre lovers. She plans to major in science and has been accepted to The Ohio State University and the University of Michigan.**

A student wears the same sweater three days in a row. To most, this is an opportunity to poke fun at his outfit choice, make snide comments about his hygiene. I began to recognize this humor as an undercover form of discrimination, a form so hidden by the materialistic mentality of school that most couldn't recognize it. I recognized the repetition of clothing, the "uncool" apparel, as a lack of privilege and opportunity. Of course, I knew of poverty and often volunteered to help, but it's harder to recognize poverty in a community where everyone assumes a certain privilege exists. What most impacted me was the realization that this assumption was not true.

I was brought up to understand that appearances are not everything. I lived by the mantra of what's inside is more important. I saw the gossip and whispers, but I also saw the hurt on those who could not afford to meet the standards of others. As it is, high school is a difficult time, and to be judged behind your back couldn't make it easier. I grew to be a person that stood up for those who were targeted, and I never regretted living up to the values I was taught. However, to me, words only went so far. Words were the stepping-stones to the impact I wanted to make.

Last year, I became the chair for the organization, Share What You Wear, as part of my mission to give meaning and purpose to my words, and attempt to make a change. Share What You Wear collects new and gently used clothing, accessories and school supplies for those who are raised by grandparents. Every August, these collections are organized at the Fairhill Center, and families are invited to "shop" for back-to-school clothing and supplies. The entire experience is free, but it provides children and teens with the same feeling that my peers have when shopping for the new school year. Seeing kids smiling at the event makes me feel like I'm truly making a difference.

Since I began working on the project, I've have emphasized engaging my community. I've utilized local stores for donations, and have involved my school's Environmental Club with the angle of "recycling clothing." Most importantly, I've involved my peers, both in my district and others. They've helped me collect and sort donations, but they most enjoy helping the children shop during the event. To me, it's crucial that the event is run by students. It gives adults the opportunity to realize our ability to impact our community, and it gives my friends a chance to remember how fortunate they are. It's easy to send donations away to a cause, but to watch the donations being received is entirely different. As much as I love to see the faces of the children as they pick out a new backpack, I love the looks on my friend's faces as they realize that the act of receiving isn't nearly as rewarding as that of giving.