

# STEP Wesley Rice Youth Advocate of the Year Award

**Calyn Baldridge**

**2022**



Calyn was diagnosed with dyslexia in 2nd grade and Turner Syndrome about 18 months ago. Instead of letting this rule her, she uses it to help others. She helps others at school; she is always encouraging and sweet. She always looks out for the younger people having difficulties like hers.

Last year, she "taught the class" to raise awareness for Turner Syndrome. She is also more than willing to tell anyone who asks about it. However, it bothers her that the growth hormone injections she takes daily cost so much for some families. So, she decided to start fundraising for the Turner Syndrome Foundation by spreading the word and having lemonade stands to help with research to find a better way to do growth hormones. She raised over \$1,000 this past summer and plans to return once the weather warms. In addition, she has been featured on the Turner Syndrome Foundation's website, acknowledging her hard work.

Calyn is a great big sister and loves her two younger siblings. She loves archery (even though the bow is almost as big as she is!) and art. She is an active church member and in the school's choir and student council clubs. She has a significant positive attitude and constantly seeks ways to help people.

We at TNSTEP proudly name **Calyn Baldridge the 2023 Wesley Rice Youth Advocate of the Year.**



# STEP Wesley Rice Youth Advocate of the Year Award

**Eric Massey**

**2021**



**Eric Massey**



The STEP Wesley Rice Youth Advocate of the Year Award is designed to honor a young person who has embodied the positive character traits of being a strong self-advocate by demonstrating leadership and accepting responsibility in speaking up for themselves and others.

This year's STEP Wesley Rice Youth Advocate of the Year Award recipient is Eric Massey.

Eric Massey is a 17-year-old senior from Memphis, TN, who lives with a diagnosis of Autism. However, he has championed his abilities by not allowing any disabilities to limit his quality of life.

He competes in three different swimming programs, including the Memphis-area Home Education Association high school team, Memphis Tigers YMCA Swim Club, and Special Olympics. In June 2020, he received a USA Today All-Star Preps Award for Special Olympics Athlete of the Year in Memphis. Recently he was selected as a member of Team Tennessee to compete as a swimmer at the Special Olympics USA Games in Orlando, FL, scheduled for June 2022. He has also served as a guest panelist with Stars from the WWE.

Eric is the first Special Olympics International Health Messenger from the state of Tennessee. He teaches inclusive health information to fellow athletes, corporate partners, and community members as a health Messenger. He also started my fitness club called iRev, which is short for Inclusion Revolution. The iRev mission is "Checking all the boxes to include everyone in activities to stay healthy. Period." So far, his iRev YouTube channel has fitness workouts we have done for cardio, strength training, kickboxing, and yoga.

Eric is also one of the first youth members of the new Step Up to the Plate Youth Council with TNSTEP.

Please join us in a virtual round of applause as we congratulate Eric. He will be receiving his award in the mail very soon.

Rhonda Crenshaw with the Salvation Army Memphis nominated Eric.

# STEP Wesley Rice Youth Advocate of the Year Award

## Drake Box

2020



**Drake serves as a mentor to Kellan who has spastic diplegia**

Drake Box is 19 and lives in Dyersburg, Tennessee. He was as a two-year-old from Ukraine by Gary and Laurie Box. Diagnosed with cerebral palsy, Drake has been through multiple surgeries at the Shriner's Hospital in St. Louis. "He has a positive attitude and an extraordinary work ethic," said Marsh Naidoo, who nominated Drake for this award. "He is a full-time student at Dyersburg Community College and a part-time employee at Kroger."

Drake has excelled in his life through determination.

Despite his physical limitations, Drake has relished playing baseball and other sports. His goal is to become a physical therapy assistant degree, in the hopes of working at Shriner's Hospital someday. He wants to motivate other children with cerebral palsy to live their best lives and serves as a mentor to Marsh's seven-year-old son, Kellan who has spastic diplegia.



# STEP Wesley Rice Youth Advocate of the Year Award

## McKenzie Tuckson

2019



**McKenzie Tuckson**

McKenzie Tuckson is a true shining star who doesn't let her disability hold her back. A 16-year-old with Rett Syndrome, McKenzie she doesn't speak, but that doesn't mean she doesn't communicate. She uses her augmentative communication device, facial expressions, pictures, vocalizations, social media, and many other ways to get her message across. She advocates for equal and fair treatment for students with disabilities within her school system. Because of her advocacy, Metro Nashville Public Schools revised their policies to eliminate use of rifton belted chairs in classrooms. McKenzie understands the importance of being able to sit in age-appropriate chairs, just like her peers.

McKenzie was the first student with exceptional needs to be inducted to the National Honor Society at White's Creek High School, as well as being voted Vice President of her Sophomore class by her peers. She is a varsity cheerleader, the first ever nonverbal cheerleader at her school. She has been highlighted in the press and in a technology catalog, and presents annually to the Alternative and Augmentative Communication class for speech-language pathology graduate students at Vanderbilt. Most recently, she and her parents attended Disability Day on the Hill where they met with legislators to advocate for laws supporting individuals with disabilities.

McKenzie proves that everyone deserves the chance to engage in activities they love, regardless of their abilities. Her mission in life is to educate others and give a voice to all individuals with disabilities.

# STEP Wesley Rice Youth Advocate of the Year Award

## Adam Dockery

2018



The 2018 award winner, Adam Dockery, first became aware of a need to advocate for himself when he came out as transgender to all of his friends and school peers. He started practicing advocacy when he found a supportive community at Nashville's Oasis Center, which focuses on positive youth development and trauma-informed care.

At Oasis, Adam found Page Regan – an Oasis Program Coordinator – who encouraged Adam to get involved with the Students of Stonewall, a group of student leaders who focus on improving and strengthening relationships in the LGBTQ+ community. He further developed his advocacy skills through weekly Students of Stonewall meetings and the Oasis Social Justice Boot Camp.

Despite his own challenges with his invisible disabilities, Adam has committed three years to serving as a student leader for the Stonewall team. Throughout those efforts, he has consistently gone out of his way to support people with disabilities. According to Page, Adam “ensures that discussions surrounding identity include the importance of ability and a recognition of disabilities both seen and unseen.”

Adam has a passion for advocating for any issues that impact minority groups, especially those that receive less attention or have overlapping identities, like those at the intersection of ability, gender, and sexual orientation. The Students of Stonewall typically focus on groups of people who are targets of social injustice. Adam says he tries to apply those principles and strategies at school and in the community when he sees an individual in need of help.

Adam's family members – mom, Patti; dad, Kevin; and his brother, Alex - are particularly proud of his accomplishments. “We are extremely proud of Adam's growth and progress as he finishes high school and heads off to college. But more importantly we are proud of how he always puts others first. He has an innate sense of the struggles others are experiencing and a dedication to finding ways to include everyone so they feel accepted and appreciated. That's a special talent, and we are grateful we have young people like Adam in our community who are focused on inclusion and diversity.”

Prior to Adam's first year on the Students of Stonewall, he was quiet, reserved and barely talked to anyone. The opportunities to self-advocate and to stand up for those with disabilities, those of color, and those in the LGBTQ+ community has allowed Adam to emerge from his shell.

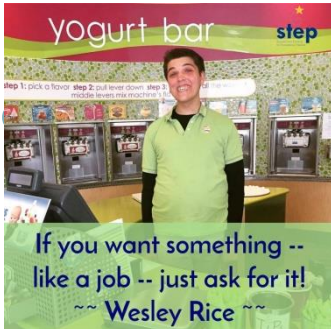
In his own words:

“I'm still on the quiet side now, but I'm much more vocal and am definitely not as quiet around new people as I used to be. I think this is a good example for those who may feel shy, intimidated or struggle speaking up and advocating for themselves. I'm happy I found my voice and see it as my purpose to use it for myself and others.”

# STEP Wesley Rice Youth Advocate of the Year Award

## Wesley Rice

## 2017 Youth Advocate of the Year



Wesley Rice is an employee and a student. He attends Carter High School in Knoxville. He will be 20 years old on May 28 and has three siblings: a sister, McKenzie who is 21, and brothers Patrick (18), and Christian (16).

According to his mom, Christi, "Wesley is genuine. What you see is what you get. He is kind, trusting and compassionate. I think what I love the most is his gift to appreciate the little things that we all take for granted. He is always polite and quick to give a compliment even on days when he's not feeling well. He always tries and never gives up."



Wesley participated in an employment event through Open Doors TN, where a local business provided an opportunity for individuals with disabilities to work a few hours and earn cash for those efforts. In that time, Wesley realized he liked to work and earn money.

Wesley and Christi began asking "anyone who would listen" if Wesley could work for them. Fortunately, Alan Sims, the owner of two Menchie's frozen yogurt shops, said "yes", which has a great deal to do with why we're standing here today, presenting Wesley and Christi with these special advocacy awards.

As a dedicated employee who has had to learn to speak up for himself, learn numerous new tasks and accept a great deal of responsibility, he has been an excellent role model

for other young people with disabilities in the community who would like the same opportunities as any other young adults.

The experience has been endlessly rewarding. Wesley's job has given him self-esteem, a feeling of independence and autonomy, a sense of accomplishment and being a productive and contributing member of his community. The job provided Wesley with a paycheck, life lessons in saving money, budgeting and opening a checking account, getting a debit card, learning not to give out that debit card number, learning how to bank and use an ATM, and independence in being able to purchase desired items without having to get parental approval. Christi said, "I have watched Wesley grow into a much more confident young man through his job and all the social skills and experience that go with his job, all because Wesley wanted a job."

Wesley has become a community leader "by example". At a recent transition fair where Wesley took part in a panel discussion about transitioning from high school to adulthood, Wesley said, "If you want something, like a job, just ask." According to Christi, "It never occurs to him that he can't do something, and I think that's one of the traits that projects leadership in Wesley."