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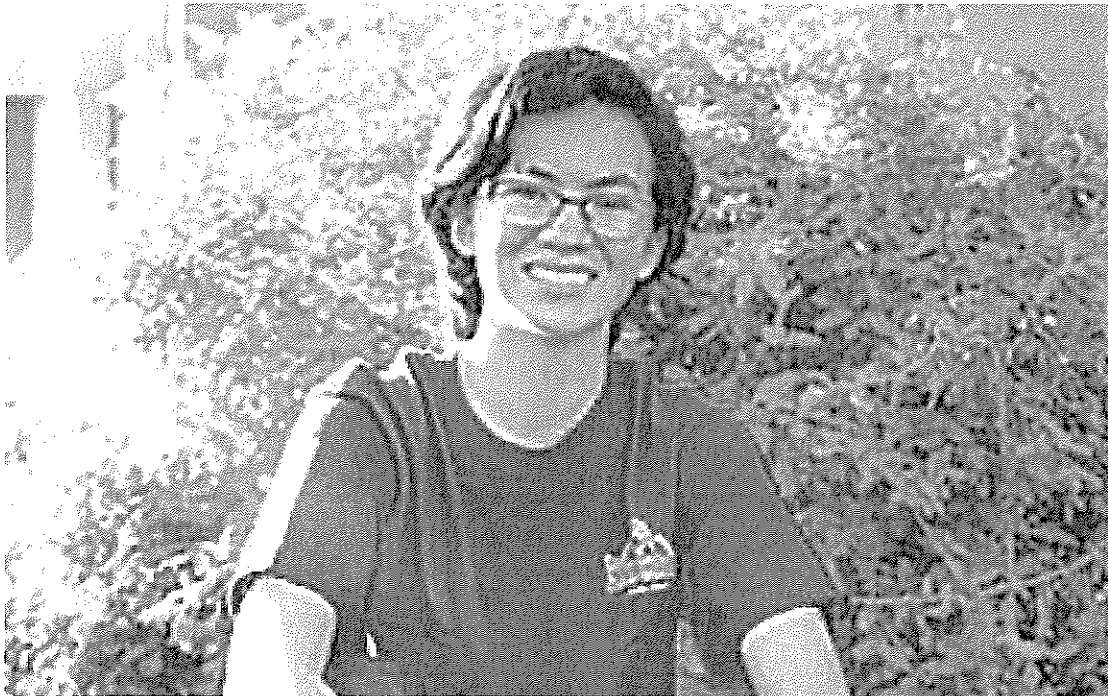
Hawaii News | Incidental Lives

Teen's efforts pay tribute to grandma's giving spirit

By Michael Tsai

Posted April 04, 2017

April 4, 2017



COURTESY PHOTO

Emma Tandara:

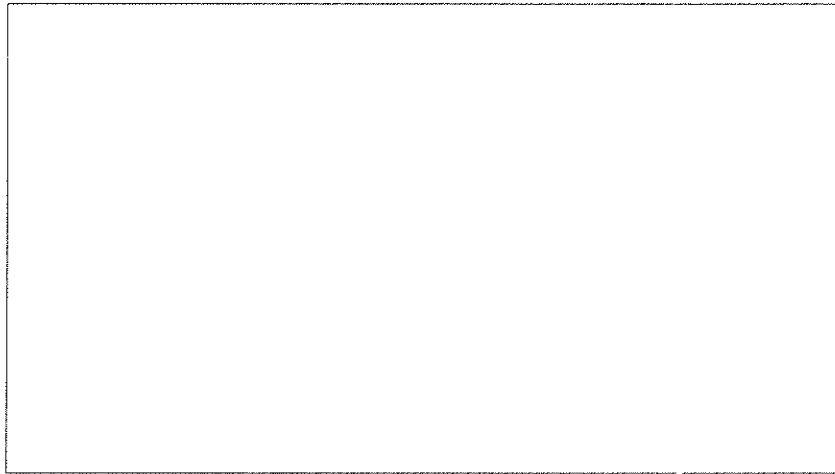
The Ewa Makai Middle student's volunteerism won a national honor

The greatest gift that Emma Tandara ever received was learning how to give.

As a child growing up in Washington state, Tandara often accompanied her maternal grandmother on food drives for the needy and other missions of community service. Though very young, Tandara recognized the joy that her grandmother experienced through her simple acts of charity, and she herself took pride in being part of the effort.

Thus, when her grandmother was later diagnosed with ovarian cancer, Tandara resisted the impulse to turn inward with her confusion, sadness and concern. Instead, she took a cue from her grandmother's example and got busy as a volunteer for the American Cancer Society, raising funds for cancer research through events like Relay for Life.

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Tandara's grandmother died after a four-year battle with the disease, but Tandara, now 14, continues to be active in a variety of community service initiatives.

"I'm thankful to have the opportunity to do volunteer work because I know that there aren't these sorts of opportunities at every school," Tandara said. "Being able to help other people just makes me happy because it measures up to something much bigger than just me."

Tandara said her service work also helped her to adjust quickly after she and her family moved to Hawaii in 2014. As a student at Keoneula Elementary School, Tandara joined the volunteer group Kids Initiating Change, led by sixth-grade teacher Victoria Coffin. Through the program, she made friends, developed organizational and leadership skills, and participated in service projects like beach cleanups and charity walks.

Tandara's community activism continues at Ewa Makai Middle School, where she is a member of the Leadership Team, a student program designed to help students develop personal skills while serving the school and its surrounding community.

Focusing on recycling and sustainability, Tandara initiated a video project about the school's green initiatives that was screened for hundreds of educators at the city's

Tour de Trash event. She's also coordinated two community recycling drives, taught students from three elementary schools about recycling and oversaw a demonstration of how to turn used T-shirts into bags at an emergency preparedness event.

Tandara's efforts recently earned her a Prudential Spirit of Community Award, a national honor for outstanding youth volunteers, plus \$1,000, an engraved silver medallion and a trip to Washington, D.C., where she and other award recipients will be honored.

Tandara is quick to note that her accomplishments are the product of a broad network of support. And, to be sure, her motivation for volunteering her time and energy has nothing to do with awards and recognition.

"I really hope my grandmother would be proud," she said. "If it wasn't for her, I don't know if I would have done all of these things. She was a very strong woman who led with her heart. I hope she's looking down and seeing that I'm trying to be just like her."

>> **Bravo:** Congratulations to the Priory Chamber Strings Orchestra, which took home three awards at the WorldStrides Anaheim Heritage Music Festival last month. Led by orchestra director Chad Uyehara, the high school and middle school students were recognized with the Outstanding Orchestra Award, first place in the String Orchestra category and an Adjudicator's Award for their overall points average. Some 25 orchestras from around the country participated in the event.

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