

GRADUATION

Brother and sister act

St. John's siblings honored for their service to people with developmental differences

By Mark Zimmermann
Catholic Standard

For St. John's College High School students and siblings Aidan and Kate McLoughlin, their award-winning volunteer work has been all about helping and having fun with friends.

During his junior year at the Catholic high school in Washington sponsored by the De La Salle Christian Brothers, Aidan McLoughlin began volunteering with Potomac Community Resources, Inc., and helping teen-agers and young adults with intellectual and developmental differences sharpen their communications skills and enjoy music.

Then this school year as a senior and member of St. John's class of 2018, he encouraged his sister Kate, a junior there, to volunteer with the nonprofit group, and she did.

"I basically told her it was a really great experience. The time flew for me when I was there," said Aidan, who is 18.

In PCR's Communications Counts program, Aidan assisted participants as they practiced maintaining conversations and responding to questions. Aidan, who plays percussion in St. John's Wind Ensemble, also volunteered with PCR's Noteables music therapy program, playing the drums.

Kate, who turns 17 in July, began volunteering with both of those PCR programs after school, like her brother was doing.

"I walked in there kind of nervous. I hadn't had any interaction with anyone with developmental differences. I was worried I wouldn't know how to interact with them," she said.

But soon, Kate said she "made a lot of friendships. I basically got to know these people."

In the Communications Counts program, she said it was especially moving to see how one young man was getting better at forming words. "It was so incredible to watch that," she said. And Kate – who is active in St. John's choir and



CS PHOTO BY JACLYN LIPPELMANN

Aidan and Kate McLoughlin, siblings and students at St. John's College High School in Washington, recently received Outstanding Youth Volunteer Awards from Potomac Community Resources, Inc.

advanced vocal studies and in the school's Drama Club – also felt at home volunteering in the Noteables program, where she was able to sing and play the piano with participants.

In April at Potomac Community Resources' annual Patricia Sullivan Benefit Dinner, Aidan and Kate McLoughlin were honored with the Outstanding Youth Volunteer Awards.

Brian Sullivan, the son of PCR founders Joan and Jim Sullivan and a member of that agency's board of directors, noted that Kate "has been an engaged and enthusiastic volunteer" who plans to continue that service in her senior year. He added that, "For two years, Aidan has been a loyal, dedicated and energetic volunteer" who is "very popular with our members and staff."

Sullivan added that, "All of us at PCR are proud of the positive differences your work makes in the lives of our members, and of the contributions you make to the success of our programs."

Aidan received the award on behalf of the siblings, since Kate on that evening was performing in St. John's production of *Emma!* A Pop

Musical, based on the classic Jane Austen book.

Kate later said that her time with the PCR programs didn't feel like service. "I was having a good time with people I liked and doing things I enjoyed, like music and communications skills."

For the future, she is thinking about ways that she can combine both those interests. "I really want to use what I learned and apply it to a career later," she said.

This fall, Aidan will attend the University of Maryland at College Park and study biology and is thinking about a career in medicine.

Volunteering with the PCR programs helped him break through walls of misunderstanding that he had about people with intellectual and developmental differences and helped him recognize "the humanity of everyone," he said.

Aidan added, "I guess the takeaway for me would be understanding how to be with people despite any differences we might have... and connect on a level of the commonality which we all have."

The siblings are the children of

Mary Beth and Gerard McLoughlin. This year, Aidan and Kate's sister Molly was a freshman at St. John's, and their brother Gerry was a seventh grader at St. Jane de Chantal School in Bethesda, where all four children have gone to elementary school, and where their grandmother, Elizabeth Hamilton, is the longtime principal.

At St. John's, Aidan participated on the crew team for all four years, and has been the team's captain this year. He also served as editor of the school's literary magazine. Aidan said his years in Catholic school have taught him the importance of "continuing to learn as much as you can to make informed decisions in life."

Reflecting on the impact of her Catholic education, Kate said, "I think it's that aspect of being kind to everybody and treating everybody with respect, and that inherent human dignity I've been learning about in my entire career in Catholic school."

She added, "It really plays a role in my life, in terms of being kind to everyone and respecting everyone no matter where they came from or who they are."